

VIRTUOSITY:

Newsletter of the ASCP (Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy)



Issue 2, December 2010

Welcome to VIRTUOSITY, the Newsletter of the ASCP

The ASCP circulated a newsletter during the latter part of the 1990s under the title "Virtuosity". We've decided to relaunch the newsletter as a way of detailing important news and events of interest to members of the ASCP and wider Continental philosophy community in Australasia. This issue gives a summary of important events over the past year, which has been a productive period for the ASCP. Future issues of the Newsletter will include news, conference calls, new journal issues, links to reviews of ASCP authors, and other items of interest to the Australasian Continental philosophy community. We look forward to receiving contributions from members of the ASCP community and welcome ideas or suggestions for future issues.

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1. Executive Committee 2011

At the 2007 ASCP AGM, held at the University of Tasmania, the ASCP was officially incorporated as a association and an executive committee was established. Since that time, Robert Sinnerbrink (Chair) and Richard Colledge (Secretary) have been serving on the executive committee, and they have now reached the end of their terms in these positions. Andrew Benjamin (Deputy Chair) will also be stepping aside for next year. We would like to thank Andrew, Richard, and Robert for their fine efforts in serving the executive committee over the last few years, and for their contributions to the development of the ASCP during that time.

At this year's AGM, to be held as part of the 2010 "Affect" Conference at the University of Queensland, Dec 5, 2010, the following positions will therefore become vacant and require filling:

* Chair

*Deputy Chair

* Secretary

Descriptions of the positions are as follows:

Chair: who is responsible for the ensuring the functioning of the Executive Committee and for overseeing the general running of the Society and its various activities. The chair takes responsibility for ensuring that the Society and its members uphold the Constitution and fulfil the aims of the Society in its activities and events. The chair will also play the role of "Public Officer" for the incorporation of the Society as a (non-profit) association.

Deputy Chair: who is co-responsible with the Chair for overseeing the running of the Executive Committee and general activities of the Society, and who can stand in for the Chair if he or she is temporarily unable to perform these functions. The Deputy Chair is generally co-responsible with the Chair for ensuring that the Society and its members uphold the constitution and fulfil the aims of the Society in its activities and events.

Secretary: who is responsible for managing all data and information records related to the Society, including correspondence to and from the Society, the Society's database, mailing lists, copies of minutes, membership registers, list of sponsored activities, and for reporting on these subjects to the Executive Committee in accordance with relevant sections of the "Model Rules For Associated Incorporations Under the Associations Incorporation Act, 1984".

The meeting and ballot will take place at University of Queensland, Sunday December 5, 2010, from 9am.

Nominations are to be forwarded in writing to the ASCP Executive Committee by December 1.



2. THE ERA Rankings: NUMBER CRUNCHING OR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH?

Probably all academic staff are aware of the Federal Government's Excellence in Research for Australia exercise (ERA). Universities across Australia have been falling over themselves to ensure the best possible result for their institution in the ERA period from 2003-8, most notably by only counting (for appointment, promotion, or study-leave purposes) publications in journals that have been ranked A or A*. Indeed, some universities are even using this measure of prestige to influence workload allocations in regard to research time, something that even the Australian Research Council and members of the ERA committee maintain is a clear misuse of the purposes for which the ERA was designed. While some of the other kinds of policies may seem reasonable in a pragmatic sense, they also ignore the myriad other kinds of responsibilities that academics have beyond playing this kind of numbers games, as well as the fact that these rankings remain best described as *ad hoc*, at least in the humanities, social sciences, and creative arts. Most disciplines in these areas have ended up with various parochial interests being enshrined, and without any apparent rhyme or reason to what type of interests have been favoured. Several friends and colleagues in European History at

