

## THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY GROUP

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FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT

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January 21, 1974

### NEWSLETTER #5

1. The Symposium on "Pivotal Issues in Ethical Thought" was very successful both in terms of attendance and discussions following the excellent papers. Douglas Greenlee was chairman of the symposium. John E. Smith, in his paper "Ethics and Community: Dewey and Royce," stressed Dewey and Royce's emphasis on the social character of experience as seen in their ideas of community, communication and communion. Both of these thinkers believed in the importance of community as a repository of values and both laid stress on its essential role in the resolution of ethical problems. In discussing Dewey, Smith emphasized the contribution of community to the establishment and preservation of democracy as a moral ideal. The extent of Dewey's reliance on the communal and the social as primary values can be seen in his conception of democracy as "primarily a mode of associated living and of conjoint communicated experience." Turning to Royce, Smith focused attention primarily on the role of what Royce called the "wise provincialism" as a means of restoring the individual in the midst of a vast, impersonal, national society which levels life to uniformity and mediocrity. This higher provincialism must concern itself with three problematic tendencies: the first problem concerns the initiation and incorporation of newcomers into some form of community which is small enough to be visible; the second deals with the "levelling tendency" in modern civilization; and the last problem has generally to do with the spirit of the crowd or the "mob." To handle these problems Royce proposed that we must find refuge and renewal in smaller communities in which the individual can regain his self-consciousness and dignity. Smith concluded by pointing out that for Dewey and Royce the community must restore the individual.

Walter Feinberg, the second speaker, in response to Smith's paper focused attention on Dewey's reactions to the problems of real men as they were presented in real situations. Dewey's commitment to democracy and community was molded and limited by his commitment to

industrialization and technology. This suggests that the role of the school was to establish the attitudes and reproduce the skills required for the efficient running of the emerging corporate society to the neglect of a more equitable arrangement of other social institutions. If this picture is accurate, then, Feinberg concluded, it is indeed the case that to understand Dewey is to understand, as Smith suggests, something most important about the problems of men in modern times.

The third paper, "Naturalism in Moral Philosophy," was given by James Gouinlock who proposes to answer the accusation that reasoning in ethics commits the "naturalistic fallacy," the presence of which is thought to dispose of the legitimacy of reasoning in ethics. He shows that reasoning in ethics involves a projection of the consequences of a choice into the world of fact and that consequences factually and truly describe outcomes in an objective world. Gouinlock takes pains to show that the word "good" is unnecessary in ethical discourse inasmuch as consequences can be translated into other than value terms. Consequences, therefore, speak for themselves and determine choice. Ethical language can be dispensed with although it would be awkward to do without it. Since ethical consequences can be presented descriptively without recourse to the word "good," Gouinlock's central thesis is that evaluation is description and hence the naturalistic fallacy has no force.

In response to Gouinlock's paper, Evelyn Shirk criticizes Gouinlock on five counts: First, she maintains that Gouinlock's paper does not adequately distinguish a broad sense of naturalism (Deweyan) from the naturalism of Moore's "naturalistic fallacy." Second, she argues that the issue does not lie in the use of moral terms in sentences but in the pattern of reasoning in ethics, which she contends is one type of induction. Third, she criticizes Gouinlock for a hidden intuitionism in supposing that to describe consequences is to know which ones are desirable on sight. This presupposes absolute goods, which is inconsistent with Gouinlock's thesis. Fourth, Shirk proposes that Gouinlock is "standard-shy" in failing to recognize that consequences must be weighed on standards of excellence and fulfillment before ethical reasoning can produce a warranted choice. Fifth, she complains that Gouinlock takes the distinction between descriptive and normative too seriously, since ethical reasoning is both. She warns that if we can't do without moral terms, this is reason enough not to dismiss them and suggests that the solution to the naturalistic fallacy morass lies not in reducing the normative to the descriptive, but in a closer examination of standards and their use.

2. At the business meeting which followed the Symposium the following took place:

- (a) The secretary-treasurer reported that members in good standing, i.e., dues paying, graduate students and retired

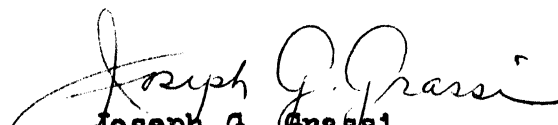
persons, numbered 96. The mailing list numbers about 255. Members who have not paid their 1973 dues are encouraged to do so. The treasury shows a balance of \$320.42 after payment of expenses amounting to \$165.87.

- (b) A nominating committee consisting of John P. Anton, Peter Hare and John McDermott was elected to select candidates for the election of officers which is to take place at the Nashville Meeting.
- (c) A program committee for the December Meeting of 1974 was selected. The members of the committee are Professors Grossman (Chairman), Royce Jones, Angelo Juffras and James Gouinlock.
- (d) Evelyn Shirk was asked to head a committee which would explore the possibilities of the Society acting as a job-clearing house for American philosophers. She will report her findings at the March meeting.
- (e) Lewis E. Hahn is chairman of the program committee for the spring meeting to be held at Southern Illinois University in 1975.
- (f) If anyone has any information that should be included in the newsletters, please send such to the secretary.
- (g) The Society thanks Montclair State College for its invitation to hold its annual spring meeting there. It was decided that at this time, at least, we should not meet at any one college permanently.

3. Professor Jacqueline Ann K. Kegley will attempt to organize in the Pacific Division a group for the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. The Pacific Division meets in March.

4. The S. A. A. P. is calling for papers for its special group meeting with the Eastern Division of the A. P. A. in December. Papers may embrace both historical treatments of, and original works on themes typical to, American philosophy. The deadline is May 1, 1974 and papers should not exceed a reading time of twenty minutes. They should be sent to Prof. Morris Grossman, Department of Phil., Fairfield University, Fairfield, Conn. 06430.

5. At the spring meeting to be held at Nashville on March 8 and 9, there will be presented seven papers on various aspects of "Human Rights and the American Tradition." At the business meeting the following items will be taken up: Election of officers and consideration of a proposed constitution. Each member is encouraged to attend the meeting.

  
Joseph G. Grassi  
Secretary