

Institute of Philosophy, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in association with the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Charles University in Prague are pleased to announce

# Colloquium on the Modalities of the Good

**5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> August 2009**  
**Prague**

*Speakers and respondents:*

*Marina Barabas*  
(Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic)

*Christopher Cowley*  
(University College Dublin)

*Christopher Hamilton*  
(King's College London)

*David Levy*  
(University of Edinburgh)

*Kamila Pacovská*  
(Charles University in Prague)

*Venue:* Institute of Philosophy,  
Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic  
(Conference Room, n. 123a),  
Jilská 1, Prague 1, Czech Republic

*Organisers:* Marina Barabas, Kamila Pacovská

Attendance is free of charge.  
If you are planning to attend please e-mail  
K. Pacovská (kamila.pacovska@gmail.com)

*Colloquium language:* English  
(drafts of the talks may be  
available beforehand)

'Good', used as a substantive, signifies value as such, and so ranges all the way from objects of want—from merest whim to deepest personal desire—to the impersonal object which calls or claims one. To explore the varieties of good means thus to explore its modalities, since *what* we value is bound up with *how* we value.

While ethics originated in the conception of the good as impersonal call of the transcendental, most of its history consists in opposition to that conception. Starting with Aristotle and his definition of 'good' as final cause—as end of action—naturalist ethics centres on good as object of want and on action as its realisation. Ethics thus becomes a sub-branch of the practical understood in terms of agency, or pursuit of (in principle) attainable projects. Characteristic of this conception of the practical is the view of desire as origin of action, of perception as gathering of information, and of thinking as deliberation; the ethical enters partly through the 'good' sought—from one's own virtue or perfection to some desirable state of affairs—, partly through the underlying ideals of freedom, activity and self-creation.

By contrast, the so-called 'Platonic' tradition points to that good which is 'known' not by desire but by responsiveness to a call and which appears not as an *end of action* but as that *in the light of* which we act and feel, perceive and think. Good so understood is not something to attain but something to do justice to. And since we do, or fail to do, justice in perception and thought no less than in emotion and action, this conception emphasizes the organic and historical individual and concern with the soul, rather than the agent defined by specific wants and the success of their realisation. The central role of lucid and just perception and thought shifts emphasis from informed deliberation to attention, from desire to love, from will as decision to will as consent, and from action as 'first cause' to action as response.

The underlying view of reality as a claim challenges the distinction between the theoretical and practical as well as the clarity of the distinction between the active and the passive. For emphasis on attentive and just response questions the ideals of freedom and action embodied in autonomous and virtuous agent with those of purity and fidelity manifested in goodness. This 'practical' character of reality raises also the question of the role of beauty in our lives and with it of the world as object of love and source of joy.

In organizing the first *Colloquium on the Modalities of the Good* we seek to open a new space for this 'Platonic' discourse with the help of the contributions made to it by modern thinkers such as Simone Weil, Roy Holland, Iris Murdoch, Rai Gaita and Cora Diamond. We hope that the discussion began this year in Prague will also raise issues for future meetings.