



The Society of Christian Philosophers



Robert Audi, President • Kelly James Clark, Secretary/Treasurer • Winter 2002

From the New Pres

Dear Colleagues,

Greetings from California, where I am again visiting Santa Clara University during the winter quarter. I am writing to tell you that the normal work of the Society has been continuing since I wrote in September and again to welcome your ideas and suggestions. Plans are developing for another trip to China, for a conference with Russian philosophers, for our usual meetings in various regions or with the APA, and for some new initiatives.

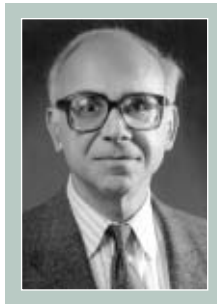
Many of you are already contributing to one or more activities of the SCP. I would welcome news of your work. Nominations of people for various committees are also welcome. Please feel free to send these to Kelly Clark or me or, in the case of a regional committee, to the appropriate committee chair directly. Volunteering to serve on committees or

do various kinds of work for the Society is of course also welcome.

The Executive Committee will be meeting at the Central Division convention of the APA in Chicago in April. As the agenda has so far taken shape, discussion will focus mainly on how we can move ahead with our major projects. You may want to suggest something in particular for consideration. I would be very happy to have your ideas.

I will be attending both of the spring APA meetings this year, and I hope to see many of you at our sessions there.

Robert Audi
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Election Results

Robert Audi was elected President of the Society of Christian Philosophers and **Jan Cover** (Purdue University), **Laura Waddell Ekstrom** (College of William and Mary), **Michael Murray** (Franklin and Marshall College) and **Mark Murphy** (Georgetown University) were elected to the Executive Committee. We express our gratitude to outgoing members **Harriett Baber**, **Timothy O'Connor**, **Charles Taliaferro** and **Stephen Wykstra**. We are also grateful for the service of outgoing President, **Steve Evans**.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jackie Chan

Kate Rogers
University of Delaware

“**B**ut what about the story of Abraham and Isaac?” What a good question, I thought. I had just finished reading my paper on the importance of family in Christian thought and how scholars comparing Confucianism with Christianity often fail to see this. But doesn't the story of Abraham and Isaac raise a problem for my thesis in that the believer in the Judeo-Christian God is clearly exhorted to put God ahead of all else? On the other hand, perhaps it confirms my point in that, had Abraham been instructed to sacrifice a neighbor's

child, the impact of the story would have been quite different. It was a fruitful question, and I wish I'd thought of it myself. I would have been pleased had a student of mine here at Delaware put the question, but I was delighted, and a bit surprised, to have it come from an undergraduate at Shandong University, in Jinan, Shandong, People's Republic of China. During the break the student and I chewed over some implications of the story, and then later, at an informal get-together, she confessed to me that, though she was currently specializing in modern and contemporary western philosophy, she did not find that it had much to offer in the way of spiritual nourishment. As

a medievalist, I had to sympathize, but encouraged her not to give up on western philosophy altogether.

The scene was the Seventh Sino-American Symposium of Philosophy and Religion on the theme “Cross-cultural dialogue: East and West” organized by the China committee of the SCP and Fu Youde, chair of the philosophy department at Shandong U., held in mid-October, 2001. The American visitors, under the intrepid leadership of Kelly Clark, included, besides myself, Gary Mar, George Mavrodes, Eleonore Stump, Kelly's mom, Phyllis, and his daughter, Emily. Mel Stewart and his wife Carol who were at Beijing University on a Fulbright assignment

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Conference presenters.

2 joined us for the conference. The conference itself was most interesting. Among the papers were several methodological discussions of how cross-cultural/inter-faith dialogue is possible, including work on Matteo Ricci, and a paper making the point that sometimes it is more respectful to argue that someone advancing a different position is wrong than to insist that the difference be ignored or wished away. A graduate student from Beijing University advanced the thesis that cross-cultural translation is not really possible. Several of us felt that her clear and well-organized presentation represented a self-refutation, and we hoped that the fact that she was the interpreter for Mel and Carol had in no way motivated her conclusions. Other papers, like mine, made some attempt at comparative philosophy. Kelly, for example, put forth the idea that the deepest commitments of Confucianism would support feminist goals.

A faculty member from Shangdong U. presented what was, in my view, one of the most informative papers, on the topic of a type of Chinese Qi Gong which has been in the news a lot lately. It was enlightening to see how a forbidden subject can be discussed within a totalitarian state. The faculty member suggested that in order to facilitate discussion we take a page from the Harry Potter books (very big now in China) in which our villain is referred to as

“you know who.” We could refer to a certain important event in Tianenman Square in 1989 as “you know what” and the branch of Qi Gong which has caused so much excitement as “you know which.” Her thesis was that one of the negative effects of outlawing “you know which” was that there could now be no scientific investigation into its claims to provide significant health benefits; claims which, due to her own experience, she was unwilling to entirely discount.

Informative as the conference was, much of the “cross-cultural dialogue” took place in the course of sightseeing trips. As we sauntered around the sacred Taishan (Mount Tai), the “Great Mountain” from which Confucius looked out upon the world and thought it looked rather small, I was able to pump the conference participants from Hong Kong (where most of my favorite movies are made) about how things have been since 1997 and what they expect for the future. And I discussed the one-child policy with a student from Shandong U. He was concerned about the “little emperor” problem; the possibly negative effects on a child who, being the only child, is treated as the be all and end all by his parents and two sets of grandparents. I have four kids and he has four siblings (he belongs to a group which is not limited to one child) and we agreed that there may well be something bene-

ficial in growing up having to jockey with others in the competition for the goods of this world.

