**DISPUTATIO OF BARCELONA, 2013-2021**

An annual activity of the Academia Europaea-Barcelona Knowledge Hub

**About the Disputationes**

In the scholastic system of education in the Middle Ages, the *Disputationes* offered a formalised method of debate designed to uncover and establish truths in theology and the sciences. Fixed rules governed the process, requiring a dependence on traditional written authorities and a thorough understanding of each argument by both sides. The famous *Disputatio of Barcelona*, convened in the summer of 1263 by King James I of Aragon, was the most important and best known of the interfaith *Disputationes* that took place between Christian and Jewish theologians in the late Middle Ages. The *disputantes* were Friar Paulus Christianus (a Dominican and converted Jewish rabbi) and Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (also known as Nachmanides, or Benastruch Sa Porta) of Girona, the most important scholar of Judaism of his time. They discussed theological questions in front of the king, his court, and the most important men, both Christian and Jewish, of the already prosperous and influential city of Barcelona.

Inspired by this original *Disputatio*, the Academia Europaea-Barcelona Knowledge Hub (AE-BKH) began organising the modern-day *Disputatio of Barcelona* series of annual debates starting in 2013. Bringing invited *disputantes*, a woman and a man, followed by questions by the audience, which is comprised of members of the local academic community. The total duration of the session is between 90 and 120 minutes. together two renowned experts (*disputantes*) holding different viewpoints on a common topic of social relevance, the series, now in its ninth edition, has covered a wide variety of topics in the exact, natural and social sciences. The debates follow a similar format consisting of a brief exposition by each of the two

**The modern-day Disputatio of Barcelona, 2013–2021**

On **November 27, 2013**, the AE-BKH celebrated its inaugural modern-day *Disputatio of Barcelona* by commemorating the 750th anniversary of the original medieval *Disputatio*. The topic of debate was “Social and state-of-the-art Medicine”, featuring neuroscientist **Mara Dierssen** (Centre for Genomic Regulation, UPF; president of the Spanish Society for Neuroscience) and philosopher **Thomas Pogge** (Yale University; leader of the Health Impact Fund).

On **November 27, 2014**, after the success of the first modern-time *Disputatio of Barcelona* in 2013, the AE-BKH organised a second modern-day *Disputatio* of Barcelona, with the collaboration of then with the United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility (UNU-GCM). The topic was “**The Mediterranean, bridge of cultures**”, and the debate was held at the Sant Pau Historic Site where the UNU-GCM is located. Two Members of Academia Europaea (MAE), **Maria Paradiso** (geographer, Professor of Geography and Planning at the University of
Sannio, Italy), and Enric Banda (geophysicist, director of Science and Environment at the “la Caixa” Foundation, Barcelona), discussed on different aspects of Mediterranean history and culture, as well as current opportunities and challenges.

On December 9, 2015, the third modern-day Disputatio of Barcelona was held in the Royal Chapel of Saint Agatha, in the Gothic Quarter. Two scholars, Núria Sebastian (vice-president of the European Research Council), and Ulises Cortés (from the Barcelona Supercomputing Centre), debated on “Natural vs Artificial Intelligence”. The session ended with an intense debate with the audience, who actively participated by posing several important questions to the speakers.

On November 21, 2016, the fourth modern-day Disputatio of Barcelona, was held at the Palau de la Generalitat and was presided by the President of the Government of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont. It was devoted to the topic “Natural Life vs. Synthetic Life”. Two scholars, Anna Veiga (Centre for Regenerative Medicine, Barcelona) and Ricard Solé (Complex Systems Lab, PRBB, Barcelona), debated on the new challenges that current scientific advancements present to humanity. The disputantes shared their impressive knowledge on the topic with the audience, which was highly interested in the topic debated in the session.

On November 23, 2017, the fifth modern-day Disputatio of Barcelona was held at the Institute for Catalan Studies (IEC) in the Prat de la Riba Hall, the most solemn room in the IEC. The Disputatio focused on “Supercomputers: An instrument for science, technology and the progress of society.” The two disputantes were Mateo Valero, director of the Super Computing Center of Barcelona (BSC), who presented the modern supercomputers in terms of scientific and technological advancement, while Alison Kennedy, director of the STFC Hartree Centre (Daresbury, Warrington, UK), presented their role in the progress of society.

On November 28, 2018, the sixth modern-day Disputatio of Barcelona, entitled “Competition vs. Cooperation: Two economists’ points of view”, was held at the Institute for Catalan Studies (IEC) in Prat de la Riba Hall. The session was moderated by Salvador Barberà, Professor Emeritus of Economics at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and featured as disputantes Hervé Moulin (Donald J. Robertson Chair in Economics at the University of Glasgow), and Gabrielle Demange, (Director of Studies at the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, EHESS, in Paris). All three are Members of Academia Europaea, in the Economics, Business & Management Sciences Section.

On November 13, 2019, addressing the question “A new humanism for the 21st century? Specialisation vs. Generalisation. A debate on the future of knowledge”, the seventh modern-day Disputatio of Barcelona was held at the IEC. The disputantes were Silvia De Bianchi, Ramón y Cajal Fellow at the Department of Philosophy and Centre for the History of Science, Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), and Maciej Lewenstein, MAE, ICREA Research Professor and Quantum Optics Theory Group Leader at the Institute of Photonic Sciences (ICFO). Serving as moderator and coordinator was Alexander Fidora, MAE, ICREA Research Professor, Department of Ancient and Medieval Studies, UAB. The participants discussed key concepts including specialisation, generalisation, interdisciplinarity, humanities, science, development and realisation of the individual, offering their analyses of the present situation of knowledge as well as their visions for the future.

In 2020, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread social impact, the AE-BKH decided to devote the eighth modern-day Disputatio of Barcelona to “Cities, Climate and Pandemics: Reflections from Urban Studies and Environmental Economics”. The session focussed on the essential role of cities in climate change mitigation and in the control of pandemics such as COVID-19. Barcelona, along with other major metropolises in the world, will provide for an interesting analysis. Coordinated and moderated by Alexander Fidora, MAE, ICREA Research Professor in the
Department of Ancient and Medieval Studies, UAB, this debate attempted to shed new light on bringing together experts from different fields. The two disputantes were urbanist Kathrin Golda-Pongratz, MAE, UPC, and UIC Barcelona School of Architecture; and environmental economist Jeroen van den Bergh, ICREA Research Professor, ICTA-UAB. The session took place at the IEC, and followed a hybrid model of (limited) in-person attendance as well as access via live streaming on Zoom. (Details regarding registration intention was made available on the AE-BKH website.)

On December 1, 2021, the Disputatio of Barcelona was entitled “Mental health and pandemics: burden and resilience”, and addressed the aforementioned issues with the goal of providing an invaluable dialogue among expert scientists on the relationship between mental health and pandemics. The session tried to find consensus on priorities and possible paths forward as stakeholders establish action plans for the mid- and long-term. Serving as the two disputantes for the debate were Arcadi Navarro, MAE, ICREA Research Professor at Pompeu Fabra University and Director of the Pasquall Maragall Foundation and Eider Arenaza-Urquijo, Research Team Leader at the Barcelonæta Brain Research Center, Barcelona. The session took place at the IEC, and followed a hybrid model of (limited) in-person attendance as well as access via live streaming on Zoom.

We can consider that the modern-day Disputationes are a distinctive feature of the Academia Europaea-Barcelona Knowledge Hub, and must be continued in future years.

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