



The Society of Christian Philosophers



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

God and Physical Cosmology Conference



by Stephen
T. Davis,
Claremont
McKenna
College

This conference, sponsored by the Society of Christian Philosophers, was held from January 30–February 1, 2003 at the University of Notre Dame. It was an exciting adventure for all those who participated. There were two quite different culture-exchanges going on: between the Anglo-American and the Russian participants and between scientists and philosophers. The papers were generally of a very high quality, the discussion periods were energized and illuminating, and the friendships formed were warm and genuine.

The conference proved that mutual interchange between current cosmology and Christian philosophy can be fruitful. We have much to learn from each other. On the issue of cosmic fine-tuning, it is clear that the conference advanced the issue beyond what might be seen as a current impasse. So far as using the facts of physical cosmology as a way of arguing for intelligent design is concerned, both the problems that must be faced and the prospects for success were clarified. There were fourteen sessions in all, and attendance for them in McKenna Hall (the Center for Continuing Education) varied between a low of some fifty and a high of one hundred thirty (excluding participants). Several scientists from different universities were in the audience,



Conference Attendees

along with many philosophers. Indeed, twelve or thirteen eminent American philosophers of religion were in attendance. There were also students, both graduates and undergraduates, from Notre Dame, Calvin College, Wheaton College, and other institutions.

Several of the conference papers were on one aspect or another of “fine-tuning” (Ernan McMullin, Phillip Quinn, Robin Collins, Richard Swinburne, Del Ratzsch). An issue which featured in several of these papers concerned whether the possibility of there being many worlds with different natural laws and initial conditions weakened the argument to God from the fine-tuning of the universe. Other papers concerned the Christian doctrine of creation (Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk), the right way to interpret the account of the “six days of creation” in Genesis (Vladimir Shokhin, Alexander Shimbalev), ancient cosmologies (Alexandre Shishkov), contemporary cosmology (Joel Primack, Sean

Carroll), the relation of God to time (Dean Zimmerman, William L. Craig), and cosmology and the doctrine of the Trinity (Victor Pervushin).

It should be noted that the Russian participants in the conference were selected not by the SCP, but by the theological commission of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is headed by Metropolitan Filaret. It is, however, a real plus that the SCP is dealing with such an important body in Russia.

In the refreshments room where people gathered between sessions, the SCP set up a display of its past exchanges with Russia and China. And three publishers displayed books and sold their wares: Eerdmans, Notre Dame Press, and St. Vladimir's Press. As at previous conferences in Russia and China, the organizers of “God and Physical Cosmology” hope that a book will emerge from it. Plans along those lines are already progressing.

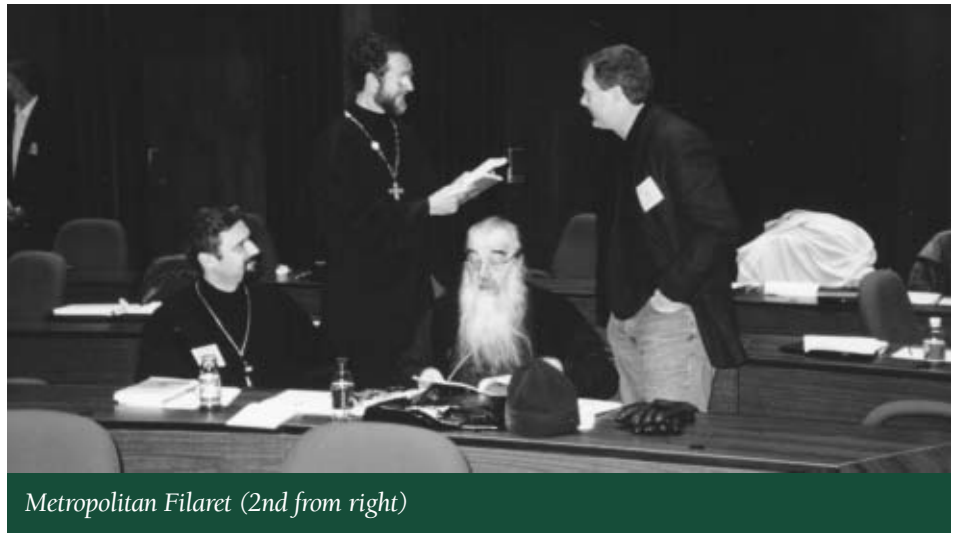
Translation issues intruded less than at previous SCP-Russia conferences.

