



# The Society of Christian Philosophers



Robert Audi, President • Kelly James Clark, Secretary/Treasurer • Winter 2003

## Religion and Ethics Conference

The SCP and British Society for the Philosophy of Religion held a joint meeting, the first such meeting, on 6-8 August, at Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford. There were some 80 delegates, including a good number of American and UK scholars, as well as representatives from the Netherlands, France, Germany, Finland and Israel. The conference theme was Religion and Ethics.

This was, I think, a genuine meeting of two philosophical communities. Most of the papers were given by US scholars, but most of the respondents were based in Europe, and papers generally elicited vigorous discussion, with participants from both sides of the Atlantic actively involved. The four keynote addresses were given by Brian Leftow (Necessary truth and the will of God), John Hare (Kant and the rational instability of atheism), and by the presidents of the two societies, Robert Audi (The love commandments and the ethics of love) and D.Z. Phillips (Has the logical problem of evil been solved?). So here at least we preserved parity in terms of number of US- and UK-based speakers (helped by Brian Leftow's recent appointment to the Oxford chair). The keynote presentations sparked wide and often animated discussion, and the conference benefited from the active participation of the keynote speakers in discussion at other sessions.

There was quite a range of topics represented in other papers. Perhaps divine command theories of ethics emerged as the single most popular theme, one which was addressed directly in the papers of Dave Baggett & Jerry Walls (a joint presentation), Ton van den Beld, Mark Murphy, and Joseph Shaw. There was also a cluster of papers on the prospects for ethical dialogue in a plu-



Lady Margaret Hall

ralistic world – a question examined by Erik Anderson, Carol Skrenes and Keith Ward. As for other papers, David Hunt and David Werther considered the relevance of alternate possibilities in establishing the possibility of moral responsibility, while Mark Nelson and Kyle Swan explored the possibility of a moral realism that would allow a place for the emotions or the 'subject dependence' (Nelson) of values. Other papers are more difficult to group, but in brief (and with apologies for simplification!) Kelly Clark considered the state of the debate between open and classical theists; Andrew Eshleman asked whether an atheist can believe in God, and Tom Hamilton whether feminist analysis may help to address certain issues posed by the writings of D.Z. Phillips; Frances Howard-Snyder considered what account to give of our obligations regarding the obligations of others, and Jeff Jordan discussed four mistakes in

theodicy; George Mavrodes posed the question of what to make of 'alien gods', and Cyrille Michon discussed the relationship of predestination and merit (and offered a further perspective on the issue of alternate possibilities); Steve Porter examined the doctrine of penal substitution, and Greg Schulz the contribution of verifying a feeling to the problem of other minds, while Leslie Stevenson considered ethics as a spiritual quest, and Nehama Verbin the inexpressibility of certain moral choices, and the possible parallels with mystical experience; Mark Wynn discussed the contribution that might be made by Newman's thought to contemporary discussion of religion and ethics. So quite a range of topics! Thanks should also be given to the chairs, many of whom made brief replies to papers. And special thanks are owed to the chairs of the plenary sessions, Vincent Brummer, Peter Byrne, Doug Geivett and Roger Trigg, all of whom offered longer responses, which helped to get discussion going.

Aside from the heat of intellectual exchange, delegates realised early on, as they gathered in the late afternoon to hear the opening paper of the conference, by Brian Leftow, that there was heat of a more mundane kind with which to contend. Various attempts to prise open windows proved of limited success, and the late arrival of additional handouts was greeted with enthusiasm as much for their use as substitute fans as for their role as aids in following the presentation. This was the hottest summer on record in Britain, and Oxford on 6-8 August was one of the hottest places to be all summer. In other respects too European scholars may have felt that they were meeting the other side of the Atlantic. Notably the conference schedule had been adjusted to meet the needs of

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American delegates to appear on the programme, producing a much heavier schedule than normal for a BSPR conference. This year we had 23 papers in addition to the four plenary presentations, as well as responses. Usually there are just four or five main papers at a BSPR conference, together with a postgraduate session. We also made an adjustment of venue – having been told that Americans would insist on en suite accommodation (true?!), we abandoned our normal venue (more central, and very historic, but also very cramped) and moved to the spacious grounds and somewhat superior accommodation of LMH, bordering the River Cherwell and the University parks. It was good to see American visitors taking the opportunity to explore the city. I was especially impressed by Mark Thame's practice of buying his newspaper from a different newsagent each morning. Some already knew Oxford well, and Robert Audi was able to direct a party to a very agreeable Lebanese restaurant following the conference close.