other institutions assure me that there are middle of the road Australian history journals that are rated A and A*, whereas some of the most prestigious history journals in the world are ranked B. In this case, the incentive for staff is to publish in average Australian journals at the risk of not having any international significance. In other disciplines (say in English and Philosophy), new journals, specialised local journals, or non-English language journals, are typically ranked B or C. While the ASCP has lobbied (with some imperfect success) the government and the AAP to ensure a fairer representation of continental journals, there are still systemic problems with this exercise. As individual academics, we face significant pressure to publish in long established international journals, with prolific citation patterns and appropriately impressive editorial boards, but if staff in fields like Philosophy and English accept the Government and their universities imperatives, many new and innovative journals will cease to exist, including journals produced largely by Australians and which in some cases might one day have a significant impact on their fields internationally. Even where this is not likely to be the case, supporting such ventures is important to providing our junior staff (and sometimes postgraduate students) with a profile and a start in the "publish or perish" milieu that is contemporary academia. Given that almost no-one seems to accept that the journal rankings are systematically fair in the Humanities and Social Sciences, it is necessary that both academics and their universities attempt to negotiate that difficult path between the Scylla of cynical opportunism (in which academic staff are effectively forced to publish only in A* or A journals by their universities, and those who won't, or can't, are metaphorically devoured by the monster, as in the Greek myth), and the Charybdis of a total romantic eschewal of such rankings. Let us hope, as we position ourselves for the 2014 version, that both academics and managers remain committed to academic freedom and the multi-faceted responsibilities that come with that.

Please advise the ASCP of any journals that are missing from the list...

Jack Reynolds

3. ERA: The Next Phase

The ASCP continued to play an active role in the critical debate surrounding the ERA Journal

Rankings exercise. In response to claims that the philosophical community simply accepted the ERA rankings process, thereby displaying an uncritical acceptance of its terms and principles, the ASCP wrote a letter explaining its role and continuing critical stance towards the implementation and future use of any such metrics. A copy of the letter, which was published on April 21, 2010 in the Higher Education Supplement of *The Australian*, can be viewed here:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/letters/critical-thinking/story-e6frgcox-1225856112308>

The ASCP believes that critical vigilance remains necessary with regard to the ERA process. A number of the criticisms that we made back in 2008, in our submission to the ARC, have been echoed recently by a number of critics:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/journal-rankings-rankle-academics/story-e6frgcjx-1225950277254>

In the interests of promoting diversity in Australasian philosophy, and cultivating more bold and risk-taking approach to research more generally (especially in specialty areas like Continental Philosophy), we need to resist the uncritical implementation of ERA rankings as definitive of intellectual quality and scholarly relevance of research. At the same time, it is vital to ensure that important journals specialising in Continental Philosophy are fairly and adequately represented in any such ranking exercise.



4. Jobs in Australian Philosophy: The Case for Australasian Candidates

At the moment, there are few philosophy jobs world-wide. This is an international situation, partly due to the global financial crisis, and a certain devaluing of the humanities. The recent UK student protests over budget cuts and tuition fees are a case in point. However, it is arguable that the job situation is particularly acute for our Australasian graduate students. This is because there are few countries that have shown a tendency to appoint young Australasian graduates

to junior positions (with the exception, perhaps, of the UK, a situation that is likely to change dramatically given recent government decisions there). While we continue to appoint American-, Canadian-, Italian-, German- and French-educated academics, all of whom do greatly enrich our philosophical scene, this pattern, for varying reasons, is not entirely reciprocated by such countries.

There are various concrete things that we might try to do about this: for example, introducing our students to international colleagues as much as possible; encouraging students to spend part of their postgraduate candidature researching at institutions overseas; and considering the broader academic training and future career advice that we give our students. We also think, however, that it is worth reflecting on this situation, and how it might be remedied, when we are fortunate enough to have long-term or permanent positions available in Australasia.

Although recently ignored by members of the AAP (including ourselves), the AAP still has a standing policy on this matter:

On the Appointment of Australasians

Although permanent positions will continue to be advertised internationally, selection committees are to be encouraged to appoint well qualified Australasian citizens or residents, and to appoint others only when they are entirely convinced that the superiority of the candidate is real and significant.

