

RCPSYCH PHILOSOPHY SIG NEWSLETTER

October 2025



*“When the concepts we are living by function badly, they do not usually drip audibly through the ceiling or swamp the kitchen floor. They just quietly distort and obstruct our thinking” – Mary Midgley:
‘Philosophical Plumbing’*

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1) NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

It is a great pleasure to take over as editor for the PhilSIG newsletter. I would like to begin by offering our warmest thanks and appreciation to our outgoing chair Dr Tassos Dimopoulos for all his hard work over the last year. I'm pleased to report Dr Dimopoulos remains an integral figure in the SIG and will also kindly be assisting me with my editorial duties! As a trainee rep, I hope this newsletter can serve not just as an update on the group's activities

& events but also as a helpful resource for trainees and clinicians. Additionally, I hope to use this as a platform to involve trainees more collaboratively in the form of guest contributions. For now, before we introduce our new chair, I would like to highlight our upcoming conference 'Autonomy and responsibility in psychiatry and mental health care' which takes place in person on Friday 7th November – Please see our 'Future events' section below or click [here](#) for more details.

2) Q&A WITH OUR NEW CHAIR DR TEMI METSEAGHARUN

I am very pleased to extend a warm welcome to our new chair Dr Temi Metseagharun. Below is an excerpt from our recent Q&A which aims to introduce Dr Metseagharun and his vision for the SIG over the next year. The full version can be found [here](#).

Q. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me Temi. Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your clinical background?

A: To tell you a little bit about myself and my clinical background, I would state that obviously, I am African, black and Nigerian, but I'm also British, Australian, Itsekiri and half Arab! That's confusing to most people I guess, but I'll have to save the details for another day.

In terms of my clinical background, I've been a working medical doctor for the past 31 years. I have dual CCT in Old Age and General Adult Psychiatry with an endorsement in Liaison Psychiatry. As a consultant psychiatrist, I worked mainly as an Old Age Psychiatrist in the UK, and in Australia, I have worked mainly as a General Adult Psychiatrist. At the moment, I work as an inpatient psychiatrist in Perth, Western Australia.

Q. Could you explain a bit about what we mean by 'philosophy of psychiatry' and why you think it is important?

A: To answer this question directly, I would say that philosophy of psychiatry is basically a field of research involving philosophical scrutiny of psychiatry. Now, that takes us to the question what is philosophy by the way, and whose philosophy are we applying?

If we go purely by the etymology of philosophy, we can just say philosophy is the love of wisdom. Then, that takes us to the question "what is wisdom?" Now, we're getting into perhaps what philosophers would see as ordinary language philosophy. So, this thing called wisdom cannot be disentangled from desire, a goal and purpose. So, our purpose here is to search for knowledge and wisdom to help relieve the suffering due to mental illness. That is what philosophy of psychiatry is or ought to be!

One unkind statement to make here is that the amount of true science you get out of a field of inquiry is directly proportional to the genuinely useful technology you obtain from the same field. So, in our theory for psychiatry or "science of psychiatry" involving mind and brain, the efficacy of our treatments is reflective of the science and pseudoscience applied historically. Again, I'll leave historians of psychiatry to reflect on this. So, with true knowledge would be expected genuine wisdom, and of course, that will be reflected in the goals we attain with that wisdom; somethings like. . . happiness, success, eudaimonia, you name it.

Okay, let's leave that aside. Now, the next aspect of answering this question would be in terms of when we talk about "the philosophy of anything." For example, there is philosophy of science, philosophy of biology, etc. In my view, it amounts to an inquiry into the logic, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics and aesthetics of whatever it, "it" in inverted commas, is. So, specifically for philosophy of psychiatry we must therefore scrutinise the logic behind every psychiatric concept. We have to analyse, or certainly scrutinise the metaphysics and epistemology behind all our concepts and constructs including all diagnoses. We cannot leave out the ethics of our practise, the politics of mental health and anything else that involves power structures and the law. All these amount to philosophical inquiry. Then we're left with what could be considered as "the aesthetics of psychiatry." Now, this is controversial or certainly contestable, but I am free to express my view, which is that all of therapy, and not just art therapy or music therapy should be seen as relevant to aesthetics. If aesthetics is the philosophy of Art, then looking at the art of life itself, I do think that that's pretty important for philosophical scrutiny . . . the art of living.

