

THE SOCIETY FOR ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

The Society for Ancient Philosophy comprises the members of the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas working in the area of ancient philosophy, broadly construed. It continues and incorporates the Oslo Happiness Project.

1. Background

Ancient philosophy has been strong in Oslo since the 1960s, with two permanent positions in the Department of Philosophy. But it gained momentum in the 1990s when Tollefsen took up his position, soon followed by Emilsson. Tollefsen organized the Seminar for Medieval Thought, meeting once a week to read texts. Emilsson revitalized the Society for Ancient Philosophy, bringing in several of the most prominent international scholars to give talks and conduct “master classes” with students. Emilsson also led the NFR project *Reason, Virtue and Action in Ancient Philosophy* (Antikkprogrammet) (1998–2001). When Rabbås and Dimas arrived from studies in the US (with PhDs from Princeton, like Emilsson), the group got further momentum, resulting around the turn of the century in the emergence of the *Oslo Happiness Project* (OHP). The OHP included the current members (except Trivigno) as well as Prof. Øivind Andersen in Classics and two doctoral, later post-doctoral fellows, Hallvard Fossheim and Håvard Løkke. The group was consolidated during its year at the *Centre for Advanced Study* (CAS) 2009/10. Both Fossheim and Løkke are now in permanent positions at the Universities of Bergen and Kristiansand respectively. After Prof. Andersen retired, the group was further strengthened by the hiring of Trivigno in 2014, Gilbert in 2015 (in Classics), Thomas Kjeller Johansen (previously Professor of Ancient Philosophy at Oxford). The PhD students, Haraldsen, Pavlos and Serangeli, are all about to finish their projects.

The Group is currently organized as the Society for Ancient Philosophy, supported by IFIKK. Several of our members were also part of the project *History of Philosophy and History of Ideas 600BC–1800AD: Research training*, funded by the Norwegian Research Council (2012–15). We applied unsuccessfully to become a Centre of Excellence (2007), for an ERC project (Emilsson: *Ancient Theories of Happiness and Contemporary Views* 2014), and a Toppforsk project (*Ancient Conceptions of Happiness in a Contemporary Context* 2015). We are currently somewhat in between major projects, but it is our firm ambition to continue to apply for funding for such projects, and eventually also to apply again to become a Centre of Excellence.

2. Aims

The overall goal of the group is to produce international top-level research in ancient philosophy broadly construed, i.e. from the Pre-Socratics through the Classical and Hellenistic periods down to Late Antiquity and the Early Christian era. We aim to reach this overall goal in several ways: by a high output of publications, both monographs and edited collections on top-level publishers, and articles in well-established journals (level 2); by organizing conferences and inviting international speakers, as well as ourselves participating in conferences and giving talks abroad; and by recruiting and educating students at all levels to become accomplished in ancient philosophy.

The number of members, their research output as well as their international network make our group one of the strongest and internationally most recognized research groups in ancient philosophy in the world. The group is particularly strong on Classical philosophy (Plato and Aristotle), Late Ancient philosophy (Neo-Platonism, Plotinus), and Early Christian thought (St.

Maximus Confessor). Our position has recently been strengthened with the upstart of the new MA study option in Ancient Philosophy (see below §5).

3. Research activities

The group is particularly strong on Classical and Late Ancient/Early Medieval thought. Dimas works mainly on Plato's ethics and ancient atomists; Emilsson on Plotinus (but also Plato and Aristotle); Johansen on Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy of nature and mind; Rabbås on Plato's and Aristotle's ethics; Tollefsen on early Byzantine thinkers (but also Aristotle); and Trivigno on Plato's critical engagement with poetry as well as neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.

The most important joint research project so far has been concerned with the tradition of eudaemonist ethics. This was inaugurated with the Oslo Happiness Project and culminated in our year at CAS 2009/10, resulting in the anthology on Oxford University Press 2015 (see below §4).

The group has for a long time been very active in publication. Its publications include numerous monographs and edited volumes with prestigious international publishers, as well as a host of articles in journals and collections at level 2. In addition, we have published translations of Plato and Aristotle into Norwegian, of Plato into Icelandic and of Plotinus into English.

The group has organized conferences and reading groups since its very beginning. It started with a weekly reading group on Plato's *Gorgias* and continued with workshops on other dialogues by Plato (*Hippias Minor*, *Lysis*, *Charmides* in Oslo and Athens), with international participation. Now we organize an annual conference on ancient philosophy with international speakers. In addition we have a bi-weekly reading group. Both of these include participation from graduate students.

The group has, since its beginning, encouraged interdisciplinary collaboration. Indeed, one of the original members was Prof. Andersen in Classics, and our reading groups are still attended by both philosophers and classicists. The project at CAS was interdisciplinary, headed by Profs. Emilsson and Andersen, and included researchers from both disciplines.