(Adopted at the AGM in 1981 and confirmed at the AGM in 1982)

While acknowledging the increasingly globalised nature of academic research and appointments, we think that there are some merits in this policy, especially in the current context, since we do have

a duty of care to those many postgraduate students doing PhDs in Australasian Universities.

We would therefore encourage members of the ASCP and of the AAP to raise the matter of employment policies regarding Australasian candidates, and to discuss and consider the AAP policy on the appointment of Australasian academics when positions in philosophy are advertised and decided in their respective Departments or Institutions. While acknowledging the importance of 'internationalisation', the ASCP believes it is important to continue arguing the case for favouring Australasian candidates in the appointment of philosophers within our Universities.

Jack Reynolds and Robert Sinnerbrink

5. Conference Report: ASCP Annual Conference, "Philosophy and the Work of Art", Monash University, Nov 29-Dec 1, 2009

The 2009 Annual Conference of the ASCP was held at Monash University, Nov 29-Dec 1, and was organised by the Research Unit in European Philosophy, Monash University, under the guidance of Prof Andrew Benjamin. The theme of the conference was 'Philosophy and the work of art' and featured both international and national keynote speakers: Miguel de Beistegui, 'The force of the work of art: in praise of Eduardo Chillida', Rosalyn Diprose, 'Building and belonging: toward an ethical distribution of the sensible', Steven Crowell, 'Phenomenology and aesthetics, or why art matters' and Tina Chanter, 'Between two times: interrogating the ambiguity of art in Levinas's philosophy'. With an impressive number of participants (130) the conference included six streams on diverse topic areas in aesthetics, ethics, politics, and religion. There were also special plenary session panels on the work of prominent Australasian philosophers such as Jeff

Malpas (University of Tasmania) and Paul Redding (University of Sydney). A special issue of the online journal *Parrhesia*, drawing from the conference, is due to be published in early 2011.

6. 'Save Middlesex Philosophy' Campaign

In April of this year the ASCP forwarded a letter protesting the closure of the Philosophy program at Middlesex University (see below). This appalling decision had disturbing repercussions not only for Continental Philosophy in the UK but also for other departments across the Anglophone world.

A vigorous campaign was soon underway to save Philosophy at Middlesex. This included an online petition, which attracted over 18000 signatures: <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/save-middlesex-philosophy.html>

An article in the Guardian by Nina Power (Roehampton University) criticised the situation and rationale behind the unprecedented move: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/apr/29/philosophy-minorities-middlesex-university-logic>

Brian Leiter's Philosophy Blog had much critical commentary from philosophers around the world: <http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2010/04/middlesex-university-in-the-uk-cuts-its-highest-raerated-program-in-its-entirety.html>

Along with other International Philosophical Associations and Societies, the ASCP strongly protested against the closure and argued in favour of retaining the Philosophy Department.

After much negative publicity and strong student and academic protests—the harbinger of the current UK protests against savage funding cuts and departmental closures—the majority of the philosophers who had been made redundant were offered positions at Kingston University, London (one of two remaining philosophers at Middlesex is Dr Mark Kelly, formerly at Macquarie University and member of the ASCP).

Professor Peter Osborne, leader of the Middlesex campaign who was suspended for his involvement in 'campus occupations', personally thanked the ASCP for their strong show of support. He noted that the international pressure and adverse

publicity directed towards Middlesex University, thanks to bodies like the ASCP, was a crucial aspect of the 'Save Middlesex Philosophy' campaign.

While Universities in Australasia are not facing the same economic and political pressures as in the UK, there are important lessons to be drawn from the Middlesex case and subsequent UK Departmental cuts and closures throughout 2010.

ASCP LETTER TO THE VC, THE TWO DVCs, AND THE DEAN OF MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY, UK:

As members of the international philosophical community, and as the Executive Committee of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy, we write to express our dismay at the decision by Middlesex University to close its Department of Philosophy.

The Department is widely recognised throughout the world as a centre of international standing for its work in the area of European philosophy. Members of the Department play a leading role in defining the framework within which topics in contemporary aesthetics as well as political philosophy, to name just two areas, are discussed.

