

Editorial 31

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In this issue a further set of papers that were first read at the San Francisco ISPC meeting are presented. Since these papers are so well introduced by Tami Spector, the organizer of that meeting, I will not add to her words but will just take this opportunity to thank her again for the persistence with which she has solicited and steered these papers through the various stages of preparation. In addition she is to be congratulated for bringing to press such a diverse set of papers, which, as she mentions, open up new areas in the study of the history and philosophy of chemistry.

Let me turn to mention two events, which are of potential interest to our community. The first is the publication of a bold and original book that aims to naturalize further the study of metaphysics and to rid it of the kind of armchair philosophizing that seems to have enjoyed a renaissance of late.¹ What the authors urge, among other things, is greater attention to the study of actual science. Of course such calls have been voiced before, but what this recent book suggests is a radical new approach to doing so. Whereas Ladyman and Ross concentrate on physics they also have a good deal to say about the ‘special sciences’ and their relationship to physics.² Their discussion of Structural Realism suggests that one might examine the structure of chemical theories in addition to those of physics, in an effort to identify what persists across theory change. For example, it occurs to me that the Periodic Table of the Elements might provide an excellent example of chemical ‘structure’, in the widest sense of the term, that is capable of transcending the question of whether one treats entities like electrons realistically or not. As John Worrall, the modern founder of this school of thought has suggested, Structural Realism offers the best of both worlds, namely realism and anti-realism. One need not be a realist about entities but at the same time one need not abandon realism altogether as the anti-realists urge us to do.

¹ J. Ladyman, D. Ross, *Every Thing Must Go, Metaphysics Naturalized*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.

² But, as frequently seems to happen, very little on chemistry.

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Structural Realism about the periodic system would seem to be a rather fruitful approach and, if developed, might represent an extension of Worrall's ideas into chemistry.³

The second item of news I want to mention is our upcoming ISPC meeting which will be held for the first time at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia in August 2009.⁴ Given the long-standing focus on the history and philosophy of chemistry that this foundation has, it was only a matter of time before a rapprochement with our own society would take place. For this we must especially thank Ron Brashear, the director of the Othmer Library at the CHF and Micheal Weisberg from the University of Pennsylvania.

³ I hope to elaborate on this idea in a presentation at the next ISPC meeting.

⁴ The meeting will take place from August 13–15th. Authors wishing to present papers should contact Michael Weisberg via E-mail by March 2nd. weisberg@phil.upenn.edu.