



The
University of Mississippi

Oxford • Jackson • Tupelo • Southaven

Department of Public Policy Leadership
Post Office Box 175
University, MS 38677-0175
(662) 915-7347
Fax: (662) 915-6622

June 19, 2009

Dr. David Schrader
Executive Director
The American Philosophical Association
University of Delaware
31 Amstel Avenue
Newark, DE 19716-4797

Dear Dr. Schrader,

I am writing to submit a report to the American Philosophical Association for the first two Society of Philosophers in America symposia of 2009. The symposia were titled "Ethics at the End of Life" and "The Midsouth Environmental Symposium." I, Eric Weber, organized the event at the University of Mississippi in January. SOPHIA Executive Director Doug Anderson organized the event at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Accompanying this cover letter I have included a one-page write up about each event, a page of photos of the event in Oxford for which we had a professional photographer, and finally two sets of evaluation for the Oxford event. The first set includes evaluations from the symposium audience. The second is the evaluation that the Mississippi Humanities Council representative drafted about the symposium. The support of the APA was instrumental in making both of these events a success.

The third symposium has been delayed until October of this year due to a professional transition for the original organizer at the University of Oregon. We have a new organizer for the event, who will host it in October. When we have final details about that event, I will send them to you to complete our report.

Thank you for supporting the Society of Philosophers in America. If you have any questions for me, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at 662.915.1336 or via email at etweber@olemiss.edu.

Sincerely,

Eric Thomas Weber, Ph.D.
SOPHIA Trustee and Treasurer

Doug Anderson
Executive Director
SOPHIA

Report on the “Midsouth Environmental Symposium” for SOPHIA

On April 22, 2009 (Earth Day), we held a full day workshop on environmental philosophy at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The workshop was underwritten by grants from the APA and SOPHIA with assistance from SIUC’s Philosophy Department and SIUC’s Student Center. The focus of the workshop was watershed use and management in the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys. The leaders were Dr. Christopher Lant, environmental geographer from SIUC, Brian Rodely, field agent for Illinois EPA, and Jonathan Gray who studies rhetoric and environmental issues. We had a total of 16 workshop participants including philosophers from Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Washington state. We were also joined by the Director of Parks of Carbondale, IL and an economist.

The morning session included only participants, and focused on discussions of two essays selected by Professor Lant. We discussed issues of watershed management, with a special focus on how practices upriver affected locations downriver. We also discussed approaches to teaching these issues and teaching environmental philosophy generally.

The afternoon session was open to the public, and participants were joined by about thirty other folks. Professor Lant opened the session with a Powerpoint presentation discussing the past and present uses of the Mississippi watershed. Then Mr. Rodely commented on the practical issues from “cap and trade” strategies to dealing with local farmers in his capacity as representative for the EPA. Finally, Dr. Gray discussed various ways in which the humanities are involved in dealing with environmental concerns. When the panelists were finished, we held an hour long open discussion involving the whole audience.

The participants found the workshop useful in bringing theoretical concerns and everyday practices into conversation. The philosophers present also found the resources provided by the panelists very useful for courses they teach in environmental philosophy. In short, though small in scale, the workshop achieved its primary goals and set the stage for future conversations across disciplines and between those working in academic settings and those practically engaged in dealing with watershed management.

Eric Thomas Weber
Treasurer and UM Program Chair
SOPHIA

Report on the “Ethics at the End of Life” Symposium for SOPHIA

On January 30th and 31st, 2009, we held a two day symposium on the subject of ethics at the end of life. The symposium consisted of four sessions of conversation. To get us all started, Dr. Lachs asked two profound questions central to the humanities: “What do you believe happens after death?” and “How does that belief affect your life?” Responses to these questions were candid, engaging, and varied. The use of simple questions like these was extremely effective in engaging the audience, which consisted of both scholars and community members. The first session also set the tone for the entire symposium, in which participants felt quite comfortable to jump in when they had contributions to offer.

To focus conversation for the remaining three sessions of the symposium, the organizers and Dr. Lachs had selected and distributed six case studies to discuss. The case studies came from a variety of sources, such as the *Hastings Center Report* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. We were also fortunate to have a generous work of attorney Mr. Hale Freeland, who prepared a customized case study based on an experience he had with regard to an Alzheimer's patient, friend, and client. The second session was about who counts in decision-making at the end of life. The third session was about early planning for the end of life. The fourth and final session was about deciding for people when they are incapable of deciding for themselves about how their lives will end.

