Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy

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Response to Policy Review of the National Competitive Grants Program
Discussion Paper: A New Plan for ARC-Funded Research

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To whom it may concern:

The ASCP welcomes the opportunity to respond to the new Policy Review of the NCGP by the ARC and the Department of Education. The ASCP is an academic society that promotes the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas inspired by diverse philosophical traditions, including phenomenology, existentialism, critical theory, hermeneutics, feminism, deconstruction, and poststructuralism. Equally it fosters productive relationships with educational institutions, government bodies, and marginalized communities within the wider Australasian public. In order to promote critical thought in the face of global challenges, the ASCP shares the sense of urgency conveyed in the discussion paper "A New Plan for ARC-funded Research." We believe it is of the utmost importance that Australia adopts a new competitive grants framework that not only consolidates and further supports local talent and expertise, but also rises to meet new concerns as they emerge and affect our communities.

With these general comments in the background, the ASCP would like to focus its response to the current proposals on three issues, chosen for their significance to our membership in particular and to philosophical research more generally: 1) the effort to provide new avenues of support for ECRs and MCRs; 2) the question of internationalisation and global research; and 3) the relationship between basic and applied research.

1) The established ARC fellowship schemes (DECRA, FF, LF) were designed to cultivate individual researchers across the course of their careers. They also tended to privilege a smaller number of research leaders. The new 2-year fellowships will clearly support a larger total number of scholars and offer more opportunities to ECRs and MCRs. This is an aspect of the proposal that the ASCP applauds in principle, and that would be very welcome for its members, most of whom are ECRs and MCRs. However, the new fellowships seem to be directed towards applicants who already have ongoing academic positions, rather than offering a path for entry into such a position, as was often the case with DECRAs and FFs. Similarly, the effort to avoid "removing researchers from the workforce" suggests that teaching relief will very rarely be funded. In conjunction with the 2-year limit, this would make it difficult for an ECR to complete any substantial amount of research, much less establish the kind of research profile required to advance an academic career. It would also make it much less inviting to international candidates, who would have to relocate for a very short period of guaranteed employment. We believe that more thought needs to be given to how the new grant schemes will work in practice, and whether they will improve or impede opportunities for new scholars to emerge and flourish.

2) On occasion, the proposal notes the importance of internationalisation and globalised research. At the same time, it seems to be focused on developing specifically Australian capacities. It also somewhat curiously suggests that Australia's impact on global research should be pursued through the promotion of local, Australia-based and -focused research. We believe that this approach could have a significant negative impact on ASCP members, whose research is international by definition, and who frequently rely on international

networks to advance their careers and research goals. It could also cause difficulties for Australia-trained ECRs seeking to enter international job markets, which is often the case for ASCP members as well. The proposal thus requires a much clearer articulation of the ARC's internationalisation agenda, and how it will encourage new contributions to global research. How will the ARC grant schemes be mobilised to generate authentic collaborations with international scholars and constituencies? How will new modes of international research be not only recognised but encouraged? Moreover, given that our society is explicitly Australasian rather than Australian, some explanation of how the new schemes will develop regional opportunities would also be welcome.

3) Finally, while the ASCP is primarily a philosophy organisation, and thus committed to the value of abstract theoretical reflection, it recognises the importance of research impact, and the need to collaborate with non-academic stakeholders. At the same time, there is a tendency in the proposal to dismantle if not entirely collapse established distinctions between basic and applied research, as was previously reflected in the difference between Discovery and Linkage grant schemes. The emphasis on "end-user collaborations" also runs the risk of promoting a relatively narrow instrumental understanding of research impact and adopting a STEM and market-oriented model that could severely curtail the critical projects often pursued in philosophy and by ASCP members. We would encourage the ARC to do more to protect the realm of pure research and to conceive of impact in a more expansive fashion, such that things like informed democratic deliberation or the fostering of a diverse, critically attuned, and inclusive civil society could be understood as valuable research outcomes. A commitment of this nature is particularly pertinent in an atmosphere of dramatic social, political, and especially technological upheaval.

The ASCP would be happy to elaborate on any of the points made here, and to explain our reasoning in more detail, as required. We once again thank the ARC for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation process and look forward to the unfolding of a new and robust research funding model.

Sincerely,

Charles Barbour