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This was undoubtedly due to the high level of our translators, Yuri Balashov and Nataliya Pukha, both of whom are Russian natives who live in the United States and who have Ph.D. degrees in philosophy and religious studies, respectively. (Indeed, Balashov teaches philosophy at the University of Georgia in the USA.) The papers were translated and reproduced prior to the conference. In the question-and-answer sessions following each paper, some questioners found it easier than others to speak in the short phrases or sentences that allow for easy translation, but all eventually caught on.

The only mishap occurred when it rained one night. The roof of McKenna Hall leaked, and water shorted out the soundboard in the main auditorium. We had to hold one morning session in a different room. But quick footwork by the Notre Dame employees ensured the necessary repairs, and we returned to the main auditorium.

Much to everyone's shock and dismay, the crash of the space shuttle Columbia occurred during the last morning of the conference. In a touch-



Metropolitan Filaret (2nd from right)

ing display of grace, Metropolitan (or Bishop) Filaret of Minsk, the head of the Russian delegation, asked to lead the conference in prayer. He prayed for the souls of the lost astronauts, and for the comfort and solace of both their loved ones and the American people.

Sincere thanks are due to the sponsors of the conference: The John Templeton Foundation, The Notre Dame Center for Philosophy of Religion, The Society of St. Sergius and

St. Albans, and the Paul and Dawn Sjolund Foundation. Most of the planning and execution of the conference was done by Richard Swinburne and Michael Murray. (This included: raising money, arranging for speakers and translators, setting up a conference web site, liaising with Notre Dame officials, registering attenders, and arranging for reproduction of papers, transportation, refreshments, meals, microphones, and power-point equipment.)

Westphal at Wuhan by Merold Westphal



In March 2003, I was in Wuhan for ten days, eight class days and a weekend. At their request I gave lectures for two different groups. I gave eight two hour lectures on Kierkegaard for the undergraduates in the Comparative Philosophy program. They knew enough English so that these did not need to be translated. I also gave four lectures for the graduate students in Religious Studies. With translation and discussion these sessions ran about two and a half hours each. At their request, the topics were: phenomenology of religion,

religious pluralism, Thomas Aquinas, and a comparative Chinese/western lecture (which I gave on the valuation of shame in the Confucian tradition and its devaluation by Aristotle, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, along with its retrieval by Levinas). The first two of these lectures were repeated for graduate students (whether in Philosophy or Religious Studies I was not clear) at Hua Jhong University of Science and Technology, also in Wuhan. These students were at least on a par, philosophically, with the students at Wuhan University. It was a busy schedule, fitting fourteen two hour (plus) sessions into eight class days. But it was very rewarding, as the level of interest and the quality of the questions and discussion were gratifying.

I was told that the Comparative Philosophy program is China's first, that its first class is now in their third year, and that a similar program has begun at Peking University, presumably in the last year or two. I presume this means

something like a new major, since the two elements, Classical Chinese and western philosophy are not new.

I was interested in the existence of a Religious Studies graduate program and was told that there is a very good job market in the field as such departments at the undergraduate level are being established across China. I asked what was studied in these departments and was told: Marxist theory of religion and Christian theology. One evening I had dinner with the chair of the department at Wuhan (Professor Duan) and six of their ten graduate students. Three of these are working on Thomas Aquinas, a special interest of Duan's (hence the request for a lecture on Aquinas) and that a Chinese translation of the entire *Summa Theologiae* is scheduled to be completed in the next couple of years. The other three (or at least two of them) were working on religious pluralism a la Hick et al.

Executive Committee Election

Philip E. Devine is Professor of Philosophy at Providence College. He is the author of *The Ethics of Homicide* (Cornell, 1978; reprinted Notre Dame, 1989), *Relativism, Nihilism, and God* (Notre Dame, 1990), *Human Diversity and the Culture Wars* (Praeger, 1996), and *Natural Law Ethics* (Greenwood, 2000). He has published articles on the philosophy of religion, general and special ethics, social policy issues, and academic freedom questions, in *Ethics, Philosophy, The Thomist, New Scholasticism and Public Affairs Quarterly*, and *American Philosophical Quarterly*. He is currently at work on a book entitled *First Person Plural*. He is a parishoner at St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church, Providence, Rhode Island.

Laura L. Garcia teaches philosophy at Boston College, specializing in philosophical theology and metaphysics. Her essays on divine attributes and on faith and reason have appeared in *Faith and Philosophy, Philosophical Quarterly* and elsewhere. Recent articles include "Christians and the Joy of Sex" in *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* and "Preserving Persons" forthcoming in C. Tollefsen, ed. *The Contribution of John Paul II to Bioethics*.

