



The Society of Christian Philosophers



C. Stephen Evans, President • Kelly James Clark, Secretary/Treasurer • Fall 2000

Sino-American Symposium

Kelly Clark asked me to write a “chronicle” of the trip of eight American philosophers (and two spouse and one child) to the Sixth Annual Sino-American Symposium on Philosophy and Religious Studies at Xiamen University on the southeast coast of China. The eight philosophers included myself (Caroline Simon, Hope College), Kelly Clark and Del Ratzsch (Calvin College), Philip Clayton (Cal. State, Sonoma), Eugene Klaaren (Wesleyan University), Gary Mar (SUNY, Stony Brook), Michael Murray (Franklin and Marshall), and Mel Stewart (Univ. of St. Thomas). We were also delighted to be traveling with Lana Mar and Kirsten and Sam Murray (I recommend borrowing a charming ten-year-old if you don’t have one of your own if you ever visit China; Sam was a real inter-cultural resource!). When Kelly asked me to write this “chronicle” he said, “You’ll have plenty of time; you’ll be waking up at 3 or 4 a.m. and can write then.” What he did not point out was the sheer density of experience I’d be confronting in pondering what to write. The brief and fragmentary reflection that follows is far from a chronology and far from systematic.

Wittgenstein said, “Pretensions are a mortgage which burdens a philosopher’s capacity to think.” Perhaps the greatest benefit for me as a philosopher traveling into a country I had never been before was being forced to lay down pretension. I was humbled by many things: by the exercise of trying to write a paper that could be comprehended across a cultural divide, by the overflowing hospitality of our hosts in Xiamen, by the intellectual seriousness and dedication of the Chinese graduate students, by the erudition of many of the Chinese scholars, by the ease with which one can get lost in a strange land, by the need to



Kelly James Clark and Gary Mar.

rely on the kindness of strangers.

Though I had read about the history and philosophy of China, and about the current political and intellectual situation, my experiences of being there thwarted more expectations than it bore out. I had expected that our Chinese counterparts would present carefully worked out positions, but that they would be less comfortable with the give and take of discussion. As it turned out, however, the Chinese philosophers and graduate students asked insightful questions and were very willing to enter into debate over issues, both among themselves and with we Americans.

Groundwork may have been a factor here. This was the Sixth Annual Sino-American Symposium on Philosophy and Religious Studies. A foundation of trust, and in some cases friendship, has been patiently laid over the last several years. In addition, most of the philosophers, both Chinese and American, spent the day preceding the conference seeing the beauties of Xiamen – its historic fort, its lovely beaches, its prosperous and active

Buddhist temple, and its charming resort area of Gu Lang Yu island. This gave us the opportunity to begin to get to know one another, both through informal conversation, and through observing one another’s reactions to finding ourselves on the opposite side of the island from where we wanted to be at the time when we’d plan to be boarding a ferry back to town. Perhaps all philosophers, most especially those who espouse Christianity, should have such full-orbed human experiences together before entering into philosophical discussion. It might help us take the reality and mystery of the Incarnation more to heart and avoid treating one another as disembodied minds as we seek the truth through philosophical exchange.

I had gone on this trip wondering whether it would be a mere “junket” – a novel experience, but, evaluated as a philosophical exchange, perhaps of fairly low quality. But I was impressed not only by the philosophical ability of the Chinese participants but by the creativity of my American colleagues. This year

Announcements

“Christian Scholarship . . . for What?”

A National Interdisciplinary Conference for Christian Scholars
Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI
September 27-29, 2001

The purposes of this conference are to reflect on the intrinsic value of Christian thinking, to attend to the need for shaping intellectual agendas in the twenty-first century, and to encourage faith-based reflection on issues in and beyond the Academy. Although topics of public policy and justice spring naturally to mind when considering “Christian Scholarship . . . for What?,” the conference will take up many areas of cultural endeavor such as the arts, the natural sciences and the social sciences. Keynote speakers include Richard Mouw (Fuller Seminary), John Hare (Calvin College), John Polkinghorne (Cambridge), Kwame Bediako (University of Natal, S. Africa), and Kang Phee Seng (Hong Kong Baptist University). Papers are also being sought from Christian scholars for presentation at concurrent sessions. Send an abstract to the following address by December 13, 2000. See www.calvin.edu/fss/125conf.htm for details and registration.

Seminars in Christian Scholarship
Calvin College
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

SCP Russia Conference on the Trinity

April 1-6, 2001

The SCP Outreach to Russia Committee (Chaired by Richard Swinburne) has arranged jointly with the Russian Orthodox Church a conference on the Doctrine of the Trinity, in St Petersburg and Novgorod from the 1st to 6th April 2001. The SCP presenters are: Richard Swinburne, Stephen Davis, Peter Forrest, David Hoekema, Brian Leftow, Mel Stewart, Elenore Stump, Peter van Inwagen, and Kallistos Ware. (Kallistos Ware is a University Lecturer in Christian Orthodox studies at Oxford, and also a Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church.) The Russian presenters are headed by Archbishop Lev of Novgorod and Bishop Konstantin (Rector of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy); and there are six other Russian presenters, mainly professors at the St. Petersburg

and Moscow Theological Academies. Although there have been two previous SCP conferences in Russia, this is the first occasion on which the Russian presenters have been officially nominated by the Orthodox Church. Although the only papers will be those delivered by the main presenters, other SCP members are welcome to come and participate in the discussions and the social occasions. Anyone who wishes to do so should get in touch with Mel Stewart (email: stemel@wavetech.net).