The bar was kept open until midnight the two evenings of the conference, and a good number of delegates stayed up, and spilled onto the lawns, in subtropical conditions, gazing out across the college grounds at some tall subtropical-looking plants, which were illuminated by the bar floodlights. This was a good occasion to get to meet people and explore issues of the day.

The conference also saw the launch of Comparative Theology. Essays for Keith Ward (ed. T.W. Bartel). The launch was to the backdrop of reggae music. It was explained that Keith's home newspaper (in his local village) had recorded his appointment to the regius chair at Oxford by announcing that he had been appointed to the reggae chair of theology.

Thanks should be accorded to Kelly Clark (the SCP Secretary and Treasurer) for taking on so much of the work from the US side. On the UK side, Peter Mitchell, the BSPR treasurer, worked tirelessly to ensure that arrangements with LMH proceeded smoothly. Thanks too to the BSPR and SCP presidents, Dewi Phillips and Robert Audi, for most helpful advice, and to Charles Taliaferro for his involvement in the early stages of planning the conference.

I conclude with some comments that I heard in the course of the conference. 'The Americans seem to have had a hand in drawing up the conference schedule'. 'The food here has been uniformly good; when I first came to Britain, it was uni-



formly bad' (happily, it seems the first visit was made some years ago). 'What do you mean "God the Father could hear Jesus from the cross"?' (D.Z. Phillips responding to questions on his paper). 'This conference has helped to raise the spirits of philosophers of religion in Britain' (this is my comment, and still my verdict today, on a rather grey autumn afternoon).

Mark Wynn  
Secretary, British Society for the  
Philosophy of Religion

*On behalf of the American philosophers,  
I'd like to thank Mark Wynn for organizing this excellent conference and for so patiently and kindly responding to our countless requests for assistance.*

~ Kelly James Clark

## Executive Committee Minutes

1. The financial report was received. The committee approved the request from Calvin College for SCP to provide a financial subvention of \$3,000 to Calvin to fund a course release for the Secretary-Treasurer. Calvin continues to provide secretarial assistance, office space, etc. at no charge.
2. After a two-year period, *Faith and Philosophy* will no longer publish special issues. The Editor has the authority to include symposia articles.
3. Outreach committees. The China outreach committee reported that the 2002 Tsinghua conference was perhaps the best yet. It also reported that the June 2003 conference had been cancelled because of SARS. There

- will be two conferences held in 2005: Sichuan University in June and Peking University in October (for the 10th Anniversary). The Russia Committee reported on a successful meeting on Science and Religion at Notre Dame in January. Plans are being made for a June 2004 conference in Russia.
4. The issues of election to regional committees and the possible merger of the Mountain-Plains and the Pacific Regions were discussed. Each region was asked to codify their election process. The merger topic was tabled.
5. The program committee advisory memorandum was approved. See next section of the newsletter.
6. Mike Murray floated a proposal for

- an Executive Director of SCP. Two factors motivated the proposal. First, the Society is best served by a prominent President who has many speaking and writing demands and so can't be expected to be more than honorary. Second, the work of the Secretary-Treasurer has expanded so that it can't reasonably be expected of a volunteer. The President was authorized to explore the idea of an Executive Director.
7. The Secretary-Treasurer was asked to see if a credit company could be used to process credit card payments for memberships. Note: This was done but the credit company denied our application.

## Program Committees, etc. by Robert Audi

Since becoming President about a year ago I've noticed that many members are not aware of the procedures governing the work of the Society's APA and other program committees. For the record, let me state my understanding and then offer some suggestions.

**Appointments.** The committees are appointed by the president, with each member having a three-year term. (An exception can occur, as where a standing member is suddenly unable to serve and an outgoing member is asked to remain active for the year in question). The chair is normally the third-year (longest-standing) member.