The effective resources were simple, including attention-getting, plain questions. Finally, the most effective resources we had were in the audience. Present at the event, we had medical doctors, spiritual leaders, nurses, hospice workers, medical industry administrators, social workers, attorneys, on top of the philosophers and other scholars from the humanities. With these rich resources, our conversations quickly answered difficult empirical questions, given the audience's varied expertise. At the same time, it was clear throughout the event that the central and most difficult questions that were addressed and focused on were the deep and difficult ethical questions of the meanings and beliefs about life and its end as well as the ethical obligations we have to ourselves and others at the end of life.

Among the many helpful connections we made at the event was our contact with the faculty of Ole Miss's University Medical Center, of Jackson, MS. For instance, Dr. Ralph Didlake attended and was a wonderful participant. He is working with us now to develop fellowships at the medical center to learn about ethics in practice at the new Center for Bioethics that is in development there in Jackson.

Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA) “Ethics at the End of Life”

The University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS, January 30th and 31st, 2009.



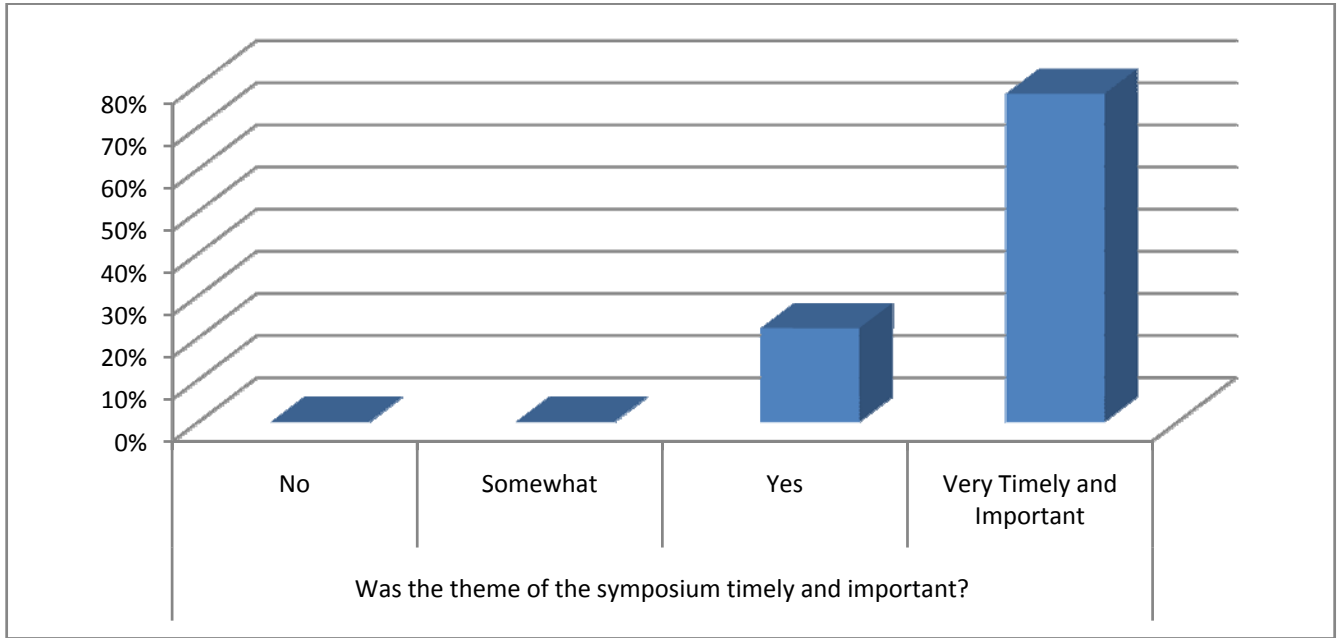
Thank you all for your support!!! <http://www.philosophersinamerica.com/>