And it was not just the Americans who had something to learn from our visit to China. As Kelly and Emily and I were toiling up the Great Wall with our student-guide from Beijing U., the student asked us if we did not think that sending U.S. troops to fight in Afghanistan was more or less a declaration of war on all of Islam. Kelly and I were able to assure her that the American government and the vast majority of the American people make a clear distinction between Muslims in general, and the few who resort to terrorism.

But lest the reader get the impression that it was all deep socio-political and interfaith discussion, I must hasten to add that much of the time we were engaged in unadulterated fun. Fu Youde is a member of the Shandong Opera Association and treated us to a program of Peking Opera in which he himself sang. (Please pause for a moment and envision your chair on stage singing Peking Opera.) I was a little slow to warm to it, but once they started in on the Jackie Chan stuff, it was impossible not to get caught up (at least for a long-time and serious Jackie Chan fan like myself.) The last section of the program was a charming piece about the emperor in disguise sparring verbally with the clever and spunky daughter of the inn keeper. I could tell

that I was getting at least a third of the jokes because the woman sitting next to me could read the Chinese subtitles and I was laughing along with about every third one of her laughs. At dinner Prof. Fu tried to teach Eleonore a Peking Opera song and she, in turn, tried to teach him a Hebrew lullaby.

And I discovered in myself a hidden talent for shopping. Had I not been called to be a philosopher, I'm quite sure that the next best career would be to be a buyer for an importer of Chinese goods. But compared to Phyllis and Eleonore I was the rank amateur. In illustration: we arrived tired and late at a hotel one night only to discover that our reservations had been canceled and we would have to get some cabs and go elsewhere. And during the very short time, say fifteen minutes, that it took for us to make this distressing discovery, rearrange our plans, and pull ourselves together to wait for the cabs, and in the midst of all the confusion, Eleonore bought a kimono at the hotel gift shop and Phyllis picked up something like seventeen bracelets. Now that's shopping!

And the eating! Hao qi! (Delicious! lit. "Good eats!") I tried almost everything, and, with the possible exception of the raw lobster which was cold and absolutely clear, enjoyed it all. I even had a stick of candied crab apples from



Emily with a monk.

the market near Wangfujing, the major shopping area near our hotel. (I had to because in one of our Hong Kong films the subtitles talk about eating "candied crab.") Apparently this is a food not often eaten by westerners, or maybe grown ups, because I noticed as I was happily eating my way down the stick that Chinese couples would nudge their child and point at me and laugh.

And speaking of children, I cannot pass over in silence how Emily contributed to the trip. She was that travel-

er than whom no greater traveler can be thought, and an inspiration to us all. For example, we were at dinner over the requisite Peking Duck, and she was so tired that she was literally asleep in her chair. When her Dad tried to wake her up, she, without fully waking up, smiled seraphically, said something extremely pleasant and polite, and went right back to sleep. On our last night she and George and I were the only ones up for a big dinner so the three of us had a lovely meal at the hotel restaurant, and Emily and I discovered that we had a lot to talk about regarding movies, our tastes being pretty similar. (George, on the other hand, has been somewhat remiss in his movie going, but we were able to mention a number of movies he ought to see.) Being with Emily, we all learned how to say "piao liang" which means "beautiful" and is what many Chinese passers-by would murmur upon seeing Emily, with her lovely blond hair.

It was a tiring plane ride home, and I was very happy to breath again the sparkling, fresh air of northern Delaware (If you think that's a joke, you have been to Delaware but not to China!). But it was a great week of philosophizing, making friends, learning, and having fun. Practically the moment I set foot on the ground I was wishing I could turn around and go back.



Fellowship Opportunity: Institute for Faith and Learning

Baylor's Institute for Faith and Learning announces two openings in 2002-2003 for Visiting Fellows. Senior fellows will possess records as accomplished scholars and are eligible for up to \$50,000. Junior fellows will show scholarly promise commensurate with time in rank and are eligible for up to \$40,000.

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Applicants should submit a CV, three recommendation letters, a 750-word

description of the project to be undertaken while at the Institute, and a published paper. Material should be sent by March 1 to Dr. Michael Beaty, Institute for Faith and Learning, P.O. Box 97270, Waco, TX 76798.

Baylor is a Baptist university affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of

Texas, and applicants should embrace Baylor's Christian identity. As an Affirmative Action, Equal Employment Opportunity employer, Baylor encourages minorities, women, veterans, and persons with disabilities to apply. See www.baylor.edu/IFL/for_faculty.htm for further information.

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

Announcements

Regional Conferences

Central Division

March 7-9, 2002

Bethel College, St. Paul, MN

Keynote Speakers: *Merold Westphal,*

Jean Porter, and *Charles Taliaferro*

Info: Andy Gustafson, 651-638-6344

Or David Williams, 651-638-6794

Pacific Regional

April 4-6, 2002

Whitworth College and Gonzaga

University, Spokane, WA

“*The Philosophical Implications
of Modern Science*”

Speakers: *Stephen C. Meyer, J.P.*

Moreland, Del Ratzsch, Robert

Spitzer, S.J., and Peter van Inwagen

Info: *Keith Wyma, kwyma@whitworth.edu,*
(509) 777-4772

Eastern Region

Fall, 2002

Other Conferences

Canadian Society of Christian Philosophers

May 28, 2002

University of Toronto, Canada

Paper proposals due: *January 21, 2002*

For more information, please contact:

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Fax: (902) 867-3243

Canadian Jacques Maritain Association

May 26-27, 2002

University of Toronto, Canada

Theme: *Science, Religion, and Philosophy
/ Philosophie, religions, sciences*

Tentative programme available at:

*http://iago.stfx.ca/people/wsweet/Mari
tain02a.html*

For more information, please contact:

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Teaching Opportunity

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