In my view, it is not sufficient to apply traditional philosophical methods or what could be considered as analytic or continental philosophy to scrutinise psychiatry. That said, there is no doubt that psychiatric phenomenology or "psychopathology" provides a rich source and materials for a kind of bidirectional flow in terms of analysis and

synthesis between the fields of psychiatry and philosophy. So, it is not at all surprising that there is a need for that dialogue and that's what this special interest group is about.

Back to why I think this dialogue, or indeed why the whole of philosophy of psychiatry as a research field is important, I go back to what we have generally agreed, which is that conceptual problems lie at the heart of clinical practice and only philosophy can help us to clarify the relevant concepts. Research in this territory will help us with getting into the heart of what makes us human. For example, very practical issues regarding blame and shame or what it means to be bad or sad at the societal level mixed with our "expert" diagnostic concepts. This fits in quite well into our upcoming annual conference which is about autonomy and responsibility in psychiatry and mental health care. When is it time to help someone or when is it time for somebody to be disciplined or punished? By clarifying these issues, we help society to engage with mental illness and of course, when we provide simplistic concepts such as chemical imbalance or decontextualised sadness equating to depression, etc. controversial subject matters, we're not assisting society engage with mental illness appropriately.

Again, by clarifying psychiatric concepts, we assist in the improvement of our institutions and how they function. In fact, the entire care system, hospitals, prisons, social services, asylum and immigration, the criminal justice system and down to human rights and the law in terms of how they deal with mental illness, would benefit from the clarification of psychiatric concepts.

There is no doubt in my mind that clarification and better understanding of psychiatric concepts, if done well, will result in innovation and advances in treatment of mental health conditions.

Q. Can you tell us a bit about the philSIG?

A: Sure, I would like to tell you a lot about the philosophy special interest group, but I have to say that I've only come in three months ago, literally and metaphorically as an outsider. So, I'm not really in a position to talk much about the history of Philosophy SIG. That said, I can emphasise that the SIG was created to facilitate dialogue between psychiatrists and philosophers. The UK Royal College of Psychiatrists has 15 special interest groups of which we're just one. This is interesting because in other countries there are also groups or fora dealing with philosophy and psychiatry, and in various universities they teach philosophy of mind as well as philosophy of psychiatry. Over here in Australia, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of psychiatrists have a section called section of philosophy and humanities. So, as an SIG, we provide a forum for members to come together in this area of psychiatric and philosophical research. For me, the Philosophy SIG is a somewhat natural interest group, one that maybe one day, might become a faculty.

As you know, we have an informal executive and that includes 6 professors and several non-psychiatrists as part of the executive. The group has existed for well over 30, probably approaching 40 years although I know in our webpage it says 25 plus years. Yeah, there is quite a bit in terms of history, and we have a task of documenting our own history and the contributions made by members over the years.

Q. What is your vision for the group over the next year and beyond?

A: In terms of my vision for the group over the next year and beyond, I would certainly like to see the SIG being more visible to the wider membership of the college and university departments all over the UK and beyond. I would like to see the rebirth and recognition of the philosopher psychiatrist. I guess you've already picked up in my conversations that I always talk about philosopher psychiatrists. I know others might say no, you know to be a philosopher, you have to be an academic. There's a whole history there. You certainly don't have to be an academic to be a philosopher. In fact, historically, some of the most distinctive philosophers were not academics, and they did their work outside of the universities. So, it's okay to be a philosopher psychiatrist. This visibility that I imagine will be brought about by more frequent events such as meetings, webinars, external events organised by others, but that we as a group can partake in or jointly organise, publications and conferences including our own RCPSYCH International Congress. Obviously, I know it's easier said than done. In fact, we're thinking about expanded international collaboration which is happening

already just by me being in Australia and already working with the Australian college. Yeah, so we can even have an international conference in due course but that's certainly not in the next year. We're looking at the near future in which we might publish two or three books. Yeah, in summary, that's my vision.

