



The Society of Christian Philosophers



Linda Zagzebski, President • Kelly James Clark, Secretary/Treasurer • Fall 2004

2004 Sino-American Conference on Philosophy and Religion

Once read that a certain movie star insisted on showering only in Evian. Similarly, for a couple of weeks this summer, I brushed my teeth using bottled water, rather than water from the tap. Alas, I was not enjoying a small slice of Hollywood-style decadence, but rather—and much less glamorously—engaged in a multi-faceted effort to avoid contracting traveler's diarrhea. (A wholly successful attempt, I would add, were I inclined to boast about such things.)

As you might have guessed, this past June I was fortunate enough to be one of the SCP members who participated in a conference on “The Nature of Persons” at Sichuan University, in Chengdu, Sichuan province, China. The other SCP members in the group were Harriet Baber (San Diego), Kelly Clark (Calvin), Steve Davis (Claremont), Lee Hardy (Calvin), Bill Hasker (Huntington), Mike Murray (Franklin and Marshall), and Lee Yearley (Stanford).

Although a few of the Chinese faculty at the conference had studied in the United States or Britain, the majority had been trained entirely in China. In part because of their training, in part because of broader cultural differences, they tended to approach the topics we discussed somewhat differently than did the American philosophers. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, the sessions were very interesting and enjoyable.

A concrete example will help to give a feel for the conference. Arguably, the central problem in the history of Chinese philosophy is whether human beings are “naturally” good or instead bad or perhaps neutral. The paper on which I commented, by Sichuan University's Chen Xia, was entitled



Trenton Merricks and Steve Davis at the Temple of Heaven

“Neo-Daoist Critiques of Confucian Views of Human Nature.” (Sichuan University is a hotbed of philosophical Daoism.) This topic falls somewhat out of my area of expertise. But Professor Chen's paper led naturally to a fun and informative discussion in which a variety of traditional Chinese views of human nature were compared to and contrasted with the Christian view that humans are made in God's image, yet tainted with original sin.

Like all the American participants in the conference, I not only commented on a paper by a Chinese scholar, but also presented a paper of my own. I gave a paper on the Trinity called “Split Brains and the Godhead.” It had been translated into Chinese beforehand, so Chinese participants could read along. I suspect the translation was not faithful to the title's

pun. That was probably for the best.

Obviously enough, the American and Chinese professors were together during the conference sessions. But, in addition, we ate all meals together, and even did a bit of sightseeing as a group. One of the highlights was a trip to the Chengdu Panda Breeding and Research Center. There we were able to get very close to lots of giant pandas, of varying ages and sizes. The meals and sightseeing provided a nice opportunity to get to know the Chinese professors in ways that went beyond merely presenting or commenting on a paper. The trip as a whole was just spectacular and I am very grateful to the SCP, Sichuan University, and the government of the People's Republic of China for making the conference possible.

~ Trenton Merricks

From the President

Dear Colleagues in the SCP,

I am honored to be elected President of the SCP for a three-year term and look forward to our continuing work as Christian philosophers in this country and abroad. As is the case in most societies, much of our work is through committees. During the time since my election early this semester, I have tried to fill all vacant positions on our committees. Each standing committee is supposed to have three members with three-year staggered terms, so there is at least one vacancy on each of the standing committees each year. I welcome volunteers to serve, as well as nominations for these positions and any suggestions or ideas you have. As you may know, regional committees arrange regional meetings, but we also have committees to arrange sessions of the SCP at each of the divisions of the APA, as well as the meetings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association and the American Academy of Religion. We also have a membership committee, a fund-raising committee, and a nominating committee.

The China committee and the Russia committee plan annual conferences with Chinese and Russian philosophers



respectively. Our contact with faculty and students in these countries has been very fruitful and some of our members have made extended stays to teach in these countries. Peking University Press has published Chinese translations of books by well-known American philosophers, including works by some of our members. I will be participating in the conference next October in Fudan University, Shanghai.

