

## SAAP: Origin and Early History

In 1972 John Lachs suggested to several of us who were interested in American Philosophy that we consider starting a new organization and he arranged for us to get together at an APA meeting. On November 28, 1972 I wrote a letter to Herbert Schneider, who by then had retired from his position at Claremont University in California. (Before moving to Claremont, he was Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University and on the Board of Editors of the Columbia Studies of American Culture.) In the letter I said

Together with John McDermott, John Lachs, George Kline and others, I am part of a group which is trying to start a new society. We are not sure what it is to be called -- perhaps the Society for American Philosophy (or for the Advancement thereof). We want to bring together scholars interested in both the history of American Philosophy and contemporary philosophy which is continuous with the thought of such philosophers as Peirce, Royce, Mead, Santayana, Dewey rather than work which remains within the narrow analytic mode.

I said "We will have an organizing meeting at the Eastern APA meetings in Boston on Thursday, December 28 at 1PM." I also said, "We hope that a smaller group will meet to do some groundwork for that meeting" and I invited him to participate. More important, I said that "We hope you will consent to be among the sponsors of this organization."

In his reply, Professor Schneider said he wished he could join us in Boston but he couldn't, and he wrote

Your plan to form one more splinter group in the APA is of course of great interest to me, and I send best wishes for its success....I hope you will keep me informed about your plan....

He also mentioned three more philosophers who he thought would be interested: Joseph Blau, Edward Madden, and Darnell Rucker.

The outcome of our meeting was an organization that was called The American Philosophy Group and the following individuals became members of a provisional Executive Board, which we called the Executive Circle: John P. Anton, Joseph G. Grassi, Lewis E. Hahn, John Lachs, John J. McDermott, Richard Robin, and Beth Singer. Joseph Grassi was appointed Secretary and starting in January, 1973 he wrote and mailed Newsletters. In the first of these, which was sent to everyone who attended the first meeting, he asked for the names and addresses of any philosophers the readers thought would be interested in joining the group.

On April 26, 1973 The American Philosophy Group held a symposium on "Possibilities for American Philosophy" at the Western Philosophy Association meeting, and the Executive Council met to discuss the future of the group. At this meeting the name was officially changed to "Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy" and it was decided that dues would be \$5. Neither graduate students nor retired professors would have to pay dues. (In 1987 dues were raised to \$15 for those earning \$20,000 or more but remained \$5 for those earning less, and in 2003 they were \$65 for those earning \$50,000 or more and \$45 for those earning less.) Today, retirees, the unemployed, and corresponding members, i.e., those residing outside the United States and Canada, owe no dues. There are many corresponding members and they reside in many countries. In the Membership Directories of 2003 and 2005, according to the members' addresses these countries include China, India, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, and Greece, in addition to England, Scotland, Spain, France, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and Belgium. There are also members with addresses in Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Ukraine, Algeria, Ghana, South Africa, Japan, Taiwan, Guam, Cuba and Guatemala.

On December 28, 1973 SAAP held another Symposium, at the Eastern Division APA meeting. The topic was "Pivotal Issues in Ethical Thought." At the business meeting that followed, a nominating committee was appointed. The members were John P. Anton, Peter Hare, and John

McDermott. At the same meeting it was reported that there were 96 members, including those who paid dues, retirees, and graduate students.

Until 1974 the Society only held sessions at APA meetings. (The Western Philosophy Association became the Central Division of the APA.) The first independent meeting was March 8 and 9, 1974 at Vanderbilt University. The theme of the meeting was "Human Rights in the American Tradition." 59 people attended. At the business meeting John McDermott, speaking for the Nominating Committee, said that they had one nominee for President, John Lachs, who was elected by acclamation. Joseph G. Grassi was elected Secretary-Treasurer, also by acclamation. There were six nominations for the Executive Committee. Since members of the committee would serve for three years each and two would be elected each year, the length of service of each nominee was determined by lot, and the results were: Lewis E. Hahn and Richard Robin one year each; Jacquelyn Ann Kegley and Beth Singer two years each; John P. Anton and John McDermott three years each. (Subsequently McDermott would be elected to succeed Lachs and he became President in April, 1977.)

At the same meeting (in 1974) a Constitution proposed by the Executive Committee was discussed. Since it was determined that several amendments were required it was decided that the vote would be by mail ballot, and that provision was added to the Constitution.

The second annual meeting was held on March 7 and 8, 1975 at the Hunter College School of Social Work in Manhattan. It was to have been held at Southern Illinois University but the SIU administration violated many of the rights of faculty members. The violations included firing tenured faculty members. The SAAP Executive Board rescinded the decision to hold the annual meeting there and so we met in New York.

The third meeting was at Loyola University in New Orleans on March 5 and 6, 1976. At the business meeting the Secretary-Treasurer reported that there were 172 dues paying members and 19 retired, unemployed and graduate

student members. (According to a Newsletter dated May 20, 1982, there were then 189 dues paying members.)

Herbert Schneider died on October 15, 1985. In March, 1975 he had participated in a panel discussion at the Pacific Division of the APA in San Diego. The topic was "Is there an American Philosophy?" and he argued that one could ask if there are American Philosophers and American Philosophies but not "Is there An American Philosophy?" Schneider's publications include *A History of American Philosophy* and *Sources of Contemporary Philosophical Realism in America*. At the Annual Meeting of SAAP in March, 1986 the Herbert W. Schneider Award was established and the first two awards were conferred the following year. The recipients were Joseph Blau and Justus Buchler.

A number of the corresponding members of SAAP are Polish and in 1995 some of them, principally Bohdan Dziemidok and Leszek Koczanowicz, organized a Polish branch of SAAP. In May of 1998 they arranged a conference in Karpacz, Poland sponsored by SAAP and two Polish universities. Half the participants were Polish and half American. The topic was "Democracy and the Post-Totalitarian Experience," and several of the papers dealt with Poland's transition from Communist domination to democracy. Others had to do with aspects of democracy and liberalism, both related to the transition in Poland and other Eastern European countries. In April, 2005 there were 21 Polish members listed in the Membership Directory.