

Philosophical Principles and Social Values in the Founding of the North American Society for  
Social Philosophy

By Robert Ginsberg  
Takoma Park, MD

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**Philosophical Principles and Social Values in the Founding of the North American Society  
for Social Philosophy**

The North American Society for Social Philosophy (NASSP) formally ratified its constitution in Montreal in 1983. Thus, to write a history of the Society's foundation appears premature. The principal founder of the Society, as well as what was to become its official journal, the Journal of Social Philosophy, was Creighton Peden. If anyone can provide the background and behind the scenes stories to the creation of the NASSP it is Creighton Peden. Hopefully, he and others in at the creation will set down their historical accounts before such matters recede too rapidly into the past. In addition to relating stories and facts, principles and values are to be discussed. For the North American Society is not simply an organization concerned about social philosophy: it is a part of an intellectual and social movement. Thus, we may with profit examine the intellectual principles in its operation and organization and how the Society itself is part of social values in North America. This, then, is one early analysis of the relationship between society and intellect in NASSP. While the principles analyzed and praised here are those enacted by Creighton Peden, he may see them in other light. This is an invitation to reflect on how one remarkable scholarly body operates. More is to be learned from that body, more is to be contributed to that body. The NASSP may provide scholars everywhere with an ongoing case study in social philosophy.

1. The principle of geographical diversity underlies the organization of NASSP. One cannot understand philosophy in North America without taking account of geography. The United States of America is not a homogenous culture; nor is Canada, in each country intellectual traditions have taken root in different regions. Cultural presuppositions and institutions support for philosophizing vary from Atlantic to Pacific, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes. The American Philosophical Association (APA), was founded at the beginning of the century as three autonomous bodies meeting at different times of the year in the East, Midwest, and Far West. NASSP adapted these three geographical divisions for its organization and planned its meetings in conjunction with those of the APA. But NASSP went beyond the established structure by introducing two further geographical divisions: the Southern and the Canadian. The Southeastern United States has long been treated as intellectually and culturally inferior by the powerful Northeast establishment. The Eastern Division of the APA had sometimes met as far south Atlanta, Georgia, but the APA maintained a seven year boycott of southern cities because of the failure of southern states to approve an amendment to the federal constitution. NASSP's Southern Division is a bold step in the right direction, bringing further philosophical opportunity and activity to the South instead of withholding it.

To speak of the Canadian Division of the NASSP as geographical is odd since it is a national organization. Early it was decided to name the Society North American instead of America in order to clarify the bi-national scope of the organization. Traditionally, academic bodies bearing the name "American", such as the APA, have been founded in the United States and open to Canadians in a species of unthinking generosity. But Canadian self-awareness caused the "American" bodies to pay closer attention to bi-nationalism in the organization and policy. As Canadians received greater respect for the identity within American organizations they also flexed their organization powers and created specifically Canadian academic bodies independent of the American ones. As example consider the recent birth of the Canadian national section of the International Association for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy (IVR) which drew members from the bi-national American section (AMINTAPHIL). Against this background of national identification, NASSP chose to be North American and to house a Canadian Division as if it were a geographical region. This should facilitate both the traditional continental tie and the

pursuit of Canadian intellectual independence. Whether NASSP will extend to Latin America remains to be seen. A promising meeting, co-sponsored by NASSP, occurred in Puerto Rico in 1985.

The geographical divisions in NASSP are not rigid. They are not meant as exclusionary ways of carving up intellectual territory. On the contrary, they overlap and encourage crossing over, sharing, and mutual support. Members of the NASSP may affiliate with any number of divisions. The Southern Division cuts across the Eastern and Western Divisions, while the Canadian Division to the north cuts across three divisions. Individuals are likely to discover they can participate easily in two geographical regions. One can become liberated from one's geography by the opportunities represented by geographical pluralism.

2. The principle of disciplinary emphases allows for the flourishing of additional divisions that are non geographical. Two such units currently exist, the Political Science Division, which has the largest program of all the division of NASSP, and the Sociology Division. Other units are being considered in anthropology, information science, and psychology. While one may come to social philosophy through professional training in philosophy, one may also come to the field from professional training in the social sciences. American scholarly bodies in the social sciences do have sections devoted to theory as well as value issues. Thus, NASSP draws to it social philosophers whose professional base of operations is those other fields.

3. The principle of conjoining meetings with other bodies permits NASSP instant access to meeting times, places, and publicity. The Southern Division meets annually with the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, the Canadian Division with the Canadian Philosophical Association, the Political Science Division with the American Political Science Association. Three other divisions meet with the divisional counterparts of APA. Logistical problems are minimized when one can use meeting rooms of a larger organization in the same hotel. Conjoint meetings have swept professional philosophical activity in America. At a recent meeting of the APA Eastern in New York some 50 other societies, including NASSP, held their independent sessions. NASSP thrives on having those attending the other meetings available to its sessions as participants or audience. The seven divisions of NASSP are committed to expanding their conjoined meetings with others to the point where a full day of programming is sponsored by each division.