It is almost incredible to those outside the UK that a Department of such remarkable standing could have its future jeopardized in this way. It is clear that its capacity to recruit and train graduate students is exceptional by both national as well as international standards. Rather than the University threatening the existence of the Department it should be seeking ways to develop it. On the basis of any criteria of evaluation - research, scholarship, graduate and undergraduate training etc., - the Department operates at the highest level. This has been recognized by internal assessment systems such as the RAE, as well as by external professional and peak bodies like the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy. Moreover, as the leading centre for research in the area in the UK, the Department also offers important opportunities for international collaboration; indeed the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy frequently welcomes distinguished visiting scholars.

On behalf of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy we ask you to reconsider your decision to close this vital and important

centre for the study of philosophy. Although it may seem like a reasonably small department in the context of the tens of thousands of philosophers who are employed worldwide, its closure would have some significant repercussions for philosophy around the world (and the decision to do so, has already generated a remarkable furore). This could not be said about many departments and is testimony to the international reputation and significance of its members.

Yours sincerely,

*Prof. Andrew Benjamin (Monash University)
Dr Simone Bignall (University of New South Wales)
Dr Richard Colledge (Australian Catholic University)
Dr Simone Drichel (University of Otago)
Dr Joanne Faulkner (University of New South Wales)
Dr Fiona Jenkins (Australian National University)
Dr Marguerite La Caze (University of Queensland)
Dr Jack Reynolds (La Trobe University)
Dr Matheson Russell (University of Auckland)
Dr Robert Sinnerbrink (Macquarie University)*

6. Books published by ASCP Authors (2010)

Andrew Benjamin, *Place, Commonality and Judgment: Continental Philosophy and the Ancient Greeks* (Continuum)

Andrew Benjamin, *Of Jews and Animals* (Edinburgh University Press)

Simone Bignall, *Postcolonial Agency: Critique and Constructivism* (Edinburgh University Press)

Simone Bignall and Paul Patton (eds), *Deleuze and the Postcolonial* (Edinburgh UP)

Andy Blunden, *An Interdisciplinary Theory of Activity* (Brill)

Diego Bubbio (ed.), Luigi Pareyson, *Existence, Interpretation, Freedom: Selected Writings* [Pareyson was one of the most seminal Italian philosophers of the 20C, a theorist of hermeneutics, and mentor of both Gianni Vattimo and Umberto Eco] (The Davies Group)

Jean-Philippe Deranty (ed.), *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts* (Acumen)

Michael Fagenblat, *A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas' Philosophy of Judaism* (Stanford)

Joanne Faulkner, *Dead Letters to Nietzsche: Or the Necromantic Art of Reading Philosophy* (Ohio UP)

Joanne Faulkner, *The Importance of Being Innocent* (Cambridge UP)

Timothy O'Leary and Chris Falzon (eds), *Foucault and Philosophy* (Blackwell)

Paul Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts: Philosophy, Colonization, Politics* (Stanford UP)

Paul Redding *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche*, (Routledge)

Jack Reynolds & James Chase, *Analytic Versus Continental: Arguments on the Methods and Value of Philosophy* (Acumen)

Andrew Schaap, Danielle Celermajer and Vrasidas Karalis, eds. *Power, Judgment and Political Evil* (Ashgate)

Matthew Sharpe and Geoff Boucher, *Zizek and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press)

Henk van Leeuwen, *Only a God Can Save Us: Heidegger, Poetic Imagination and the Modern Malaise* (Common Ground)

Dimitris Vardoulakis, *The Doppelgänger: Literature's Philosophy* (Fordham)

James Williams, James Chase, Ed Mares and Jack Reynolds (eds), *Postanalytic and Metacontinental: Crossing Philosophical Divides* (Continuum)

Magdalena Zolkos, *Reconciling Community and Subjective Life: Trauma Testimony As Political Theorizing in the Work of Jean Amery and Imre Kertesz* (Continuum)

Any authors belonging to the ASCP who have recently published books should contact us (robert.sinnerbrink@mq.edu.au) so we can include their volume in our next issue.