4. Research collaboration

Apart from our extensive international network and participation in conferences, the group as a whole has at various times had more formalized contacts with a number of prominent scholars. Since we are at present between projects, we do not currently have any specific formalized collaboration with external scholars or institutions.

The project at CAS, *Ethics in Antiquity: The Quest for the Good Life*, involved a wide range of prominent international partners: Julia Annas (Arizona), Jonathan Lear (Chicago), Gabriel Richardson Lear (Chicago), Spyros Benetatos (Patras), Gösta Grönroos (Stockholm), Katerina Ieradiakonou (Athens), Alexandrine Schniewind (Lausanne), Fritz-Heiner Mutschler (Dresden), Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson (Iceland), Pauliina Remes (Uppsala), Miira Tuominen (Jyväskylä), in addition to the aforementioned Fossheim and Løkke. There were seminars, lectures and conferences, as well as a weekly reading group. The group also produced an edited volume, entitled *The Quest for the Good Life: Ancient Philosophers on Happiness* (Oxford, 2015), and a special issue of *Symbolae Osloenses*, to which Douglas Cairns (Edinburgh) and Anastasia Maravela (Classics, IFIKK), amongst others, contributed.

The *History of Philosophy and History of Ideas 600BC–1800AD: Research training* project has been primarily a collaboration between UiO, UiT and UiB: in addition to the members of our group

and those from Tromsø and Bergen (Heine Holmen, Erik Christensen, Kjersti Fjørtoft and Beatrix Himmelmann (UiT), and Hallvard Fossheim (UiB)), others from IFIKK (Profs. Camilla Serck-Hanssen and Christel Fricke from Philosophy and Prof. Reidar Aasgaard from History of Ideas) have participated, as well as Christia Mercer (Columbia). This group organized workshops, seminars and PhD courses, all with the aim of training younger scholars (see §5 below).

Our unsuccessful Toppforsk application also included a wide range of partners, many of whom have already been mentioned, but with the addition of Daniel Haybron (St. Louis), Karen Margrethe Nielsen (Oxford), Nancy Snow (Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing at the University of Oklahoma), Christian Tornau (Würzburg), and Jennifer Whiting (Pittsburgh).

In addition, in recognition of the high standard of our ancient philosophy group, the committee of the Symposium Aristotelicum decided to hold its 2020 meeting in Oslo. This symposium brings together a distinguished group of scholars to offer a chapter-by-chapter study of an important work of Aristotle. These commentaries are published by Oxford University Press.

5. Recruitment and training

The group attempts to recruit new students at the MA and PhD levels in part through its own teaching activity, and in part by exploiting its personal networks.

Starting in the autumn 2016 IFIKK will offer a new study option in Ancient Philosophy at the MA level. The aim is to make this an attractive programme for national as well as international students. The programme is interdisciplinary, including both philosophy and language (ancient Greek), and will be taught by us as well as by colleagues from Classics and the History of Ideas. We very much hope this will be a way for us to recruit PhD students.

We currently have three PhD students here at IFIKK, though we do serve as co-advisors for others at other institutions. We have frankly not had enough PhD students, although some of our MA students have competed successfully for PhD positions elsewhere (NTNU, Stockholm, Uppsala, Yale), and one of them is now a member of our group (Gilbert). Moreover, given the success of previous postdocs Fossheim and Løkke in getting permanent employment, it is a shame that we have not had more postdocs. Part of our strategy has been to get external funding for these positions, but we have not been as successful as we might have hoped.

When it comes to training, the group encourages students to participate in its activities in various ways. Students are welcome at our reading groups and are encouraged to attend our conferences. We also invite them to present papers at these conferences. The core aim of the project *History of Philosophy and History of Ideas 600BC–1800AD: Research training* was to improve the range and quality of research training in the history of philosophy in Norway. A secondary objective was to increase collaboration in this field between Norwegian universities and to embark on a project that may lead to a full organized research training in the history of philosophy at a national level and even at a Nordic level. The training programme was a success and we hope to pursue a more formalized project, perhaps through a Marie Curie grant.

We also encourage our students to spend some time abroad, and try to make use of our personal contacts, as well as the agreements IFIKK already has with other institutions.

6. Members

The Society for Ancient Philosophy currently consists of the following members:

Professor Panos Dimas
Professor Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson (leader)
Professor Thomas K. Johansen
Professor Øyvind Rabbås
Professor Torstein Tollefsen
Professor Franco V. Trivigno

In addition we have

Pál Rykkja Gilbert (temporary Lecturer in Classics, now finishing his PhD on Aristotle at NTNU)