4. The principle of proliferation of meetings is evident. Frequent meetings held across the continent in conjunction with other major meetings spells maximum access to participation. NASSP works to open up and expand programs. This is in the spirit of social philosophy understood as opening inquiry into social problems and social theory. The more chances to participate professionally and more individuals have such changes. Increased activity draws more audiences. More professionals discover that what they have been doing is something now called social philosophy. NASSP does not merely serve a constituency of specialists; it helps create the broadest community of fellow professionals.

To the seventh annual divisional meetings must be added one or two annual continental or international meetings. These give an even greater opportunity for the members to work together, and such meetings take on cosmopolitan appearance. About 75 papers were presented at the NASSP inaugural conference in Montreal in conjunction with the World Congress of

Philosophy (1983). Some 60 papers were scheduled for the Plenary Conference of NASSP in Colorado, August 1985. In conjunction with the Inter-American Congress of Philosophy in Guadalajara, Mexico in November 1985, NASSP scheduled an Inter-American Conference on Social Philosophy with 27 papers.

NASSP created an international Social Philosophy Conference Board to actively explore holding major conferences throughout the world. From the outset, the North American Society has seen the desirability of global outreach in its work on social philosophy. The field of social philosophy steps over borders. Social philosophers show willingness to study the values and problems of others from across the world. Social philosophy may be the fastest growing philosophical field in the world.

NASSP's international board is planning meetings in 1986 in Paderborn, German Federal Republic, in 1987 in North Carolina for the bicentennial of the United States Constitution, in 1988 in England in conjunction with the next World of Congress of Philosophy, 1989 in France for the bicentennial of the French Revolution. Other conferences are being explored in India, Latin America, and the Nordic Countries.

5. The principle of shared responsibility and multiple centers of power allows many people to participate in planning without the dominance of a clique. No school of thought predominates in NASSP because no person or group rules. The organization has been ingeniously structured to check that natural exercise of power that comes to those who with the best intentions get institutions started. Checking the drift toward centrality are the seven divisions. Each division is preceded by two co-chairs. They are assisted by a board of as many as twenty members. Two persons act as coordinators for the annual divisional program. The coordinators are named for each year in the 1980s. I suspect that Creighton Peden has applied to academic organization the principles of participatory democracy and shared power he encountered as activist in social movements in America. Other American scholarly bodies stand to learn this lesson. The diffusion of power not only prevents rigidification, favoritism, and orthodoxy, it also gives people a hand in their profession. To facilitate full exercise of responsibility by individuals is a good principle of social philosophy as well as a good principle of a society for social philosophy.

The two co-chairs of each division sit on the Executive Council of NASSP to which are added such officers as President, Archivist, and Treasurer. The Executive Council may offer broad statements of policy to the divisions. In turn the divisions bring their diverse experience to enlighten the Society as a whole. The officers can represent the Society to other bodies, while the divisions carry on the principal activities. North America federalism may have contributed to this kind of working relationship between centralized and regional organs.

6. The principle of general publicity means that all the programs of the Society are made known as early as possible to as many people as possible. Because of the planning of the international board and because of the designation of divisional program coordinators through 1990, many meetings may be announced long in advance and repeatedly. This is the widest opening of participation. Those interested in announced topics have opportunity. But the very announcement of topics may cumulatively bring minds to bear upon problems they are not now considering. The future of social philosophy can thus be given some shaping through general publicity. I am disappointed that NASSP has not announced more of its divisional programs for

the rest of the decade so that more thought will be given chosen problems. Advance planning can lead to quality publications.