Expanding our membership is one of my priorities. There are many Christian philosophers who are not members of the SCP, sometimes because they are under the mistaken impression that our society is only for those Christian philosophers who specialize in philosophy of religion. I urge you to invite Christian colleagues and students to join the Society. We are hoping to have a reception for members and potential members at the Central APA meeting in Chicago at the end of April. Look for an announcement about that soon.

As I was about to write these words, I learned of the death of Phil Quinn. This is a great loss for all of us. Phil was a gentle man, a man of wisdom, integrity and humor. His combination of faith and acute philosophical ability was an inspiration to me when I first entered the profession, and I am grieved that we no longer have him in our midst. I know that all of you who knew him personally or through his work join me in praying that he will share in God's eternal life.

With warmest wishes,

Linda Zagzebski
lzagzebski@ou.edu

2004 Executive Committee Minutes

The following is a selected list of items for action at the 2004 Executive Committee Meeting.

Approved: Given the recent history of meetings in the Western regions of the United States, the Executive Committee merges the Mountain Plains with the Pacific Region and changes the name of the combined regions to the Western Region. The current Pacific regional committee shall be the new Western Regional Committee. There are now three regions of SCP: Eastern, Midwest and Western.

Kelly Clark reported on the rejection of SCP by a commercial organization which would have permitted payment of dues by credit card. Mike Murray

will explore the possibility of paying SCP membership via Paypal.

Approved: \$5 increase of dues to cover administrative costs and a course release for the Secretary- Treasurer.

Robert Audi & Kelly Clark: 3 year – proposal to Calvin College for an additional course release at Calvin's regular cost.

The executive committee hereby recognizes and appreciates Melville Stewart for his outstanding work in China and Russia on behalf of SCP. Robert

Audi was authorized to inform the APA Central Divisional Committee of the SCP that the 2005 APA session should be dedicated to Mel with papers arranged according to Mel's ongoing interests. In addition, SCP will publicly honor and commend Mel for his important work.

The joint British / SCP meeting was a tremendous success. Mark Murphy offered and was encouraged to hold a joint meeting at Georgetown in the future.

Election Results

Linda Zagzebski was elected President and **Garry DeWeese, Janine Marie Idziak, Caleb Miller** and **Thomas Sullivan** were elected to the Executive Committee.

In Memoriam: Phil Quinn

Phil Quinn, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, died on November 13, 2004.

We mourn his loss. The following is excerpted from his eulogy:

Phil Quinn was a jewel. He was rare and valuable, a treasure whose loss we mourn.

Phil had a powerful and supple mind of crystalline clarity. He was immensely knowledgeable in most areas of philosophy and contributed to many of them, writing more than 150 scholarly articles. He excelled as a commentator and interlocutor. But the lecture hall was the setting in which this jewel sparkled most brightly. Phil could listen to a paper on virtually any topic in philosophy — on virtually any topic in the humanities — and ask a question that cut to the heart of the matter. You always understood a paper better after Phil asked a question about it.

There are few rewards the philosophical world can offer that Phil did not receive. He was a chaired professor at an Ivy League university when he was little more than 40. He was elected president of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association.

Phil also had a tender conscience. He stood and fought for causes that engaged it. His readiness to pick up the cudgels for the liberal causes in which he believed, yoked with the power of



his mind, could make him a very formidable presence in academic meetings. Yet his presence was also a welcome one that gave hope to many who shared his convictions.

Yet if Phil was a jewel we valued, he was also — like a jewel — impenetrable. He lived his life at some remove from us. The fences he put up to guard his inner core were high and kept us all at a distance. We caught glimpses of the inner Phil only on those rare occasions when he let down the guard that he usually maintained so jealously.

