

Report: VISU 2011

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From the 4th till the 15th of July, approximately 30 scholars from all across the world got together at the 10th Vienna International Summer University, a joined activity from the Institute Vienna Circle and the University of Vienna, in Vienna, Austria. The summer school already managed to establish for itself a well-known reputation in interdisciplinary tutoring, in memory of 'der Wiener Kreis'.

The topic of this year's two week program revolved around *The Nature of Scientific Evidence*. The main lecturers, Hasok Chang (Cambridge University), Tal Golan (University of California, San Diego) and David Lagnado (University College London), challenged the participants to rethink any concept of evidence they already had.

Hasok started out explaining the problems of induction. Is the emerald green or grue? And what about the white shoe, does it confirm that all ravens are black? David reconstructed the 'Sally Clark' case to show that jurors should be trained in Bayesianism to evaluate evidence. According to his approach, people are very capable of constructing causal stories, but bad at assessing the support for the story. Tal provided us with a historical approach to scientific evidence, by revealing a tight link between what happened in the 18th and 19th century courts and what was evaluated as good evidence or reliable expertise. After each lecture there was time for group discussion; needless to say that with an audience of 30 students from different origins and specializing in different subjects, the topics of the debates tended to be quite diverse. After four days of plenary discussions, the group unanimously decided to split up in three smaller groups to discuss more in depth questions.

During the second week, our opinions on the nature of scientific evidence were put even more to the test. After Hasok's lecture on measurement, questions were raised about accepting the results of carefully experimenting as evidence. Are measurements defined by the concept they're measuring or vice versa? Tal further pointed out that social values have a strong but difficult to decipher influence on what is accepted as evidence in legal and scientific contexts. Why is it that fingerprints were accepted, whereas polygraphs were not? David continuously urged us to think about the psychological aspect of evidence based reasoning and set up a framework of, what he called, Legal Lego. Softening his optimism driven by Bayesian applicability, he claimed that causality should be an important dimension of probabilistic reasoning.

In general, some interesting questions were spelled out that would otherwise not have been raised, such as 'What counts as a relevant fact?', 'Can the strength of evidence always be quantified?', 'What degree of probability is sufficient (for what purpose)?', 'Are explanations involved in evidential considerations?', 'How is the connecting of different kinds of laws (i.e. chemical, biological, sociological) supposed to happen?', 'Are we inclined to go Bayesian?'

Although there was a great diversity in the proposed answers, these two weeks served as an excellent opportunity to reason with people from different disciplines. This experience enabled us to engage in a special kind of dialogue, embodying Otto Neurath's appeal for cooperation as the only guarantee for fruitful results. We were part of a stimulating exercise in interdisciplinary reasoning that, in the end, turned out to be worth dodging any obstacles along the way. Last but not least, we

would like to end with a personal note for the speakers, organisers and other attendees: 'Vielen Dank für diese wunderschöne Zeit zusammen!'