7. The principle of dissemination of information about NASSP activities and of its scholarly results operated at several levels. Announcements are constantly being issued. A newsletter, originally published by the Eastern Division for its Board members, has evolved into the Bulletin of the Society, sent to all members. It gathers together announcements and reminders. Discussed policy questions, and shared the news of individuals. A News section edited by Karen Hanson is also included in a more formal way in the Journal of Social Philosophy (JSP). Founded by Creighton Peden in 1970 as a periodical of a few sheets held together by a single staple, the journal was a constant stimulant to the growth of social philosophy in America. It grew with the movement. In a handsome print format, the journal appears three times a year under the editorship of Joseph Betz and it the Society's official Journal. The pattern differs from the usual story of American philosophical organization. Usually, a society is formed, holds meetings, and circulates a newsletter which may grow into a journal. In the case of NASSP the journal existed first and built a community of coworkers who could form the society. Two special features of the journal were introduced by Peden and are continued by Betz: short articles and special issues. The journal originally preferred articles no longer than 2000 words; the preference is now expressed as no longer than 10 double-spaced pages. This preference may reflect the witticism, "If it can't be said briefly, it isn't worth saying." In a profession that publishes an enormous number of American journals, the preference for brevity is a refreshing contribution by JSP. It obliges authors to cut loose the heavy academic baggage they habitually bring to philosophical writing. The obligation of brevity is an incentive to get to the point at once, to stick to the point, and to resolve the point without wasting time. Thus, JSP articles are more pointed and less pedantic; this befits social philosophy. The special issue draws attention to a topic of social concern. Like the announcement of a special issue elicits fresh reflection. A special issue turns minds around to consider it like an intellectual magnet. Both writers and readers profit from the stimulation. Some special issues are announced years in advance thereby extending opportunity to younger scholars to prepare for its treatment.

The journal can only publish a fraction of the excellent papers presented annually under the auspices of NASSP. Accordingly, another vehicle was formed to act as a record of proceedings. This is a microfiche publication called Social Philosophy Research (SPR). The Social Philosophy Research Institute is that side of NASSP concerned with research, publication, and grants. SPR is edited by Brian Schrag. It is meant to preserve for future research upon the social philosophy movement the materials of scholarly presentation. I had objected to SPR out of the fear it would constitute automatic publication of all materials, this removing the incentive to revise and the opportunity to evaluate. But SPR may become less a journal than a documentation; a tool for research rather than a publication of research. An antecedent exists in the microfilm version, edited by Peden, of the proceedings of the Montreal Conference.

Book-length works are co-published by NASSP with University Press of America (UPA) as the Social Philosophy Research Institute Book Series (SPRIBS), edited by Robert Ginsberg. The press is run by academics for academics as an alternative to presses run by American universities. Small pressruns are possible. Instead of costly typesetting by printers, the books are photo-offset from perfectly typed or word-processed copied prepared by the author. The technological breakthrough of word processors and computers available to scholars is revolutionizing not only writing but publishing in America. SPRIBS provides professional

editorial assistance for its authors. Books approved by SPRIBS for the Series are then turned to UPA. UPA has an enormous list in philosophy, and it has developed extensive marketing programs to reach scholars, including exhibits at scholarly meetings. SPRIBS, then, fits conveniently the publishing and marketing procedures of the publisher while it acts as a fully formed outlet for authors in social philosophy: an excellent application of American entrepreneurial interest, technological instrumentation, and business sense to intellectual needs.

The several kinds of publication sponsored by NASSP thus forms a range of opportunities for the social philosopher. Moreover, the forms are mutually supportive. A paper presented at one of the many meetings may find its way into the microfiche SPR or the printed Journal. The proceedings of a conference may be recorded in microfiche or published in print in the Book Series. A precedent exists in Peden's edition in 462 pp. Of notable articles that appears in the Journal in the 1970s: *Philosophy for a Changing Society* (1983). The special issues of JSP and the titles in the Book Series are regularly announced in the Journal and the Bulletin. The interlocking possibilities of publication have greatest value for the younger social philosopher. Such a person may begin a professional career with a paper given and recorded on microfiche, a book review completed for the Journal, or an article accepted. Then that person may move on to contributing to a special issue, even editing one for JSP, and submitting a book for SPRIBS. Both younger scholars and senior contributors are invited to serve on the editorial boards as well as the program committees for meetings. This, ASSP provides an umbrella under which many stages of professional development are nourished.

8. The crisscrossing of activities is itself a principle of interconnectedness. The Society operates on several fronts, each with its personnel and goals. Yet there is cooperation between persons and some sharing of goals. The great range of diversity is balanced by a healthy sense of common core of values. E pluribus unum is the motto of the United States. Still in its growing states, the Society may be seen to be more extended than centrally unified. It is exploring. Whatever it undertakes, publicity and publication stand ready as the before and after for any activity. The dividing of responsibilities applied to the four forms of Society publication means that each has the chance to shape its function and future under independent editorial initiative. Proliferation of meetings and geographical diversity means an abundance of materials will be produced across North America eventually aimed at publication. At conjoint meetings, other scholars will witness our live programs and see our book exhibits and hence become interested in making their work available to us. Global ties are strengthened as the Journal reviews books from all over the world, the Book Series publishes volumes written abroad, and the International Conference board sponsors meetings on several continents. Different kinds of talent are called upon to conduct the Society's activities: organizational, editorial, diplomatic, managerial. Hence, the Society thrives because it does not treat its members as mere thinkers, as simply philosophers; instead, it encourages them to be active professionals, co-workers in the sophisticated social activity that advances thought.

