

Society of Christian Philosophers Non-Discrimination Statement

The Society of Christian Philosophers (SCP) was formed to promote fellowship among those who self-identify as both philosophers and Christians and to stimulate study and discussion of issues which arise from their Christian and philosophical commitments. Self-identification as a Christian philosopher remains the SCP's sole criterion of membership. The SCP's founding purpose thus requires us to strive to ensure that everyone who meets its membership criterion feels welcome within the SCP. Accordingly, the SCP is committed to fostering and maintaining an environment free of harassment and discrimination on the basis of sex, race, ancestry, place of origin, color, ethnic group, citizenship, disability, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, creed, age, marital and family status, and any other characteristic protected by law. For ease of reference, they are collectively referenced in this statement as "protected characteristics."¹

This Non-Discrimination Statement (NDS) does not attempt to define either "discrimination" or "harassment".² Our goal in making this statement is to contribute to our mission of promoting fellowship among Christian philosophers by providing an expression of opposition to discrimination and harassment, acknowledging the challenges that confront members of an organization as philosophically and theologically diverse as the SCP, and offering guidance regarding how to respond to those challenges.

Opposition to Harassment and Discrimination

Harassment and discrimination on the basis of one's protected characteristics constitute violations of professional ethics; they are inimical to the goal of cultivating an environment of mutual respect wherein freedom of inquiry and productive scholarly exchange of ideas can flourish; and they transgress important values that the SCP—as a Christian organization—is committed to uphold.

A hostile environment laced with harassment or discrimination discourages intellectual rigor and valuable, trusting human relationships. Both are necessary for good scholarship and professional excellence.

Harassment and discrimination have no place in the SCP. As such, there shall be no restrictions on anyone, on the basis of a protected characteristic, from participating in any SCP committee or event, or from receiving any of the benefits that the SCP provides. Nothing in this NDS should be taken to preclude affirmative action initiatives.

Responding to Challenges

Self-identification as a Christian philosopher is the sole criterion for membership in the SCP; but SCP

¹ This NDS has no implications for anything other than the overt behavior that SCP members engage in as SCP members, and the effects of that behavior. As such, this NDS has no implications with respect to (i) whether the content of any particular religious doctrine is discriminatory or (ii) whether any of its members' employers or ecclesial communities engage in discriminatory practices or promote discriminatory beliefs.

² The SCP does, however, have a separate statement on sexual harassment and discrimination that includes both definitions and examples of sexual harassment. We encourage those who believe that they have witnessed or experienced sexual discrimination or harassment within the SCP to consult that statement and the accompanying informal grievance procedure.

members are not required to subscribe to any particular theological or philosophical doctrines, and SCP members may disagree about what it means to be a Christian or a philosopher. Accordingly, it has never been part of the SCP's mission to police the boundaries of Christianity or philosophy.

As a result, however, some SCP members may be confronted with this challenge: on the one hand, they are asked to contribute to an environment that is welcoming toward everyone who self-identifies as a Christian philosopher, regardless of any protected characteristics; on the other hand, some SCP members may have philosophical or theological commitments concerning those protected characteristics that, if expressed, might make others feel decidedly *unwelcome*.

One way to confront this challenge would be to stifle discussion of the issues on which self-identifying Christian philosophers disagree. As a society of Christian *philosophers*, though, we cannot endorse this strategy. The SCP neither desires nor intends to foreclose discussion or debate about any philosophical or theological position.

Instead, the SCP encourages its members to adopt a respectful approach toward discussing and debating philosophical and theological positions, particularly those concerning people's protected characteristics.

In order to adopt a respectful approach toward discussing and debating philosophical and theological positions concerning people's protected characteristics, SCP members should bear in mind:

- There are people with differing views on the relevant issues who are just as thoughtful and serious about their commitments to Christ and Christianity as they themselves are.
- Behavior in discussions about these difficult issues should conform to norms of mutual respect, charity, humility, and tolerance.
- On matters of discrimination and harassment, individual members' experiences may lead to genuine disagreement about the nature of certain actions or policies, and therefore, SCP members are encouraged to acknowledge a distinction between actions and policies that are discriminatory *in intent* and actions and policies that are discriminatory *in effect*. Acknowledging this distinction allows SCP members to identify actions or policies that have resulted in discriminatory states of affairs and to take action to address them without raising questions about whether anyone acted from discriminatory intentions.

Grievance Procedure

The SCP provides an informal means of resolution of disputes where people believe that they have experienced discrimination or harassment on the basis of protected characteristics. The SCP's Grievance Procedure does not replace procedures or remedies available through other organizations (e.g., the American Philosophical Association or the American Academy of Religion), but offers support for its members through these procedures.

Notably, the SCP's informal Grievance Procedure is not intended to replace direct communication between people who disagree or who may be offended by another's actions or statements. Some individuals may be very comfortable plainly advising colleagues of inappropriate or offensive actions; or otherwise encouraging them to be mindful of maintaining respectful discourse.