Q. Are there any upcoming events, webinars?

A: In terms of upcoming events, we have our annual philosophy special interest group conference on the 7th of November 2025, which is in-person. We've got more events in the new year - our quarterly zoom meetings, although left alone to me I want these meetings to be bimonthly, but I think in terms of a combination of quarterly meetings and international meetings, we may in fact, ultimately be having bimonthly webinars and/or meetings in the next 12 months. Our next online Philosophy SIG drop-in session will be on the topic 'Philosophy of Biology for Psychiatrists' and is provisionally planned for 28 January 2026. I have also confirmed a date - 18 February 2026, with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, RANZCP Section of Philosophy and humanities as host, hoping it will be an international webinar!

Thank you!

3) FUTURE SIG EVENTS

- **Philosophy Special Interest Group Annual Conference 2025: 'Autonomy and responsibility in psychiatry and mental health care'**

We are very excited to announce our annual conference which takes place on **Friday 7th November** on the theme of 'autonomy and responsibility in psychiatry and mental health care'. This is an 'in-person' event at Royal College of Psychiatrists, 21 Prescot Street, London E1 8BB. Tickets (as well as further information) are available [here](#). A link to the full program is available [here](#). We look forward to seeing you there!

Speakers and topics include:

- **Mental disorder, self-disclosure, and responsibility**
Dr Anneli Jefferson, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Cardiff University
- **Responsibility, risk, and the disordered mind: intersections of philosophy and forensic psychiatry**
Dr Hasanen Al Taiar, Oxford University, Dr Anneli Jefferson, Cardiff University, His Honour Judge Cooper, Resident Judge at Aylesbury and Amersham Crown Courts and Judge Teresa Munby
- **A journey into neurolaw: can neuroscience provide normative borders between mental health and disorder?**
Professor Drozdostoj St. Stoyanov and Dr Kristina Stoyanova, Plovdiv Medical University
- **Why philosophy?**
Dr Sam Wilkinson, University of Exeter
- **Making psychiatric education intellectually stimulating and emotionally fulfilling: How can the Philosophy SIG help?**
Professor Subodh Dave, Dean, Royal College of Psychiatrists
- **Agency, Responsibility, and Recovery: Domain-Specific Approaches to Personality**
Professor Jonathan Hill and Dr Anna Bergqvist, Manchester University



4) UPDATES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Philosophy SIG drop-in session – Why Philosophy, Why Now?** Many thanks to our all our panel members who delivered the first of our planned online ‘drop-in sessions’ on the topic *why philosophy, why now?* Which took place on 15 October 2025. This was a really rich and thoughtful discussion setting out the case for the importance of philosophy in psychiatric research, practice and training, as well as providing a helpful introduction to some of the key issues and insights. **You can check out the recording [here](#) (Password: Fo&e8LLh)**

Panel Members

Temi Metseagharun, MRCPsych, FRANZCP, MA (Phil), Chair of the RCPSYCH Philosophy SIG

*Sam Wilkinson, Senior lecturer Department of Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology, University of Exeter and author of *Philosophy of Psychiatry, a contemporary introduction* (Routledge 2023)*

Clara S. Humpston, Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in Mental Health, Department of Psychology, University of York

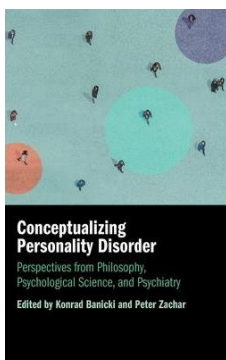
Anna Bergqvist, Reader in Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Humanities Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom. Executive Officer, International Network for Philosophy and Psychiatry (INPP)

Abdi Sanati, MD, MSc, MA, FRCPsych, Consultant psychiatrist, Chair, RCPsych Professional Practice and Ethics Committee and Elected Fellow, Fmr Chair of the RCPsych Philosophy Special Interest Group

- We look forward to hosting more webinars and/or drop-in sessions on an at-least-quarterly basis. Our next **Philosophy SIG drop-in session** will be on the topic ‘**Philosophy of Biology for Psychiatrists**’ and is provisionally planned for 28 January 2026.
- For further updates and events keep an eye on our [events page](#) and future newsletters.