9. The principle to which I have the greatest attachment in the social philosophy movement is that of the opening of opportunity. This underlies the spirit of the movement. The activities open opportunity to those beginning professional work in social philosophy. We encourage them, keep them informed, and offer possibilities for their participation. Both the individual contributor and the Society grow thereby. We also open the doors to those outside who grow thereby. We also open the doors to those outside who have been active in cognate areas. They may discover that they have been social philosophers after all. Social Philosophy is

gathering in under its wide rook those who have been at is gathering in under its wide roof those who have been at the edges of traditional disciplines. Opportunity also exists for experienced workers in social philosophy to take for experienced workers as editors of publications or organizers of international conferences. While the Society is no school of philosophy, it is a schooling in practice. It recognized that to be a philosophy in twentieth North America is to be a social agent with institutional ties, community obligation, and professional tasks, While the North American Society for Social Philosophy does not define social philosophy, it provides ample opportunity for individuals to become social philosophers in the fullest sense. This open-ended practice befits a continent beset by controversy over social issues affecting the future of humanity, a continent also known as the Land of Opportunity.

## A. Acronyms

AMINTAPHIL: American Section of the International Association for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy (IVR)

APA: American Philosophical Association

IVR: Internationale Vereinigung für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie

JSP: Journal of Social Philosophy

NASSP: North American Society for Social Philosophy

SPR: Social Philosophy Research

SP RIBS: Social Philosophy Research Institute Book Series

UPA: University Press of America

## B. Executive Council, North American Society for Social Philosophy Officers

President: Creighton Peden (Augusta College)

Vice President: James P. Sterba (University of Notre Dame)

Archivist: Karen Hanson (Indiana University)

Treasurer: David Speak (Georgia Southern College)

### Canadian Division

Co-Chairs: Alan Drengson (University of Victoria)

Lorane Clarke (Bradshaw Associates)

### Eastern Division

Co-Chairs: Virginia Black (Pace University)

Robert Ginsberg (The Pennsylvania State University, Delaware County Campus)

### Pacific Division

Co-Chairs: John K. Roth (Claremont McKenna College)

Myra Ross (Claremont McKenna College)

### Southern Division

Co-Chairs: Alan Fuchs (College of William and Mary)

Laurence Thomas (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

### Western Division

Co-Chairs: Mary Mahowald (Case Western Reserve University)

James F. Sterba



Political Science Division

Co-Chairs: Jonathan Galloway (Lake Forest College)  
David Speak

Sociology Division

Co-Chairs: John W. Murphy (Arkansas State University)  
Roslyn W. Bologh (St. Johns University, New York)

Ex- Officio

Editor of Journal of Social Philosophy: Joseph Betz (Villanova University)

C. Publications of the North American Society for Social Philosophy

JOURNAL OF SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY. Editor: Joseph Betz, Villanova University,  
Villanova, PA 19085, USA

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY RESEARCH. Editor: Brian Schrag, Bethel college, North Newton,  
KS 67117, USA

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY RESEARCH INSTITUTE BOOK SERIES. Editor: Robert  
Ginsberg, The Pennsylvania State University, Delaware County Campus, Media, PA 19063,  
USA

NASSP BULLETIN. Editor: Leonard Harris, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD  
21239, USA

D. Chronology

1970. First Issue of Journal of Social Philosophy edited by Creighton Peden and Richard  
Ray.

1973-1975. Occasional meetings of “Society for social Philosophy” organized by Creighton  
Peden and Williams Blackstone, held in conjunction with APA.

1983, August 19-24. Montreal, Quebec. North American Society for Social Philosophy  
formally established: constitution approved, officers elected and first International  
Convergence held in conjunction with 17<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Philosophy.

1983. Publication of Montreal proceedings and Philosophy for a Changing Society, both  
edited by Creighton Peden.

1984. JSP, now official journal of NASSP, under the Editorship of Joseph Betz.

1984. First Book in the series SPRIBS published: Donald A. Wells, War Crimes and Laws of  
War.

1985, February. NASSP co-sponsors conference on Philosophy in the Americas, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

1985, August 7-10. Colorado Springs, Colorado. 2<sup>nd</sup> International Social Philosophy Conference.

1985, November 9-10. Guadalajara, Mexico. First International Social Philosophy Conference.

1986, July 22-25. Paderborn, German Federal Republic. Conference on American Philosophy and Religion.

1986, November 15. NASSP Bulletin appears, under the Editorship of Leonard Harris

1987, June 4-6. Charlotte, N.C. Conference of Social Philosophy and the U.S. Constitution

1988, August 16-19. Oxford, England. Fourth International Social Philosophy Conference

E. Regional Map of North America