



The Society of Christian Philosophers



William Wainwright, President • Kelly James Clark, Executive Director • Fall 2007

Guns, Bouncers and Strobe Lights *by Charles Taliaferro, St. Olaf College*

I know that plays, dances, concerts, conferences and other live performances may not be going well when I begin praying for the actors, dancers, musicians or presenters. Usually the prayer is simple: Oh God, please help them in this hour of need! I started doing this several years ago just after getting an Anglican prayer book with the following prayer I have been using regularly: 'O Lord, may I not be an embarrassment today either to myself or to those around me.' Sadly, this prayer request is rarely granted in my case, but there were certainly many opportunities for prayers for divine assistance at the recent meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) last weekend in San Diego when, for example, a speaker announced to those of us attending her talk: 'When I see all of you, I want to get out my gun.'

I do not think any of us present thought that she honestly hoped to have and use a firearm either to rob, maim, kill or threaten us. But the German trained, American university professor's figurative gesture was far from friendly or ironic, as it was prefaced by a series of biting comments such as her suggestion that, despite our academic credentials, we were banal and without passion. Among the more bewildering charges was the claim that we all had problems growing up with our fathers. The Freudian hint about our mentors was actually not completely unfamiliar to me, as I had studied under a German professor who urged all of us to treat our professors like our father (including him) and then to kill the father (metaphorically). This never really caught on with me for several reasons: my professor was nothing like my father, I happened to love my father, and many of my best professors were women. In

any case, when the professor at the AAR expressed (with enthusiasm) her desire for a weapon, I could not remember which Nazi had said something similar; was it Gobbles, Goering or Hess who said they wanted to reach for a revolver whenever they hear the word 'culture'? In any event, the tension was broken in the room (slightly), when someone cried out: 'Where is the love?'

Love was not immediately present at another event later at the conference. A friend (Stewart Goetz) and I had just completed a book on naturalism which was 'launched' along with six other books from 9pm to midnight by our publisher at the Martini Lounge. I suppose the name of the establishment should have clued us in to the Bacchanalian spirit, but we were utterly unprepared to meet four bouncers (well cut suits, muscles, hip ties), the heavy metal music drowning out any possibility of conversation, the strobe lights, and open bar with hard liquor next to the book display. Above the bar there were multiple rotating images of all seven books. We did not stay long. The hospitality was great, but I went into an itching fit due to some bedbug bites from my hotel and while this fit into the scene—I probably looked as though I was dancing—we had early flights out, and so on.

Drifting back to the hotel (and a new bedbug free room), I felt relief reading student papers. It has been a difficult fall. One former student who withdrew from school about 2 years ago died last month. I remember him telling me during our course together how he had a heart and lung transplant as a boy and, consequently, he had a very limited life expectancy. What an honor to know and work with such a brave young man. Another student lost his father to cancer



last week. Still another is on medical leave. Yes, there are days when classes can be blundering embarrassments and meltdowns and conferences can be great. Even with twice as many bedbugs, the AAR conference was worth meeting a philosopher who deals with real guns; in addition to doing major philosophical work on cosmology he is a senior Navy war strategist. But at the end of the day, I am most in awe of the privileged, tangible ways in which we are able to work together as students and faculty and staff on a daily basis. A senior, best of the best colleague in my department (Ed Langerak) once proposed that we should measure success in class to the extent that we increase the love of wisdom. I feel sure this would not work as a formal, quantified measure, but I actually think Langerak is (as always) right on target. At the end of the day, it is something like the love of wisdom that makes what we all do intensely anti-banal (if that is a word) and, instead of being some quasi-Freudian happening, the heart of the matter is an unaffected, un sentimental, sustained passion.

Regional Meetings

Eastern Regional Meeting

April 18-19, 2008
Niagara University
Niagara Falls, NY

Conference Hotel: Crowne Plaza Hotel,
300 Third Street, Niagara Falls, NY
14303, 1-800-2CROWNE

Conference Theme: *Options and Issues in Applied Ethics*

Papers on any topic of philosophical interest will be considered, with some preference given to papers that connect with the conference theme. We are especially interested in papers dealing with issues of social responsibility and teleology in relation to applied ethics. However, we would like a broad range of philosophical interests represented. Participation is welcomed from both Christians and non-Christians.

The conference will feature three keynote speakers: Jorge Garcia of Boston College, Alexander Pruss of Baylor University and Gerald McKenny of Notre Dame University.