Perhaps Phil's work was at its best when he wrote about human vulnerability to the tragic and about its implications for human love. One of his most powerful and moving essays was on the novel *Silence*, by the Japanese author Shusako Endo. I know how hard Phil worked on that paper, and how he thought about every nub of that book's subtle texture. In his essay, Phil argued, in effect, that it is

impossible for human beings always to love as we should. It's impossible because we can find ourselves trapped between the conflicting demands of the two great commandments, which enjoin love of God and love of neighbor. If Christianity forces us to choose between honoring God and alleviating the sufferings of our neighbors, what are we to do? I know that Phil, empathetic as he was, would have chosen his neighbors. But he would have wondered how God could be silent when we face so tragic a conflict. These were difficult existential questions that bothered Phil deeply, but to which he had no answer.

But however tempting it may be to acquiesce when darkness and silence cloud our souls, God simply will not allow loneliness and isolation to have the final say. For however difficult it may be for us to love, God unconditionally loves the world and all of us who are in it. Where Phil is now, he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is as completely and totally loved as a human soul can be.

~ Paul Weithman, Chair,
Philosophy Department,
University of Notre Dame

You can find the eulogy in its entirety at www.nd.edu/%7Endphilo/quinn/quinneulogy.html.

Regional Meetings

Eastern Region

Cumberland College
December 2-4, 2004
Science and Religious Faith

Plenary Speakers:

Robin Collins, Messiah College
Anne Foerst, MIT Artificial
Intelligence Laboratory
Alvin Plantinga, University
of Notre Dame

Further information about the conference is (or soon will be) available at <http://religion.cumberlandcollege.edu/DRob/SCPMeeing.htm>.

Western Region

Theme: *Christian Citizenship*
George Fox University
Newberg, Oregon
April 14-16, 2005K

Keynote speakers: **Robert Audi**
and **J. Budziszewski**

Papers, 20-25 minutes in reading length, are invited on this topic, but papers on all topics are welcomed. Deadline: January 20, 2005. Send to: Mark McLeod-Harrison, Department of Religious Studies, George Fox University, 414 N. Meridian St. Newberg, Oregon 97132.

Midwest Region

Christian Philosophy & Religious Diversity
April 7-9, 2005
Lincoln Christian College and Seminary
Lincoln, Illinois

Plenary Speakers: **David Basinger**,
William Lane Craig and
John Sanders

Call For Abstracts: Deadline submission January 15, 2005. Send via US mail or email to: James F. Sennett, Lincoln Christian College and Seminary, 100 Campus View Drive, Lincoln, Illinois 62656 or jsennett@lccs.edu. Updated information and registration forms are available at the conference web site: www.lccs.edu/scp



Announcements

SCP-Russia Outreach: The Problem of Evil

This conference is jointly organised by the 'Outreach to Russia' committee of the Society of Christian Philosophers, the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of the Sciences, and the Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church. It will take place in Moscow on June 6,7, & 8, 2005, mainly at the Danilovski Hotel. The SCP speakers will be: Marilyn Adams, Robert Adams, Peter van Inwagen, Ric Otte, Michael Murray, Dan & Frances Howard-Snyder, Mark Wynn & Richard Swinburne. Any SCP mem-

ber is welcome to attend, but there will be no scope for additional presentations. Contact: Richard Swinburne .

The Society for Continental Philosophy and Theology (SCPT)

The Wisdom of Love
March 18-19, 2005
Wheaton College (IL)

Keynote Speakers:

John D. Caputo (Syracuse University)

Amy Laura Hall (Duke University
Divinity School)

Call for papers on issues concerning love. Send complete papers by January 7, 2005, prepared for blind review, with

a maximum of 3,000 words to Shane M. Wilkens as email attachments (Shane.M.Wilkens@wheaton.edu). For more information about SCPT, visit www.scptonline.org. For further information regarding the conference, contact Bruce Ellis Benson (Bruce.Ellis.Benson@wheaton.edu).

Wesleyan Philosophical Society Conference

*Social and Political Philosophy:
Christians and Communities Since "9/11"*
March 3, 2005
Near Seattle Pacific University
Dr. Brint Montgomery (brint@snu.edu)

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>

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