Charles D. Kay, Prof of Philosophy, Wofford College (A.B., Princeton

University; Ph.D., Univ. of Pittsburgh) has been a member of the SCP for twenty years, most recently serving as chair of the SCP program committee for the APA-ED meetings. He teaches courses in the History & Philosophy of Science, Medical Ethics, and Science & Religion, and is a past president of the South Carolina Society for Philosophy.

Robert C. Koons is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of *Paradoxes of Belief and Strategic Rationality* (Cambridge, 1992) and *Realism Regained: An Exact Theory of Causation, Teleology and the Mind* (Oxford, 2000). The topics of his published work include the interdependency between theism and science, the cosmological argument, divine providence and human freedom, vagueness, and the theory of causation, and he has published in *Mind, American Philosophical Quarterly, Faith and Philosophy, Philosophical Studies*, and elsewhere. He is a member of Redeemer Lutheran congregation in Austin, Texas.

Trenton Merricks is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Virginia. He has published articles in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of mind. These articles have appeared in *The Journal of Philosophy, Mind, Nous, Philosophy and*



Phenomenological Research, and elsewhere. He is also the author of *Objects and Persons* (Oxford, 2001). He is a member of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville, VA.

Robert Roberts teaches philosophy at Baylor University. His most recent book is *Emotional: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge, 2003). Currently he co-authoring a book with Jay Wood tentatively entitled *Virtues That Deliver Epistemic Good*.

William A. Rued, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg, taught previously at Sonoma State University, Middlebury College and Princeton University. For some years his research and writing has focused on the moral authority of God as key to the possibility of an ideally free and meaningful existence--and to the rationality of radical, biblical commitment to Christ. As a lay leader at Church of the Ascension, in Pittsburgh, he is currently working to establish a new, interchurch and interracial ministry to inner city youth.

James E. Taylor is Professor of Philosophy at Westmont College. He has published articles on various epistemological topics in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, American Philosophical Quarterly, Synthese, Philosophical Studies, Nous* and elsewhere. He is currently working on a book on Christian apologetics. He has served as chair of the SCP Pacific Regional Committee, and he organized and hosted the spring 2001 Pacific Regional Meeting of the SCP at Westmont. He has been a member of the SCP since its founding in 1978, and he has attended numerous SCP meetings throughout the U.S. for the last 25 years. He is a member of Montecito Covenant Church in Santa Barbara, CA.

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/~scp>

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

Executive Committee Election

Executive Committee (vote for four):

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Phillip Devine | <input type="checkbox"/> Laura Garcia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Kay | <input type="checkbox"/> Rob Koons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trenton Merricks | <input type="checkbox"/> Bob Roberts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> William Rued | <input type="checkbox"/> Jim Taylor |

Send your completed ballot by August 15, 2003 to: Kelly James Clark, Secretary-Treasurer, Society of Christian Philosophers, Department of Philosophy, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Announcements

SCP-the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion

*Joint Meeting on Religion and Ethics
August 6–8, 2003*

Lady Margaret Hall, University of
Oxford

Keynote speakers: Robert Audi, John
Hare, Brian Leftow and D.Z. Phillips

For a complete program and confer-
ence particulars, contact Dr Mark
Wynn at: M.R.Wynn@exeter.ac.uk

C.S. Lewis Foundation National Faculty Forum

“Free Speech: Academic Freedom and
Religious Expression”

October 11, 2003

UC Berkeley, Dwinelle Hall

Conference Details and Registration:

[www.cslewis.org/programs/
facultyforum/index.html](http://www.cslewis.org/programs/facultyforum/index.html)

Deadline for proposal submission:
July 1, 2003. See website for details.

Evangelical Philosophical Society National Conference

November 19–21, 2003

Atlanta, GA

Plenary speaker: N.T. Wright.

Contact scott.smith@biola.edu.

Regional Meetings

Eastern Region

Fall 2003

Pacific Region

February 19-21, 2004

Biola University

Contact Doug Geivett at

dougeivett@biola.edu

Mountain-Plains Region

Philosophical Issues in Christian

Apologetics

Denver Seminary

Spring 2004

Contact Doug Groothuis at

DRGroothuis@aol.com

Midwest Region

*Stewardship: Caring for the Earth and its
Inhabitants*

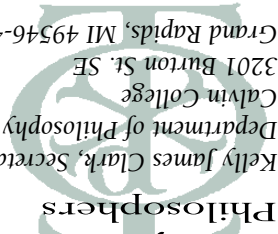
Co-sponsored by the D. B. Reinhart
Institute for Ethics in Leadership

April 1-3, 2004

Viterbo University

La Crosse, Wisconsin

Contact Dr. Richard Kyte at (608) 796-
3704 or email ethics@viterbo.edu


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