The Deadline for submissions is January 5, 2008 with the selection to be completed by February 10. Submissions should have a reading time of 20 to 30 minutes and be prepared for blind review.

For information and submissions contact:
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[http://www.niagara.edu/philosophy/
SocietyofChristianPhilosophy
Meeting.htm](http://www.niagara.edu/philosophy/SocietyofChristianPhilosophyMeeting.htm)

Central Regional Meeting

May 8-10, 2008
Union University
Jackson, Tennessee

Conference Theme: *Engaging Eastern Thought*

Plenary Speakers:

Kelly James Clark, Professor
of Philosophy, Calvin College
Robin Collins, Professor of
Philosophy, Messiah College
Winfried Corduan, Professor
of Philosophy, Taylor University

Papers exploring philosophical issues associated with Eastern thought (e.g., Asian or Middle-Eastern philosophy/religion) as well as papers addressing issues broadly related to philosophical and religious pluralism are encouraged.

However, papers on any topic of interest to Christian philosophers are welcome as a broad range of philosophical interests will be represented. Participation is open to both Christians and non-Christians. Conference participants need not be members of the Society of Christian Philosophers. Manuscripts, suitable for blind review, with a reading time of approximately 20-30 minutes, should be submitted, along with an abstract (150 words or less) including the author's name and affiliation, as he or she would like it to appear in the program. Electronic submissions are preferred, but hard copies submitted by conventional mail will also be accepted.

Paper Submission Deadline: January 15, 2008

Direct inquiries and submissions to:
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Executive Committee

Michael Bergman, Janine Marie Idziak, Wes Morrison, and Michael Murray were elected to the SCP Executive Committee. We thank the following retiring members for their service: Garry DeWeese, Caleb Miller and Thomas Sullivan.

SCP-Templeton Scholars

From 65 students applicants at China's top universities, SCP selected its first eight students for the Templeton Funded Visiting Student Program. These students are at four colleges/universities as follows. Calvin College: Xuan Qingwen, Sun-Yat Sen; Liu Asi, Peking. Hope College: Leng Xin, Fudan; Zhang Yanliang, Tsinghua. Notre Dame: Hong Hao, Peking; Yu Guofei, Wuhan. Baylor University: Ye Weiming, Beijing Normal; Pu Rongjian, Wuhan. In addition, three postdoctoral fellows were selected. Xu Xiangdong of Peking University and Xu Yingjin of Fudan University are at Notre Dame and Hao Changchi is at Baylor.



From l.-r.: Tom Tong, Hao Changchi, Ye Weiming, Kelly James Clark, Pu Rongjian

Reflections on the Sino-American Symposium

by Scott Davison, Morehead State University

Of course, it is impossible to convey completely in writing the nature of any interesting experience in one's life (especially for a person who is trained to focus on general, abstract principles). Like many first-time visitors, I was apprehensive about traveling to China. I wondered about what the food would be like, about what kind of accommodations we would have, about access to home, about being safe and remaining healthy, and about the quality of an academic exchange across so many different kinds of difference. My worries turned out to be ill-founded.

All of the American delegates stayed in a lovely hotel on the enormous campus of Tsinghua University in Beijing. Our rooms were complete with Internet access for those who brought computers; much to my surprise, the connection was fast enough to support seamless video calls to my family back home. We ate breakfast in the hotel every morning, then proceeded to our conference room a short distance from there, passing a lovely pond covered with lilies and walking over an elegant bridge crossing a canal that runs through campus. We ate lunch and dinner with the Chinese delegates in a restaurant on campus nearby, and the food was really wonderful. I couldn't tell you the name of a single dish, but I disliked only a handful of them, and each meal involved at least ten different ones, and sometimes twice that number. All of our meals were served at egalitarian round tables with the food arranged on large glass "lazy Susan" trays that could be turned easily back and forth so that everyone could access every dish.

The Chinese delegates were very friendly and their English was surprisingly good. All of the papers were presented in English. A translator assisted in the process of commentary for the



benefit of the students in attendance, although it soon became clear that the students had their own opinions about how the commentary should be translated, offering suggestions (and even corrections!) at regular intervals. I spoke to a Master's level student from the University for about forty minutes, finding her English to be most impressive, only to discover that she had never spoken with a native English speaker before in her life. At another time, a different student asked me where my home University was located; trying to be helpful, I seized upon the ready availability in Beijing of Kentucky Fried Chicken, explaining patiently that my University was in Kentucky. The student patiently answered me: "Yes, Kentucky is the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln." Needless to say, I had gravely underestimated my interlocutor at this point.

