

INTRODUCTION

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During the week of August 15-19, 2005, some 100 scholars from various continents gathered at Hoeven, in the South of The Netherlands, to discuss philosophical issues. The occasion was the 7th International Symposium of the Association for Reformational Philosophy. Apart from the plenary sessions eight different panel sessions and some fifty workshop sessions were held. This volume presents the plenary papers. Papers read at panel and workshop sessions may find their way to this journal at a later stage.

The overall theme was *Ethics: Person, Practices and Society*. Note that the interest of the symposium was not in Person, Practices and Society as subject matters for ethical reflection. Rather, it was the other way around: the symposium made an attempt to situate ethics by drawing widening circles starting with the abstract person, then adding societal structures and finally taking into account our present day globalizing world.

The metaphor of widening circles is taken from the position paper, drafted by Bart Cusveller and Arthur Zijlstra, which served as guideline for the plenary lectures. Of course, the meaning is not that with a broadening of scope the person would no longer be of any concern, nor that globalization *per se* annihilates the reality of 'practices'. Rather, *Person, Practices and Society* should be read as indicating an order of progressive concretization. So, after examining fundamental notions of virtues and applied ethics we envisaged the challenge to find moral approaches for a globalized world. In this sense Young Ahn Kang explored the meaning of the biblical golden rule, as a key concept to be recognized in different cultural and religious contexts.

The term 'practice' stems from a Wittgensteinian milieu and was introduced into social ethics by Peter Winch. But this piece of history played little role at the Symposium. Rather, the idea of a social practice as used by speakers and participants was first of all Alasdair MacIntyre's. As quoted in Henk Jochemsen's contribution, MacIntyre's definition is:

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.¹

'Achieve excellence': this phrase indicates that under MacIntyre's hands 'practice' underwent a transformation in Aristotelian-Thomistic direction. Let the reader of this volume judge for himself or herself whether at the Symposium a further transformation in the sense of Reformational philosophy did or did not

¹ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue; A Study in Moral Theory*, London (1981): Duckworth, 175.

succeed. But one thing is clear: ‘practice’ has become a notion not to be ignored. It serves as a vehicle for virtue ethics, which is a key issue in these papers. It also forms a key to occupational ethics. This branch of ethics is indeed a hot topic and not only in philosophical circles: China some years ago launched an official program to promote the study and application of occupational ethics! High time, therefore, for Christian philosophers be on their mettle!

The interest in occupational ethics is in a double sense indicative of a process of ongoing professionalism. On the one hand, ethicists want to be serviceable to professionals, be it medical doctors, lawyers, IT-workers, or scientists engaged in highly specialized research. This is a trend much to be welcomed. On the other hand, ethicists tend to post themselves as specialists, often eschewing the name of philosopher.² The Symposium was unanimous in opposing this second type of professionalism. It was already in this spirit that the plenary speakers had been asked to focus on meta-ethical issues rather than on highly specialized themes.

In the present volume Henk Jochemsen brings out the systematic implications of ‘practices’. His contribution is complemented by Gerrit Glas’s in-depth discussion of relevant anthropological notions (also providing a state of the art philosophical ethics within the Association for Reformational Philosophy). Both Glas and Jochemsen probe virtue ethics as a new way to articulate the intrinsic normativity of human life — so central to Reformation philosophy. John Hare subtly elaborates some epistemological issues pertaining to a ‘prescriptive realism’, as he names his own position, while Joan O’Donovan reminds her audience that ‘practice’ is broader than ‘occupation’ by showing the importance for public life of a *praxis pietatis* — in the sense of Thomas Cranmer and other Reformers. O’Donovan’s contribution follows a course set out by Richard Mouw in his opening lecture. By contrasting a Kuyperian view of culture with an Anabaptist understanding, as exemplified by Yoder and Hauerwas, Mouw brings out the lasting significance of a creational perspective. He also shows that ‘creational structures’ cannot be isolated and turned into a mainstay for a Christian transcendental philosophy unless — indeed — a full (= broader than philosophical) sense is maintained and nurtured of what it means to be part of God’s good creation.

Although there was a shared sense that another conference would be needed to clarify all issues that had come up, the majority of participants agreed that a good start had indeed been made. This is also very much the spirit of the Final Statement adopted at the last session of the conference, and included in this volume.

² A point raised in the position paper: ‘Ethics has become professional in two senses: it is connected with a specific profession and it has become the business of specialists (often institutionalized in ethical committees and protocols).’