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**Ph. of Cognition Essay Submission**

4 messages

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**Simone Testino** <simone.testino@gmail.com>  
To: Giorgio Sbardolini <g.sbardolini@uva.nl>

Sat, 25 Jan at 14:28

Dear Giorgio,

Attached is my essay for the Philosophy of Cognition course.

I recently came across the [FOIS](#) conference in Catania on the ILLC website and am considering submitting this paper for two main reasons. First, I believe that, within its narrow scope, the paper turned out particularly well. Second, having a submitted paper for a conference could strengthen my ongoing [PhD applications](#).

Given this, I would greatly appreciate your feedback on both the content and structure of the paper. The submission deadline is at the end of March, but since I would like it to support my PhD applications, I aim to submit it within the end of the next week.

If you think the paper is suitable for submission, would it be possible to meet next week to discuss potential revisions or additional results worth including?

Finally, the current version slightly (by 200w) exceeds the 2,500-word limit for the course. If this limit is strict, please let me know, and I will promptly submit a shorter version.

Thank you in advance for your time and feedback.

Best regards,  
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Ontic\_Structuralism\_of\_Concepts.pdf

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**Giorgio Sbardolini** <g.sbardolini@uva.nl>  
To: Simone Testino <simone.testino@gmail.com>

Tue, 28 Jan at 12:15

Dear Simone,

I read your essay. I think submission of this manuscript is premature. I hope you will find the following comments helpful, should you decide to continue working on this project. Let us meet and talk further!

Essentially your claim is that, while Gardenfors takes concepts to be regions in a space, you take them to be equivalence classes of regions. This is what you call Ontic Structuralism. Incidentally, it is not so clear why you call it Ontic: perhaps it is a way of distinguishing it from Benacerraf's anti-realist structuralism?

The statement of what Ontic Structuralism consists in is nowhere to be found in the paper, and this is never a good idea: always state plainly what you mean to say. Good writers are those that can convey precisely what they mean even on the first page, without burdensome definitions. But indeed, the idea that concepts are equivalence classes of regions can be said in one paragraph,

including an explanation of what it means to be an equivalence class. Yet more than half of the paper (4.5 pages over a total of 6.5 pages of written text) consists of definitions. This makes it hard to read, and it obscures your contribution, rather than illuminating it. Besides, the definitions are unnecessary: first, they are entirely textbook; second, they can be stated more simply and informally (informally doesn't mean imprecisely, it just means informally); third, they are irrelevant because Gardenfors' theory is not couched in the terms you use, and you set yourself up to talk about Gardenfors' theory. You can introduce your own terminology, of course, but if you decide to do that, then you have to explain how it relates to the terminology of the author you are addressing. Besides, you didn't even present Gardenfors' theory: you do state that Gardenfors takes concepts to be convex regions (p. 3), and then you say "To clarify what this entails" you introduce the definition of total order, and then you never go back to explain how the definition of total order clarifies what Gardenfors takes concepts to be.

In general, your discussion is not orderly and unfocused. Think about it this way. You claim: because of such-and-such problem, I propose an amendment to an existing theory. Very well, but then your main focus should be to show that your amendment fixes the problem! Yet you do not explain how the indiscernibility problem is solved by your proposal. I also fail to understand how your solution is a good solution (this shows that you should not leave the reader to guess what your solution is or what the benefits of your solution are). So we have the problem of the inverted spectrum: qualia are incommunicable. We can think of this as a by-product of the fact that two spaces might be equivalent but intrinsically different. So let's take equivalence classes over those spaces. Good so far. But now are qualia communicable? I highly doubt it, since if anything we have gone more abstract and more structural, farther away from sense experience. Or have we "dissolved" the problem, we made it disappear? Here I cannot guess what you take the solution to the indiscernibility problem to be.

Another important point in a good paper is this: once you come up with an original proposal, think about objections. One advantage of thinking of concepts as regions is that it gives us a metric: we can explain similarity and typicality judgments using concepts, among other things. This is all lost if we move to equivalence classes of regions: it is no longer a good theory of concepts because we lost the topology (or we get a topology, but of something else). This is a foreseeable objection: if your amendment fixes one problem but raises others, it's not good to recommend it.

The introduction section is a bit all over the place. You begin by describing your manuscript as containing formal tools to address questions about perception. This is misleading, since your manuscript is about a modification to Gardenfors' theory of concepts. Maybe the formal tools to address questions about perception is a benefit of your discussion, but it is not your aim. You then promise that you will show the limitations of Gardenfors' framework, but I have a hard time figuring out where you did that. And there are other moments where you said some things without much explanation, that do more harm than good to the clarity of your argument. On top of p. 2, for example, what's the point of introducing the "first perspective" in cognitive science, since you are not interested in it anyways? (The reader here wonders what has any of this to do with qualia: your writing should instead be waterproof!) For another example, you go for elementary equivalence in the definition of concepts you prefer, being careful to distinguish it from isomorphism (pp. 6 and 7), but who cares? Why is your choice better? That is not explained. If something is important, only mentioning it is insufficient, you have to explain your view. If it is unimportant, leave it out altogether. Or this: "

Readers familiar with  $\sigma$ -algebras and measures are invited to keep these concepts in mind as they read the following passages" (p. 5). Why? This is not adding anything, leave it out.

With regards to my course, the grade of this essay is 6. Let me know if you have any questions. I'm happy to set up a meeting.

Best wishes, Giorgio

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**Simone Testino** <simone.testino@gmail.com>

Thu, 30 Jan at 11:13

To: Giorgio Sbardolini <g.sbardolini@uva.nl>

Dear Giorgio,

Thank you for the thorough feedback; it is extremely helpful in understanding the weaknesses in the presentation of the paper. I will soon decide whether I still wish to proceed with the submission to the conference and will let you know accordingly.

Regarding the course, I would appreciate some clarification on the terms for the resit submission. I see on the Canvas page that it will take place in June, but I was wondering whether it would be possible to elaborate on the same core idea while completely restructuring the essay according to the guidelines you provided.

On this last point, I have a remark and a related question. It seems to me that—not only in this course but in almost all Philosophy courses I have taken—the vast majority, if not the entirety, of the grade depends on the form and presentation of the paper, while the idea that this form is meant to communicate carries little to no weight in the evaluation. Is this indeed the case? Does it also apply in comparable measures to submission to conferences/journals? If not, do you think that the idea, or at least what I was able to convey in my submitted paper, is worth reworking and submitting either for the course or the conference?

Thank you and best regards,

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**Giorgio Sbardolini** <g.sbardolini@uva.nl>  
To: Simone Testino <simone.testino@gmail.com>

Thu, 30 Jan at 12:37

Dear Simone,

for the resit, I require another essay. The deadline for this is flexible, but the topic must be something different (and still within the rules of the final essay for the class).

You ask me about the weight carried by ideas as opposed to their presentation. In my experience, and also personally, I am disinclined to reject a proposal on the ground that it is a "bad" idea. Most ideas deserve to be given a go. What is a "bad" idea, especially in logic? There may be true contradictions, or logics without negation, or impossible worlds.... all of this is fine, in principle. So what matters is the motivation provided for it.

Structuralism about concept is worth investigating. I am aware of this work

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13164-021-00524-x>

but no much else. But the reason people are structuralists in philosophy of mathematics or philosophy of science are typically indeterminacy arguments. I wonder whether these reasons are relevant in cognitive science. On the other hand, there are people who think of concepts as "theories" and some people are structuralists about scientific theories. So, yeah, perhaps the link exists.

Best wishes, Giorgio

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