**Procedures.** The chair should contact the divisional secretary (or other conference organizer) for space: for the Eastern Division, Richard Bett (Hopkins); Robin Smith (TX A & M) for the Central; Anita Silvers (SF State) for the Pacific; and, for the ACPA, (Dr.) Michael Baur (Fordham—mbaur@fordham.edu). To the best of my knowledge, the Pacific should be contacted early in the fall, the Central by late fall, and the Eastern and the ACPA by about the end of April. *Space can be reserved, if need be, before the program is complete.* The chair should, however, contact members in time to have the program complete before these deadlines. It is best to send in all the information at once *and to send a copy of the program to the Secretary-Treasurer and President.*

**Other conferences.** The Society has usually held a session at the AAR (American Academy of Religion) annual meetings; and it has held some at World Congresses of Philosophy (though there is no plan regarding this summer's meeting in Istanbul, about which I have heard nothing official since the announcement mailing about a year ago). In principle, the Society can hold meetings at other conferences; but this should be cleared with the President and Executive secretary. The same procedures would normally apply.

**Format.** 1. Usually three-hours total. 2. We have tried to avoid "prime time" owing to conflicts with the regular APA program, and we can do with two hours if necessary (or perhaps have two separate program appearances, up to two or even three hours each). 3. It has been common to have one or two main speakers, with commentators, and a chair for each overall session. I recommend, however, that when possible there be at least two speakers and a commentator or two for each, given the number of members who would like to give papers and the role of papers in securing travel funds (which are increasingly thin relative to rising travel costs). 3. Junior as well as senior people should be represented if possible; and one could have separate chairs for each subsession. 4. Three subsessions in three hours is of course possible; and in the evening one usually has flexibility since it is unlikely that anyone else is using the room after 9 pm or, especially, 10 pm. 5. Non-members are of course

eligible to speak, but preference for members seems appropriate and I do not think we have ever had a predominance of non-members on a program.

**Speaker guidelines.** 1. Speakers should be given guidelines and (usually) encouraged to bring short handouts or to use visual aids. 2. I recommend, for one-hour sessions, twenty minutes and ten for the commentator, with up to five for reply and rejoinder; and for hour-and-a-half sessions, forty, twenty, and five. Panels and three-hour symposia can be handled as appropriate. 3. Principal speakers should be asked to get their papers to commentators at least a month in advance—how long depends on how much time there is between the invitation and the session. 4. Commentators should be asked to get their papers to principal speakers at least a week in advance. *In the interest of discussion, time limits should be observed.*

**Publicity.** Program information should be electronically sent to the SCP office at Calvin, c/o Kelly Clark, for Website posting and any other publicity the Society can provide. Any other efforts at publicity are welcome.

**Hospitality.** It has been common to give people a few minutes to greet each other at the beginning of the time period and to allow for a stretch between subsessions. This is a good idea and should be suggested to chairs, with the caution that they not get too far off schedule.

## Executive Committee Election Results

**Laura Garcia, Robert Koons, Robert C. Roberts and James Taylor** were elected to the Executive Meetings. We'd like to express our gratitude to retiring members David Hunt, Caroline Simon, Jay Wood and Linda Zagzebski.

## SCP on the Internet

Listserve: subscribe by sending e-mail to: scp-request@calvin.edu, with the subject "subscribe" (no quotes).

WWW: <http://www.siu.edu/~scp>

SCP Canada WWW: <http://iago.stfx.ca/people/wsweet/scp.html> or <http://www.ncf.ca/~ax448/scp.html>



## Regional Conferences

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### Eastern Region

“Open Theism and Its Critics”

December 4-6, 2003

Asbury College Wilmore, Kentucky

Speakers: Thomas Flint, William Hasker and Michael C. Rea

Contact Ray VanArragon

([raymond.vanarragon@asbury.edu](mailto:raymond.vanarragon@asbury.edu))

or visit [http://www.asbury.edu/news/press/press\\_detail.cfm?id=214](http://www.asbury.edu/news/press/press_detail.cfm?id=214)

### Pacific Region

“Reformed Epistemology versus Evidentialism: Recent Developments”

February 26-28, 2003

Biola University

Speakers: Richard Swinburne and Timothy McGrew

Contact David Costillo ([david.costillo@biola.edu](mailto:david.costillo@biola.edu)) or visit [http://www.talbot.edu/programs/maph/scp\\_meeting.cfm](http://www.talbot.edu/programs/maph/scp_meeting.cfm)

### Midwest Region

“Stewardship: Caring for the Earth and its Inhabitants”

April 1-3, 2004

Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wisconsin

Speakers: Terry Tempest Williams and Calvin DeWitt

Contact (608) 796-3704 or email [ethics@viterbo.edu](mailto:ethics@viterbo.edu).

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