

Tributes

Volume 28

Conceptual Clarifications

Tributes to Patrick Suppes (1922-2014)

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Jean-Yves Béziau, Décio Krause and Jonas R. Becker Arenhart, eds.

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Conceptual Clarifications
Tributes to Patrick Suppes (1922-2014)

edited by

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Conceptual Clarifications, Tributes to Patrick Suppes (1922 - 2014)

A Preface

JEAN-YVES BÉZIAU, DÉCIO KRAUSE AND JONAS ARENHART

This is a collection of papers dedicated to the memory of Patrick Colonel Suppes (1922-2014) by people who have been closely connected with him and his work. It was first thought of as a kind of natural follow up of a special issue of *Synthese* (Volume 154, Issue 3, February 2007) edited by the first two editors of this book commemorating the 80th birthday of Pat Suppes. The title of this issue was *New Trends in the Foundations of Science*. The subtitle of the present volume reflects — in some measure — the situation in which it must be presented to the public, given Suppes' passing away during its production.

So, with this laudatory intention in mind, the whole volume was first thought of as a Tribute to Suppes due to the occasion of his 90th anniversary. We shall not speculate on the reasons why people think that anniversaries should be commemorated with a volume — when they are commemorated at all — from ten to ten years (why don't we find a homage to someone's 87th birthday?). The first plan, anyway, was that the volume should be a well deserved homage to Suppes, commemorating his long life of productive interaction, influence, and direct collaboration with a great variety of researchers. This did not mean that the homage took it as a fact that Suppes' work was finished, or that Suppes was only an influent philosopher of the past that had nothing else to say: he was still active and developing influential new ideas in many fields. In fact, one of the papers in this collection is co-authored by Suppes himself. So, the idea was clearly not merely to praise someone, but to continue an ongoing debate on some of the issues discussed in the work of Suppes himself.

The work of Suppes touches many different areas, ranging from meteorology to physics, through logic, mathematics, psychology, neuroscience, education, painting, but he was first of all and/or above all a philosopher, always questioning, but not in vain. Part of Suppes' research in the foundations of science culminates in his book *Representation and invariance of scientific structures* (CSLI, Stanford, 2002). This

book is a synthesis showing clearly the relations between all the topics he has investigated. There are not many philosophers who can be proud of having written influential math textbooks, contributed decisively to the philosophical foundations of science, helped to develop research in real labs, and much more. Suppes is such a singular figure. Not only did he think about some of those important issues, but also helped to bring some of them about, as in the particular case of computer-assisted learning; perhaps, that is the aspect of his work for which he will be reminded by most of the public out of philosophical circles (again, not many philosophers can be proud of that too).

Since the range of interest of Suppes was very broad, so is the variety of topics dealt with in this volume. In fact, the work of a researcher is certainly not limited to his own writings, but has to be appreciated also through the work of the people he has been working with and influenced. From this point of view the work of Suppes is very impressive, and the present book contributes to show that. This feature — wide range of interest and great competence to deal with such interests properly — appears very clearly in this collection; on the one hand the volume clearly bears the sign of Suppes' influence and wide ranging interests as a scholar: most authors have had direct contact and have felt the need to discuss Suppes ideas; the themes are varied and their main thread is . . . , well, their relation, direct or indirect, with the work of Suppes. On the other hand, with such a long life span and such a great variety of interests, the volume should certainly contain a broad spectrum of themes that may seem at first to lack a unifying thread. In fact, as readers may notice, it is not possible to contemplate — not even in a whole volume — the whole spectrum of areas of interest featuring in the works of Suppes. This volume illustrates this: hardly two papers deal with the same subject. Suppes was such an apt thinker as to see unity in many disparate areas.

Most of the authors of the papers collected here had, at first, the expectation that their contribution would be indeed a further step in their fruitful interaction with Suppes; most of the papers develop themes that were among Suppes' areas of direct research, in the present or in some moment of his life. Anyway, the celebratory tone of the volume was not meant to obscure the fact that another round of stimulating intellectual dialog with Suppes himself was expected. It is not everyday that we meet someone with such a great expertise in so many areas of intellectual investigation, so, the opportunity should not be missed by anyone.

However, as we have mentioned, during the preparation of the volume Suppes passed away. This happening made the present volume

into a posthumous homage celebrating his work and influence. The fact that it is now a posthumous homage does not change that Suppes' contribution is a lively one; the debate should go on following the steps of Suppes' fruitful contributions. We are proud of having a paper by Suppes himself and his collaborators in our volume. Not only was he a philosopher deserving to be praised, but was also a philosopher in the scientific sense of the word. For those investigating the nature of science there is no stopping point, science always presents another challenge and the philosopher must be always on guard. Suppes did that in an exemplary fashion, contributing to both science and philosophy.

The editors would like to take the opportunity to thank all the authors that contributed to this volume. The quality of the papers here gathered certainly are a fair tribute to the greatness of the philosopher Suppes was. We would also like to thank the authors for their immense patience it took for the production of the volume. As we know, academic pressures and other contingencies sometimes provide for unwanted and unexpected delays. However, at last, it is ready and out for the public judgement. May the volume meet its public and help to enlighten the themes here touched on, themes that were dear to Suppes, and it will have reached its aim.

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