Reports of Misconduct By and Against SCP Members

Anyone who believes they have been subject to harassment or discrimination or who has witnessed behavior that they believe constitutes harassment or discrimination is encouraged to report the alleged conduct to the SCP Ombudsperson. If the complaint involves the Ombudsperson, the report may be brought to the Executive Director or the President of the SCP, or to a member of the SCP Diversity Committee.

Request for Informal Resolution

Individuals who wish to pursue the SCP's informal resolution process should communicate this clearly and directly when they report the alleged misconduct. The SCP will not attempt informal resolution without specific instructions/agreement from the complainant.

If a complainant does not clearly request the SCP's informal resolution process, the SCP will assume the complainant is merely seeking guidance or resources that will help the complainant determine how or whether to pursue redress through formal institutional procedures.

Role of SCP Ombudsperson

The SCP Ombudsperson will oversee the informal resolution process (except where the Ombudsperson is implicated in the reported misconduct). If the Ombudsperson is unable to oversee the process, the matter will be assigned to the SCP officer to whom the matter was first reported.

The Ombudsperson (or assignee) should take appropriate action consistent with and conducive toward the following goals:

- ensuring that SCP events are free from harassment and discrimination,
- protecting the privacy of both the complainant and the person responding to the complaint (respondent), and
- lending support to the complainant while ensuring fair treatment of the respondent.

Steps Toward Informal Resolution

To facilitate accurate communication of allegations, the complainant is strongly encouraged to submit a written account.

The Ombudsperson (or assignee) will take appropriate action to gather information, including talking with the complainant, considering options, and understanding the complainant's desired resolution.

If deemed appropriate by the Ombudsperson (or assignee), the respondent will have an opportunity to respond and to participate in an informal mediation.

Any informal mediation may, with the agreement of those involved, include the SCP President, the Executive Director, or a member of the SCP Diversity Committee.

During the informal resolution process, the respondent may be asked to refrain from participating in

SCP-sponsored events.

Conclusion and Findings

The resolution process concludes when one of the following occurs:

- (i) the complainant and respondent agree that a satisfactory resolution to the matter has been reached; or
- (ii) the Ombudsperson (or assignee) deems the process to have reached an impasse.

The SCP Ombudsperson (or assignee) will submit a written report to the SCP Executive Director. The report will briefly explain the nature of the allegations, a summary of the process, the positions of the respective parties, and actions that were taken by the SCP to address them.

Where a satisfactory resolution is reached, both the respondent and the complainant will be asked to sign a copy of the report. If no satisfactory resolution is reached, care should be taken in the final report to protect the confidentiality of those involved.

Consequences

The SCP Ombudsperson (or assignee) will consider the information gathered and the credibility of those involved, and then assess whether harassment or discrimination likely occurred. If so, it will be recommended that the SCP take appropriate action.

In cases involving executives of the SCP (i.e., any member, elected or *ex officio*, of the Executive Committee) as respondents, the final report supplemented with identifying details will be turned over to the Executive Director, who will then form a committee consisting of the Executive Director, the Ombudsperson, and three members of the Executive Committee. (Executives who are named in the complaint or have other conflicts of interest will be excluded from this committee; and if it is the Executive Director or Ombudsperson who has the conflict of interest, their role in this part of the process will be filled either by the President or—if the President also has a conflict of interest—by another member of the Executive Committee appointed by majority vote of those on the Executive Committee who have no conflicts of interest.) This committee will then decide, in consultation with legal counsel, whether and in what way to investigate the matter further.

- If advised by legal counsel or if deemed appropriate at the end of a formal investigation and in consultation with legal counsel, this committee is empowered to remove the President from office.
- If the respondent is in another position of leadership within the SCP, and has not voluntarily resigned their position, the final report supplemented with identifying details shall be submitted to the President of the SCP, who will then consider and decide, in their sole discretion, whether the person should be removed from the leadership position.

Confidentiality of Information

The SCP encourages confidentiality throughout and after the process. Rumor and innuendo are not

productive, and appropriate confidentiality protects both the complainant and the respondent. Information about discrimination and harassment that arises out of the informal resolution process, including the information available in the report that is submitted (with names redacted) when the process has concluded, will ordinarily not be disseminated to the SCP membership or to the public, except as required by law.

The SCP and its officers shall endeavor to keep information obtained during the informal resolution process confidential; however, the SCP cannot guarantee complete confidentiality—e.g., in cases where it would conflict with the resolution process or with the SCP’s legal obligations.

Reports on complaints will be retained by the SCP for five years, or such other later period as required by law, and then destroyed. No other written records of discrimination and harassment complaints should be kept by the SCP or its officers.

The Executive Director and the President may, at their discretion, share redacted reports with the Executive Committee of the SCP if it is determined that a pattern of discrimination or harassment is developing within the SCP that needs to be addressed in a larger or more systemic manner.

Likewise, the Ombudsperson, on the basis of their awareness of matters that have arisen, may recommend—without providing identifying details—that such a discussion be had with the Executive Committee. Prior to initiating such discussion, it is advised that the President and Executive Director consult legal counsel and consider drafting policy to handle the situation that has arisen.