Introduction to Special APRA Issue

Nick Trakakis • Morgan Luck • Sarah Bachelard

Published online: 18 April 2009
© Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2009

Philosophy of religion, across the major philosophical centers of the West and across both the Anglo-American and Continental streams, has been undergoing a significant revival over the last few decades. This is evidenced by the many societies, journals, and monograph series that have recently been established, as well as the various conferences and seminars that have been hosted, with the aim of examining a range of topics within the philosophy of religion, or even the nature and goals of the discipline itself. This renewed academic interest in a subject that in the middle of the previous century was languishing as a philosophical relic of a bygone era has been supplemented by a renewed popular interest in religious matters, with religion now very much in the public sphere: from the ‘new atheist’ critiques to discussions of religious fundamentalism and the place of theology and religious institutions in a secular world. To capture this interest and to offer a platform for Australasian philosophers and scholars to contribute to the conversation, we decided to form the Australasian Philosophy of Religion Association (APRA), the first of its kind in Australia and New Zealand.

N. Trakakis
Department of Philosophy, Monash University, Clayton 3800 Victoria, Australia

N. Trakakis (✉)
School of International and Political Studies, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood
3125 Victoria, Australia
e-mail: Nick.Trakakis@arts.monash.edu.au
e-mail: Nick.Trakakis@deakin.edu.au

M. Luck
School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Charles Sturt University, Locked Bag 588, Wagga Wagga,
NSW 2678, Australia
e-mail: moluck@csu.edu.au

S. Bachelard
St Mark’s National Theological Centre Public and Contextual Theology (PaCT) Strategic Research
Centre, Charles Sturt University, 15 Blackall Street, Barton, ACT 2600, Australia
e-mail: sbachelard@csu.edu.au

To be sure, there has always been at least some interest in religion and the philosophy of religion within pockets of the Australasian academy. The fact that *Sophia* has its roots in the University of Melbourne, to which it retains a close affiliation, bears testimony to this. But one can now clearly see a broader, more reflective and more rigorous (if not also more tolerant) engagement with the philosophy of religion amongst many distinguished Australasian philosophers. With the establishment of APRA, we aim to build on this foundation, strengthening it, and widening it to include voices and insights from a range of philosophical traditions and neighboring disciplines such as religious studies and theology.

The primary aims of APRA are (i) to encourage, publicize, and circulate work on philosophy of religion, especially work undertaken by Australasian philosophers and scholars, and (ii) to promote and facilitate constructive dialogue between differing schools of thought and traditions, especially the analytic and Continental traditions, as these bear on the philosophical study of religion. APRA, then, is not intended as a partisan organization, and does not wish to promote any particular religious or philosophical orientation, but is rather intended as a forum for friendly and philosophically informed discussions of religion that bring together a diversity of scholars and a plurality of ideas and viewpoints.

The eight papers in the present issue were drawn from the inaugural APRA conference, held at St. Mark's National Theological Centre (in Canberra), on September 27–28, 2008. We were honored to have Peter Forrest and Max Charlesworth deliver the keynote addresses, and their papers (slightly modified) are published here. The remaining papers deal with a variety of issues, including the notorious problem of evil (Daniel Cohen) and its relationship to miracles (Morgan Luck); the influence of Rousseau on Kant's critique of philosophical theology (Philip Quadrio); naturalism and its presumed incompatibility with an ontology of supernatural entities (Steve Clarke); Plantinga's epistemology of religious belief, as compared to the Christian spiritual tradition on 'unknowing' (Sarah Bachelard); and the reasoning processes at work in design and fine-tuning arguments (Graham Wood). We would like to thank the many institutions whose generous support made the conference possible—specifically, St. Mark's National Theological Centre, Charles Sturt University, the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics (CAPPE), the Public and Contextual Theology Strategic Research Centre (PaCT) of Charles Sturt University, and the Australasian Association of Philosophy—and we are particularly grateful to *Sophia* both for its financial support and its invitation to publish a select group of papers from the conference. We hope to continue running the APRA conference as an annual event, taking the conference to a different city in Australasia each year. We also hope to foster links with other like-minded philosophy of religion associations across the world, and steps are already in place for establishing an International Philosophy of Religion Association. Philosophy of religion, in Australasia and globally, has a bright future indeed.