Conference Evaluations

Evaluation of the Symposium's Planning

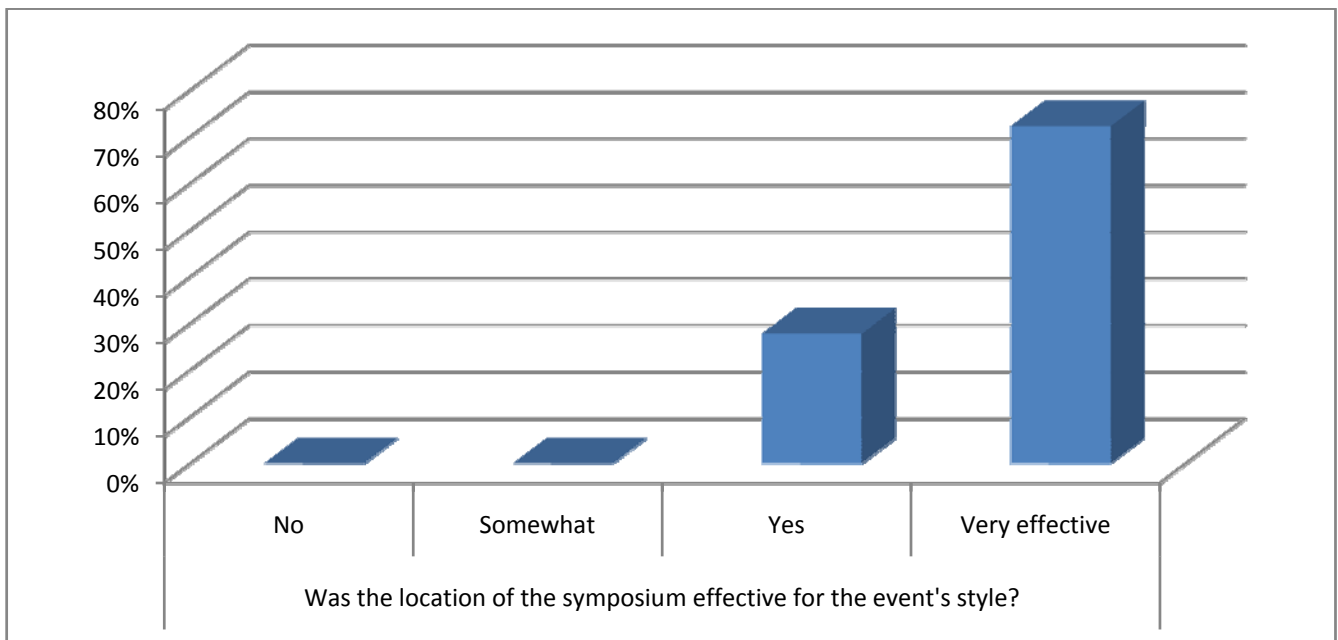
1. Was the theme of the symposium timely and important?