2000 AAR/SBL Annual Meeting

November 18-21
Nashville, Tennessee

Society of Christian Philosophers (I)

Sunday, 11/19/2000
7:00 pm - 8:30 pm
Johnson A & B
Chair: *C. Stephen Evans, Calvin College*
Speaker: *Stephen T. Davis, Claremont McKenna College, “Philosophical Assumptions and Biblical Scholarship”*

Respondent: *Marilyn Adams, Yale Divinity School*

Society of Christian Philosophers (II)

Monday, 11/20/2000
11:45 am - 12:45 pm
Bayou C
Chair: *C. Stephen Evans, Calvin College*
Speaker: *William J. Wainwright, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, “Theological Determinism and the Problem of Evil: Are Arminians Any Better Off?”*
Respondent: *Michael McClymond, Saint Louis University*

Initiative Grants to Network Christian Scholars

This program of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) will award \$15,000 grants to small groups (3-6) of Christian scholars for networking activities as they work on individual or collaborative research projects related to a common thematic focus. Applications are due January 15, 2001. For a program description and application instructions, write or email Dr. Harold Heie, Director, Center for Christian Studies, Gordon College, Wenham, MA 01984 (ccs@gordon.edu), or obtain this information directly from www.cccu.org/projects/.

Ethics Across the Disciplines Conference

Viterbo University
La Crosse, Wisconsin
April 20-21, 2001
2001 Theme: Hospitality

The 2001 Ethics Across the Disciplines Conference will examine the meaning, history, and implications of the practice of hospitality. The aim of the conference is to reconsider the nature and extent of our obligations to welcome the stranger into our lives, especially in times of danger, uncertainty, and deep disagreement. Topics at the conference will include the ethics of service in the context of cultural, racial, and sexual diversity; Crime and punishment; Politics; War; Medical practice; Education; Religion; Commerce.

Plenary Speakers: *David Solomon, University of Notre Dame; Amy Oden, Oklahoma City University; Elizabeth Newman, St. Mary's College; Scott Moore, Baylor University.*

Presentation proposals should be no more than one-page in length and include name, affiliation, address, and e-mail address. Presentations will be limited to twenty minutes with ample time provided for discussion. Proposals for panel discussions and “works in progress” are encouraged. Deadline for submissions is January 30, 2001. Proposals should be mailed to Dr. Richard Kyte, D. B. Reinhart Institute for Ethics in Leadership, Viterbo University, 815 Ninth Street South, La Crosse, WI 54601. For more information call (608) 796-3704 or email rlkyte@viterbo.edu.

Election Results

Caroline Simon of Hope College, Jay Wood of Wheaton College, David Hunt of Whittier College and Linda Zagzebski of University of Oklahoma were elected to the Executive Committee of SCP. SCP owes its thanks to retiring members William Lane Craig, J.L.A. Garcia, John Hare and J.P. Moreland.

Sino-American Symposium ~ continued from cover

there were two foci of discussion – philosophy of science and inter-faith dialogue and there were contributions on both topics by both Chinese and American presenters. I learned from all the presentations, but exemplary in their creative pedagogy was Gary Mars' brave strategy of breaking us into small groups to work on a game-theoretic exercise (he then ran the results on a computer program) and Michael Murray's use of card tricks to illustrate when intelligent agency would be a better hypothesis than chance. From the Chinese side, I will have the most enduring memories of a paper on Christian/Jewish dialogue presented by Fu Youde, a scholar who became interested in the study of Judaism by translating Spinoza into Chinese, the presentation by Zhan Shichuang, who decided to tell us Taoist parables instead of adopting the Western "language-game" of argumentative rhetoric, and the courageous foray into eco-feminism by Chen Xia, the only female Chinese presenter. The need for translation in many ways helped the quality of the dialogue – I found myself with

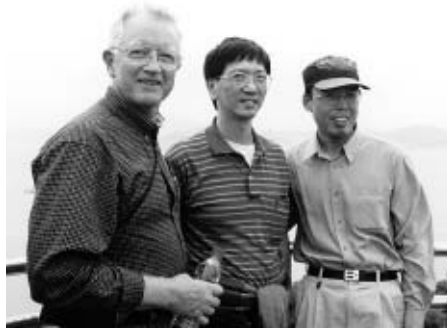


Tracy, student assistant, and Caroline Simon

time to ponder and observe, pay attention to tone and facial expressions when people were speaking Chinese. I also found the exchanges among those Chinese participants who knew English well enough to kibitz when translation was going on fascinating. Perhaps exchanges among American philosophers would be enhanced if we spent several minutes

consulting on whether we understood the question or response before commenting upon it!