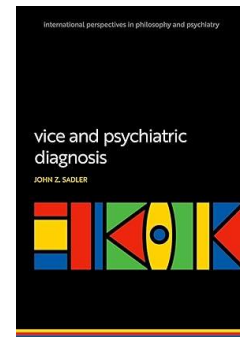
5) NOTABLE PUBLICATIONS

- **Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology Journal [Volume 32 June 2025](#)** has several excellent articles on ‘4E cognition’ which build on contributions in previous themed volumes [here](#) and [here](#). For the unfamiliar, ‘4E cognition’ has emerged as a collection of overlapping ideas influenced by dynamical systems theory, ecological psychology, connectionism & robotics and phenomenology, which emphasise to varying degrees that the mind is *embodied, embedded, enacted* and *extended*, in contrast with classical cognitivist approaches which have been critiqued for decontextualising the brain from its bodily and environmental constraints. I would recommend this [introductory article](#) by Kristopher Nielsen and there are two videos on this topic on the SPG YouTube channel mentioned in the ‘Resources’ section of this newsletter.



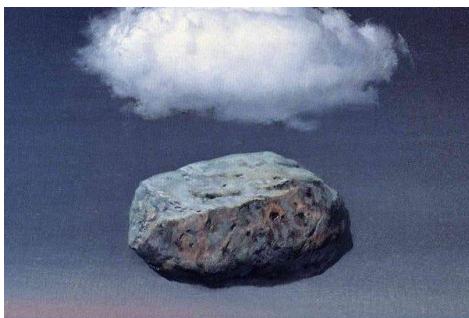
- **Conceptualizing Personality Disorder: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychological Science, and Psychiatry** Edited by Konrad Banicki & Peter Zachar and published by Cambridge University Press in June 2025. [The book](#) “offers an interdisciplinary perspective on personality disorder with chapters by philosophers, psychiatrists, and psychological scientists. Written to be accessible to all three disciplines, it updates traditional conceptualizations and offers new and novel perspectives on personality disorder, with a special emphasis on borderline and narcissistic personalities. Featuring contributions from established senior researchers as well as early career scholars from across four continents, it offers surveys of contemporary research and clinical expertise that together plumb the foundational understandings of personality disorder.”

- **John Sadler – Vice and Psychiatric Diagnosis** Published by UOP March 2024 and part of the excellent [International Perspectives in Philosophy and Psychiatry](#) series. Following on from his 2003 book Values and Psychiatric Diagnosis, [Vice and Psychiatric Diagnosis](#) “Offers a novel intellectual history of madness and morality from prehistory to the present. Key insights from this history illuminates our current, and limiting, ways of thinking about mental illness and crime. Presents a transformational way of thinking about criminality and mental health leading to significant potential improvements in mental health, criminal justice, and other social welfare programs and agendas. Provides a broad overview of issues in mental health and social welfare, while also providing detailed suggestions for clinical practice and social reform”. You can watch Prof Sadler discussing his book [here](#).



- **Stein et al 2024 - Philosophy of psychiatry: theoretical advances and clinical implications** Although again published over a year ago, I wanted highlight [this article](#) published in World Psychiatry. It provides a wonderful overview of some of the key advances in the field and is great to see to ‘philosophy of psychiatry’ being published in such a popular mainstream journal.

6) RESOURCES



[Psychiatry at the Margins](#) I have been following this substack by Dr Awais Aftab since its outset and can’t recommend it highly enough. Aftab reflects on a range of historical and contemporary issues related to the field of philosophy and psychiatry, interviews key figures and provides helpful ‘notable links and miscellanea’. He writes “*Psychiatry at the Margins is a newsletter about exploring critical, philosophical, and scientific debates in psychiatric practice and the psy-sciences. I am Awais Aftab, a psychiatrist in the US who is active in these debates as a clinician, educator, scholar, and writer*”

