

## THE SIR KARL POPPER ESSAY PRIZE

In 2011, arrangements for the Prize have changed. Henceforth, the Sir Karl Popper Essay Prize will be awarded for the best of those papers appearing in the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* which concern themselves with topics in the philosophy of science to which Sir Karl made a significant contribution. To be awarded on the basis of the judgement of the Editors of the *Journal* (in liaison with the BSPS Committee, as the Editors see fit) from papers appearing in that year's volume of the *Journal*.

The Prize was originally established at the wish of the late Dr Laurence B. Briskman, formerly of the Department of Philosophy, University of Edinburgh, who died on 8 May 2002, having endowed an essay prize fund to encourage work in any area falling under the general description of the critical rationalist philosophy of Karl Popper. Dr Briskman came to the University of Edinburgh in 1969, after completing graduate studies in logic and philosophy of science at the London School of Economics, where he was greatly influenced by Popper, who remained the dominant intellectual influence on his philosophical outlook throughout his career.

### POPPER PRIZE 2013

The decision of the Co-Editors of the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* is that the Popper Prize for 2013 should be awarded to Charles Pence and Grant Ramsey for their paper 'A New Foundation for the Propensity Interpretation of Fitness', BJPS 64 (2013) 851-881 <http://bjps.oxfordjournals.org/content/64/4/851>

Popper famously argued that the characterization of natural selection in terms of 'survival of the fittest' amounted to 'almost a tautology', rendering Darwinian evolution untestable and hence at best a metaphysical research programme. The propensity interpretation of fitness overcomes this problem by relating fitness to the propensity of an organism to produce different numbers of offspring. This then underpins the principle of natural selection, to the effect that if an organism is better adapted than another in a given environment, then the former will probably produce more offspring than the latter in that environment.

However the PIF was subjected to a number of apparently critical counter-examples, leaving it fatally undermined in the eyes of many. Pence and Ramsey seek to save the interpretation by showing that these criticisms are problems not for the PIF itself, but for the various mathematical formulations of it that have been proposed. They then go further by presenting a new mathematical formulation of the interpretation that saves it from the counter-examples, while retaining its explanatory force.

This is a significant achievement in the philosophy of biology and Pence and Ramsey's paper combines philosophical insight with an acute appreciation of the formal details. Furthermore, as they themselves state in the conclusion to their paper, by offering such a new formulation and freeing the PIF from its standard criticisms, they have opened the way for a more sophisticated and fruitful debate over the foundations of natural selection.

By doing so and by bringing together formal and philosophical features of the foundations of biology in such an astute and productive manner, they are this year's well-deserved winners of the BSPS Popper Prize in the philosophy of science.

### PREVIOUS SIR KARL POPPER ESSAY PRIZE AWARDS

2012: The winner of the 2012 Popper Prize is Dr Elliot Wagner (University of Amsterdam) for his paper "Deterministic Chaos and the Evolution of Meaning" (BJPS 63(3), 547-575).

2011: The winner of the 2011 Popper Prize is Dr Daniel Greco (NYU) for his article "Significance Testing in Theory and Practice" (BJPS 62(3), 607-637).

2009: The winner of the 2009 Popper Prize is Dr Sebastian Lutz of the University of Utrecht for a paper on 'Criteria of Empirical Significance: a Success Story'.

2008: The 2008 Sir Karl Popper Essay Prize was won by Antoni Diller (School of Computer Science, University of Birmingham) with an essay entitled "On Critical and Pancritical Rationalism"

2007: no award made.

2006-7: The 2006-7 Sir Karl Popper Essay Prize 2004 was won by Maria Kronfeldner (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin) with an essay entitled "Darwinian hypothesis formation revisited".

2005-6: no award made.

The 2004-5 Sir Karl Popper Essay Prize 2004 was won by Benjamin Elliott (University of Aberdeen) with an essay entitled "Falsifiable Statements in Theology: Karl Popper and Christian Thought". The runner-up was Milos Taliga (Matej Bel University, Slovakia).