

Presenting Work and Delivering Papers



by Thomas Magnell

Most philosophers have delivered papers or otherwise presented work before colleagues and the educated public as a means of furthering their own intellectual development. Plato and Aristotle went so far as to create colleagues for the purpose. Medieval scholastics became itinerant speakers, in part to fill the void of monkish seclusion. Worldly philosophers such as Russell have sought all manner of occasions to speak their minds, as well as to write their thoughts. There is much to be said for this.

More or less formal venues for presenting work give you the opportunity to engage others in discussions of your developing thought. Through their questions and comments, you can learn what needs to be said more clearly; which arguments need to be tightened up; and which points might even need further thought. Criticism is usually friendly. Intemperate speechifying by others is not likely to be well received. Killer questions are always possible, though rare. In any event, difficult questions can spur you on to further reflection after the fact. All of this is difficult to obtain through the printed word. Moreover, occasions for speaking allow you to present work in various stages of completion, from early thoughts, to work in progress, to work ready for publication. Delivering papers is no substitute for publishing papers, but it is one way to go about publishing better papers.

Meetings of the American Philosophical Association

The meetings of the American Philosophical Association (APA) are obvious occasions for presenting work. They are the largest annual gatherings of philosophers in the United States. There are three sets of meetings: Eastern Division Meetings, held in the last week of December; Pacific Division Meetings, held at the end of March or the beginning of April; and Central Division Meetings, held at the end of April or the beginning of May. The Eastern Division Meetings are attended by the largest number of people, but the Pacific and Central Division Meetings are otherwise comparable. The programs at the meetings of each division are separated into sessions sponsored by the division and sessions sponsored by smaller philosophical societies that focus on a particular area of philosophy, a philosophical movement, or a prominent philosophical figure. In recent years, the portion of the program sponsored by the smaller philosophical societies has grown to be as large as the APA portion of the program.

Each division of the APA has its own program committee, which makes decisions about invited papers, commentators, and chairs of sessions for the APA portion of a divisional meeting. The divisional program committee will consider requests for chairing or commenting on sessions. The program committee is also the body that makes the decisions on which submitted papers will be accepted for the APA portion of a divisional meeting. Guidelines for submissions are set forth below on pages 29-31.

GUIDEBOOK FOR PUBLISHING PHILOSOPHY

There is no single rule for submitting papers to the smaller societies. Each society is autonomous and has its own guidelines. Some societies will only accept submissions from members. Others do not impose conditions of membership. Some societies meet regularly with all three divisions. Societies that have sessions at only one of the divisional meetings are likely to have them at the Eastern Division Meetings.

When submitting a paper to a society, it is usually a good idea to follow the general guidelines for APA submissions. Deadlines may be a little more flexible, as may the lengths of papers. It is prudent, however, to check this out ahead of time. Some societies review submissions by committee. The president of a society can be expected to forward submissions to the appropriate individuals. Requests for chairing a session or commenting on a paper can also be made to the president.

Most philosophical societies belong to the Conference of Philosophical Societies, an umbrella organization of which even the APA is a member. A list of member philosophical societies and information on the societies may be requested from the National Office of the American Philosophical Association. Information on philosophical societies is also published in *The Directory of American Philosophers*, published by the Philosophy Documentation Center.

International Conferences

The largest international gatherings of philosophers are the World Congresses of Philosophy. They are sponsored by the *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie* and held once every five years. In addition to the invited papers, the program committee for a World Congress of Philosophy reviews submissions for sessions in sections on specified topics announced in a circular that is made available ahead of time. International societies and some of the societies that meet regularly with the APA also hold sessions in conjunction with World Congresses of Philosophy. Inquiries, requests for guidelines, and submissions may be directed to the president of a participating society. The XXth World Congress of Philosophy will be held in Boston in the summer of 1998. This will be only the second time in over seventy years that a World Congress of Philosophy will have been held in the United States.

Occasionally, the *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie* sponsors smaller interim conferences in the off years between World Congresses of Philosophy. International societies also meet on their own, sometimes in exotic locales. Nationwide and regional philosophical groups outside the United States, such as the Canadian Philosophical Association, the Australasian Association of Philosophy, and the Aristotelian Society and Mind Association hold annual meetings. Many local conferences are also held throughout the world. Presenting work in another country among scholars who may have sometimes remarkably different philosophical backgrounds and perspectives can be highly stimulating.

PRESENTING WORK AND DELIVERING PAPERS

Conferences in the United States

Some philosophical societies, such as the American Society for Aesthetics, and the Metaphysical Society of America choose to hold large annual meetings apart from the divisional meetings of the APA. Other groups, such as the Conference on Value Inquiry, and the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics hold independent, annual conferences. Geographically based associations, such as the Creighton Club, the New Jersey Regional Philosophical Association, the Northern New England Philosophical Association, the Ohio Philosophical Association, and the Washington Philosophy Club hold regular meetings, some of them more than once a year. Graduate students are often made particularly welcome. The review process for submissions varies from group to group, and sometimes meeting to meeting. The geographically based meetings offer excellent opportunities to try out new arguments, to garner critical comments on works in progress, and to meet nearby philosophers.

The dates and locations of conferences can be found in the Philosophical Calendar. Some international conferences, as well as annual conferences and special conferences on particular topics are listed. The Philosophical Calendar also contains information on persons to contact and deadlines for submissions. It is published by the Conference of Philosophical Societies, and is available by mail through subscriptions. Some issues appear in the *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* and can be viewed through the home page of the APA on the world wide web. All the issues are mailed to subscribers and to all member societies.

Departmental Colloquia and Other Engagements

Departmental colloquia and lectures, and undergraduate and graduate student philosophy clubs provide still more opportunities for presenting work. The selection of speakers is almost always by invitation. The engagements range from small, informal gatherings, to large, formal lectures. It is wise to determine the nature of the engagement at the time of the invitation. A paper focusing on scholarly minutiae that only a specialist could love would be as out of place at an undergraduate philosophy club as a laid back, directed discussion would be at a formal lecture. Whatever the venue, presenting work before others can promote lively, edifying discourse.