Returning to the subject of the conference proper, each person presented a paper on the subject of happiness and commented on a paper presented by someone from the other country's delegation. Christian viewpoints were

explored alongside of Confucian and Buddhist ones. I learned a great deal more than I expected I would, not just from the papers presented, but also from the people who presented them. It is hard to explain, but there is nothing like the realization that other people do things quite differently than you do, yet meet with success their own way. I left the conference meetings each day with many things to consider and many questions about things that I had never previously considered carefully. It was challenging and rewarding and tiring (thanks to the 12 hour time difference!) all at once.

We were also fortunate enough to be able to do some sightseeing, visiting the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square, and the most famous Peking Duck restaurant. All in all, the experience was quite amazing. I hope to return to China again, and to bring my whole family along, and to stay for an extended period of time. I am grateful to the SCP for making the conference possible, and I look forward to ways in which I can support the SCP's efforts in this direction in the future.

"Millions long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon."

~ Susan Ertz

"It is impossible to travel faster than light, and certainly not desirable, as one's hat keeps blowing off."

~ Woody Allen

Science and Religion Series At China's Top Universities

by Mel Stewart, Templeton Visiting Philosopher

Although I have been involved in SCP's efforts in China since their inception in 1993, the task of conducting a Science and Religion Series added an entirely new dimension to my China experience.

In 2005, we met at Wuhan University. The local contact, Changchi Hao, is currently an SCP Templeton scholar at Baylor University. The Series team included Del Ratzsch (Philosophy, Calvin), Deborah & Loren Haarsma (Physics, Calvin), and Tom Greenlee (Physics, Bethel). My T.A., Li Yong, studied for a year at Calvin College is now working on a Ph.D. at the University of St. Louis.

The 2006 series at Fudan University was co-planned by Yingjin Xu, who is currently an SCP Templeton scholar at the University of Notre Dame. He has translated the second series of papers into Chinese, which is to appear under the title, *Science and Religion: 21st Century Dialogue*. My TA, Vincent (Tang Jie), is currently working on his Ph.D. at Fudan University. The Series at Fudan drew crowds ranging from 80-170. The team included Alvin Plantinga (Philosophy, Notre Dame), Peter Dodson (Anatomy, Geology, Pennsylvania), Steve Matheson (Biology, Calvin), and Richard Swinburne (Philosophy, Oxford).

The 2007 series at Shandong University was co-planned by Fu Youde.



Mel Stewart and Zhao Dunhua,
Peking University

He is co-editor of Volume III, to be published by Peking University Press. The translator for this edition is Professor Huang Fuwu. Xia/Summer, Fu Youde's T.A., helped prepare the programs and the booklets containing the papers for the Series. Team III included: Don Page (Physics, Alberta), Gary Patterson (Chemical Physics, Carnegie Mellon), Kelly James Clark (Philosophy, Calvin), Michael Murray (Philosophy, Franklin & Marshall), and Richard Peterson (Physics, Bethel). Several milestones took place at Shandong. For a third time, I was invited to present a paper at the Beijing International Forum, which starts off at the Great Hall of the People in Tianan'men Square. Volume I in the Series was published and 1,000 copies were distributed to Wuhan, Fudan,

Shandong and Peking universities. And Blackwell of Oxford agreed to publish the English version of the Series in a 2-volume Library Clothbound edition billed as "state of the art in science and religion."

I have met with the co-planner for Peking University 2008, Xing Taotao who was a visiting scholar at Notre Dame. This team includes: Owen Gingerich (Astronomy, Harvard), William Lane Craig (Philosophy, Talbot), Alvin Plantinga, and Cal Dewitt, (Environmental Science, Wisconsin).

The team scheduled for 2009 includes: Peter van Inwagen (Philosophy, Notre Dame), Alan Padgett (Philosophy, Luther), William Hurlbutt (Bioethics, Stanford), Stephen M. Barr (Physics, Bartol Institute), and Bruce Reichenbach (Philosophy, Augsburg). Other universities in Beijing will be engaged during the 2008 and 2009 Series, including Tsinghua University, the People's University, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The first three series have met with the enthusiastic support of faculty and students at each university. Many thanks are due to the host universities, to Peking and Fudan university presses, to Blackwell of Oxford, and to the John Templeton Foundation, Paul & Dawn Sjolund Foundation, and the Salem and Wooddale foundations for funding these exciting China ventures.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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