My own presentation was on the possibility of developing virtues through inter-faith dialogue. My thesis was developed as a pure a priori hypothesis; before this conference I'd had only a handful of conversations that one could dignify with the term "inter-faith dialogue." Whether or not it turns out that my a priori hypothesis is true and that inter-faith dialogue is in fact a useful school of virtue, our trip gave me ample opportunity to reflect on virtue and vice. As a moral philosopher, I tend to think that it is more edifying to



Mel Stewart, Kang Phee, and Chen Lisheng

reflect on the virtues one sees others exhibiting and the vices one glimpses in oneself rather than vice versa, lest one become self-congratulatory and smugly judgmental. The first virtue I saw exhibited by the Chinese was hospitality. On our first full day in China we stopped to try to get a sense of what a Chinese village is like. We were immediately invited into a family's home and not only allowed to look around but offered ears of corn that the family was in the process of cooking – perhaps for their own dinner. This same experience also underscored the Chinese love of beauty. In the midst of what we would find a spartan and utilitarian courtyard was a rose bush flourishing from loving attention and several song birds, kept for the delight they gave to the eye and ear. Linked with the love of beauty is

the love of physical grace: the park areas surrounding the Temple of Heaven on Saturday are populated by groups of people practicing Tai Chi and ballroom dancing. Industriousness and ingenuity were also evident in large quantities. At 6:30 a.m. Chinese college students are out of their dorms getting breakfast, sitting outside studying or practicing their English by reading aloud, jogging, exercising or playing pick-up basketball. Work that in the United States would only be done with heavy equipment is done in China by a combination of hard work and cooperation. We watched men carrying what looked like 200 lb. rocks to the top of a retaining wall they were constructing by strapping each rock on polls and carrying the load balanced between them as they negotiated a bamboo ladder. These virtues will all be needed in ample supply as China faces into the challenges of environmental problems, large population and rapid social change.

These virtues, especially industriousness, explain, I think, the quality of the scholarship we saw from the Chinese side. Many of these scholars gained their education and their access to higher education against the singularly uncongenial background of the Cultural Revolution. Rather than dwelling on this, these scholars are using their talents to try to cultivate the wisdom among the Chinese that will be necessary in order to know how to benefit from contact with the West without being corrupted by our vices. The tallest building I saw in Xiamen was topped with the Pizza Hut logo. Across the street from the Buddhist temples was a McDonald's and a KFC, complete with fu dogs guarding the entrance. These businesses are not in themselves bad, but "McDonaldization" is a term of which the Chinese scholars are cognizant. I think that those of us in America who believe in the power of prayer would do well to pray that the Chinese can learn from our virtues (one that one Chinese scholar acknowledged was our commitment to human rights) while avoiding our vices, and that this might be a two way street.

I am extremely grateful to Kelly Clark, Zhou Jianzhang and Mel Stewart for their hard work in organizing the conference and to the Templeton foundation for its support of the conference.

— Caroline Simon, Hope College

SCP on the Internet

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

WWW: <http://www.siu.edu/departments/cola/philos/SCP/>

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



Regional Committee Elections

Biographies for candidates for regional committees are on the SCP Website:
www.siu.edu/departments/cola/philos/SCP/

Pacific Region

(two positions, vote for two):

David VanderLaan

Chair (one candidate):

Jim Taylor

Mountain-Plains (vote for one):

Wes Morriston

J. Jefferson Broome

Midwest Region

(two positions: vote for two):

Storm Bailey

Robert O'Connor

James Sennett

Eastern Region (vote for one):

Michael Rea

Mark Murphy

P. Eddy Wilson

Send your completed ballot by January 15, 2001 to: Kelly James Clark, Secretary-Treasurer, Society of Christian Philosophers, Department of Philosophy, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

2000-2001 Regional Conferences

Mountain-Plains

September 28-30, 2000

Sponsored by the University of Colorado Theology Forum, University of Colorado—Boulder, Colorado

Theme: *Christian Apologetics: The Theological Limits*

Keynote Speaker: *Professor Stephen Davis, with Respondents*

For further information:

Phone: (303) 492-8414

email: jon.jensen@colorado.edu

Eastern Regional Meeting

March 1-3, 2000

St. John Fisher College in Rochester, NY

Plenary speakers: *Jorge J. E. Gracia, Linda Zagzebski, Ed Wierenga and Nicholas Wolterstorff*

Contact: *David White (white@sjfc.edu)*

Midwest Regional Meeting

March 15 to 17, 2000

University of Dubuque, Dubuque, Iowa

Keynote Speakers: *Caroline Simon and David Hoekema*

Keynote address: *Christian Commitment and Academic Freedom*

Additional speakers to be announced.

Contact: *Roger Ebertz (rebertz@dbq.edu)*

Pacific Regional Meeting

April 6-8, 2001

Westmont College

"Virtue and the Foundations of Ethics"

Plenary speakers: *Robert Adams, Steve Evans, John Hare and Robert Roberts*

Contact: *Jim Taylor (taylor@westmont.edu)*

Society of Christian
Philosophers
Kelly James Clark, Secretary-Treasurer
Department of Philosophy
Calvin College
3201 Burton St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4388

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