

## **Australasian Association of Philosophy**

Eliza Goddard & Graham Priest

The Australasian Association of Philosophy (AAP) is the professional association for philosophers in Australasia. The aims of the association, as stated in its Memorandum of Association, are: to promote the study of philosophy; to promote the exchange of ideas among philosophers; to encourage creative and scholarly activity in philosophy; to facilitate the professional work and protect the professional and academic interests of philosophers. The AAP has always included Australia and New Zealand; in 2004, Singapore was also admitted.

The AAP is run by an executive (the Council), elected by the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the association. The Council comprises a President, Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Editor of the association's *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, and such other people, with various roles, as the AGM or the Council determines from time to time. Positions other than the presidency are usually held on an ongoing basis. The presidency changes every year. Membership of the AAP is open to all interested persons, as well as professional philosophers; but

### Australasian Association of Philosophy

voting rights at meetings of the association are limited to members who are, or have been, active in Australasian philosophy at tertiary level, including research students.

The association was founded on 17 January 1923 as the Australasian Association of Psychology and Philosophy. The first president was Bernard Muscio (University of Sydney); the first editor was Francis Anderson (University of Sydney); and amongst the first vice-presidents were William Ralph Boyce Gibson (University of Melbourne), Elton Mayo (University of Queensland), and William Mitchell (**University of Adelaide**). Since then, a great number of distinguished Australasian philosophers have been active in the association.

When the association was founded, psychology was not yet established as an autonomous discipline; the association changed its name to 'The Australasian Association of Philosophy' in 1958, after it had become so. There is a New Zealand Division of the Association (AAPNZ) which was formally established in 1978. The New Zealand Division of the AAP did operate as an informal association prior to this date, with the inaugural New Zealand Conference held in 1953. At various times, there are or have been active branches of the AAP in various Australian states and the Australian Capital Territory.

An important aspect of the AAP is its annual conference. This has been held on a continuous basis since the inception of the association. Each year, the conference is hosted by a university department/school/program of philosophy. For the most part, it has been held at a university location. In its earliest years, the conference rotated annually between the **University of Sydney** and the **University of Melbourne**. Since the 1950s locations have diversified, with the conference circulating amongst various universities in different states in Australia, and from time to time in New Zealand.

When the conference first started, it was very small, lasting for a day or two, and with a handful of papers. It now lasts for a working week, starting with the presidential address on Sunday evening. Over recent years, the number of papers has averaged between 150 and 160. The conference has a strong international reputation, and attracts philosophers not only from Australasia, but also from North America, Europe, Asia and other parts of the world. It is characterised by its egalitarian nature, known for its social activities, as well as its intense philosophical ones. The AGM of the AAP is held during the conference. As well as taking business decisions, it has at various times taken stands on political issues, including nuclear weapons, East Timor, and the treatment of Eastern Bloc philosophers.

Another major function of the AAP is to run its journal, the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (*AJP*). This was first published in the same year the association was established (1923), as the *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, changing its name to the present one in 1947. The journal is now, therefore, one of the oldest English-language philosophy journals in the world, and is constantly ranked as one of the best of these. Articles are published only after a rigorous and anonymous peer-review system, managed by the Editor. In common with the other top-rated international philosophy journals, its acceptance rate is currently less than 10%.

It is heavily cited in the general philosophical literature and covered by all the major abstracting and indexing services. In 2007 it was rated 'A' in the European Reference Index in the Humanities (ERIH).

From its inception until 1997, the *AJP* was published by the AAP. The publication rights (though not ownership or editorial control) were given to Oxford University Press in that year. In 2005, these were transferred to Taylor and Francis, operating under its Routledge imprint. The whole back run of the *AJP* has now been digitised, and is available online to subscribers. Since 2007, the AAP, in conjunction with Routledge, has awarded an annual *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* Best Paper Award. This is awarded to the best piece published in the *AJP* in the preceding year, as determined by a committee set up by Council.

In addition to its scholarly content, the *AJP* contains an historical record of the AAP and the activities of members of the profession. The 'Notes and News' section includes, amongst other things: proceedings of conferences, records of resolutions and policies, as well as general news about members of the profession, including movements and obituaries. Much of this information (including a list of executives of the association and conference proceedings dating back to 1923) is available on the AAP website.

The AAP has always been active in defending the interests of philosophy in Australasia and of Australasian philosophers. Over the years, the AAP has collected data on the profession and produced various reports on it. The most celebrated instance of the association's stance in regards to an individual philosopher involved the chair of philosophy at the **University of Tasmania** from the mid 1950s to mid 1960s. In 1956, the University of Tasmania summarily dismissed its chair of philosophy, Sydney Sparkes Orr. The AAP considered the action 'contrary to academic tradition' and passed a resolution on 18 August 1958 stating that the University of Tasmania was 'not a suitable place of employment for teachers of philosophy'. This declaration came to be known as the 'black ban'. The ban was reluctantly continued throughout the next decade, and was lifted at Orr's death in 1966, only after which time was the chair filled again. Throughout this period, the AAP supported the reinstatement of Orr to academic life. It provided and organised financial support for Orr's legal case, and also for his family after his death. The Orr case was exceptionally public; the AAP's activities on behalf of individual members, of necessity, often requires confidentiality.

Since the AAP was established in 1923 a number of more specialised Australasian philosophy organisations have come into being. The AAP provides an umbrella organisation for these, and over the years has worked closely with many of them (including the **Australasian Association for Logic**, the Australasian Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, and **Women in Philosophy**). Often, these other organisations hold their conferences in conjunction with the AAP conference, or organise streams within it.

In recent years, and especially with the increased funding provided by giving the publication rights of the *AJP* to a professional publisher, the AAP has been able to increase and expand its professional activities considerably. It has instituted an

**Australasian Association of Philosophy, New Zealand**

annual meeting for heads of philosophy programs; collects data on the state of the profession on an annual basis; contributes to various Federal Government reporting activities; and makes submissions about philosophy to various government bodies. Through its website, the AAP provides information about jobs, conferences, mailing lists and the academic study of philosophy. The volume of activity has increased so much that in 2006 the AAP appointed a salaried Executive Officer (part-time) for the first time.

An important aim of the AAP over recent years has been to raise the public profile of philosophy in Australasia. It has organised various public lectures, has run press lunches and has in other ways facilitated communication between journalists and philosophers. In conjunction with Taylor and Francis, it awards an annual AAP Media Prize for the best piece by a philosopher published in the popular media in Australasia during the previous calendar year. It also awards occasional prizes to journalists for their work relevant to philosophy. The AAP has produced a short film, entitled 'What is Philosophy?', which explains for the general public what philosophy is, and the benefits of studying it. This can also be found on the AAP's website.

Through its activities, the AAP has made a substantial contribution to the sense of community in the profession and has played a major role in fostering both philosophy in the Australasian region and the impact of Australasian philosophy internationally.