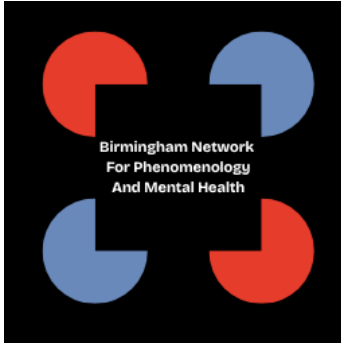
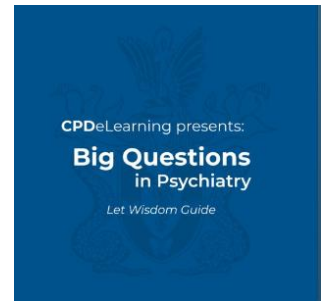
[Speculative Psychiatry Group YouTube Channel](#) I have been part of the steering group for the West of Scotland Speculative Psychiatry Group over the last few years. We “aim to create a space for professionals and the public to reflect on the future direction of Psychiatry. We aim to foster a multi-perspectival and pluralistic approach, incorporating speakers from a variety of different specialties to address the breadth of conceptual, philosophical, technological, political, cultural, clinical and scientific issues that are inexorably enmeshed within the field of mental health”. There are currently 23 presentations available on the youtube channel. If you would like to be added to the mailing list for future events please just drop me an email.

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[PhenoLab](#) have recently launched their new website. They write “PhenoLab brings together philosophy and mental health to promote person-centered care through lectures, courses, and international collaboration. The Phenolab team brings together scholars, researchers, and clinicians from diverse backgrounds in philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and psychiatry. With extensive international experience, our staff is united by a shared mission: to develop person-centered approaches to mental health and foster dialogue between phenomenology and clinical practice”. Here is a link to sign up to their course on [Clinical Phenomenology: From theory to practice](#). (I’ve just signed up and hope to write more in future newsletters!). Here is the [PhenoLab Youtube Channel](#) with lots of great presentations on phenomenology and mental health.

[Big Questions in Psychiatry Podcast](#) RCpsych Dean Prof Subodh Dave is running a great podcast series with the college which covers a variety of conceptual and philosophical issues in psychiatry. They write: “Our new series of podcasts, *Big Questions in Psychiatry*, explores the complex and sometimes messy issues shaping psychiatry. With the help of world experts in the field and utilising a grounding panel of patients, carers, clinicians, learners and service managers”.



[Birmingham Network for Phenomenology and Mental](#)

[Health](#) An interdisciplinary network based at the University of Birmingham bringing together researchers from across the University working on phenomenology with linguistics, AI and computational psychiatry, with practitioners and individuals with lived expertise of mental healthcare, to enhance the understanding and treatment of psychiatric disorders. Co-lead by Prof Matthew Broome and Dr Francesca Brencio and funded by the Interdisciplinary Research (IDR) Accelerator Network+ scheme from March 2025 to March 2026. Visit their website to sign up to future free activities and workshops.

[Phenomenology and Mental Health Network at the Collaborating Centre for Values-](#)

[Based Practice](#) PMH Network provides a forum for exchange of ideas between mental health professionals and academic researchers in phenomenology; it also bridges Anglo-Saxon and Central European traditions of phenomenology. The network is co-led by Richard Gipps, Marcin Moskalewicz, Philipp Schmidt-Boddy, and Giovanni Stanghellini, and regularly organizes workshops in Oxford and online. The forthcoming hybrid event is now [open for registration](#): "Navigating Value: Phenomenological Perspectives on Emotional Abilities in the Digital Age" (22nd October 2025); The network is [open to anyone](#) interested.



7) MISCELLANEOUS

[The Karl Jaspers Award](#), organised by the Association for the Advancement of Philosophy & Psychiatry is an annual competition for students and trainees. Eligibility includes undergraduate students, graduate students in philosophy, psychology and related fields, medical students, and residents and fellows in psychiatry. Entrants must meet eligibility requirements as of the dates of authorship and submission. The deadline for this year is **7th December 2025** and more details can be found on their website.

If you have any suggestions for future newsletters or would like to contribute a guest article please contact myself at chrismeechan@gmail.com