No	Somewhat	Yes	Very Timely and Important	Total Responses
0	0	8	28	36



2. Was the location of the symposium effective for the event's style?

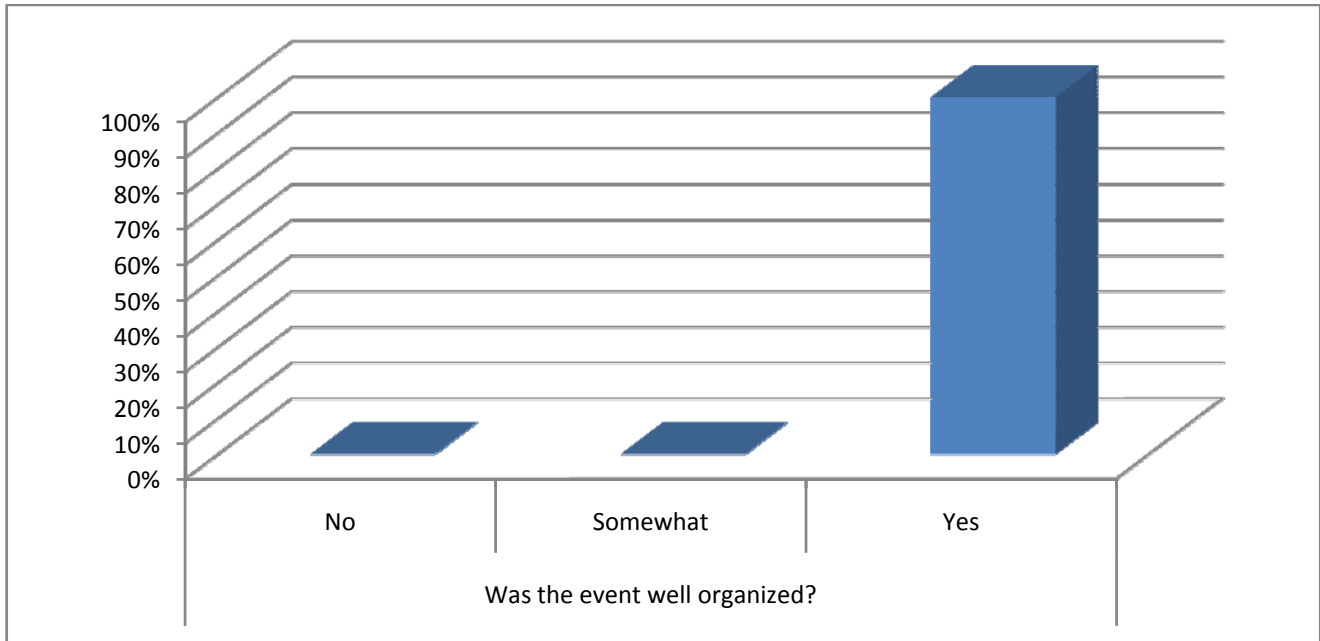
No	Somewhat	Yes	Very effective	Total Responses
0	0	10	26	36



Conference Evaluations

3. Was the event well organized?

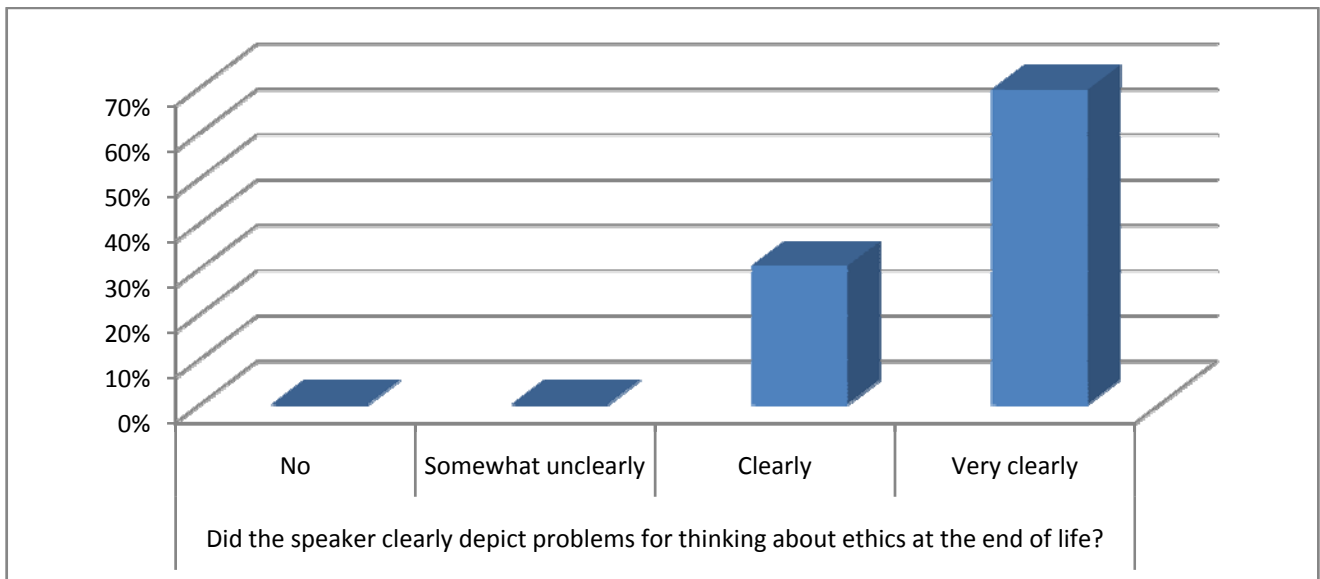
No	Somewhat	Yes	Total Responses
0	0	36	36



Evaluation of Facilitator and Keynote Speaker – Dr. John Lachs

1. Did the speaker clearly depict problems for thinking about ethics at the end of life?

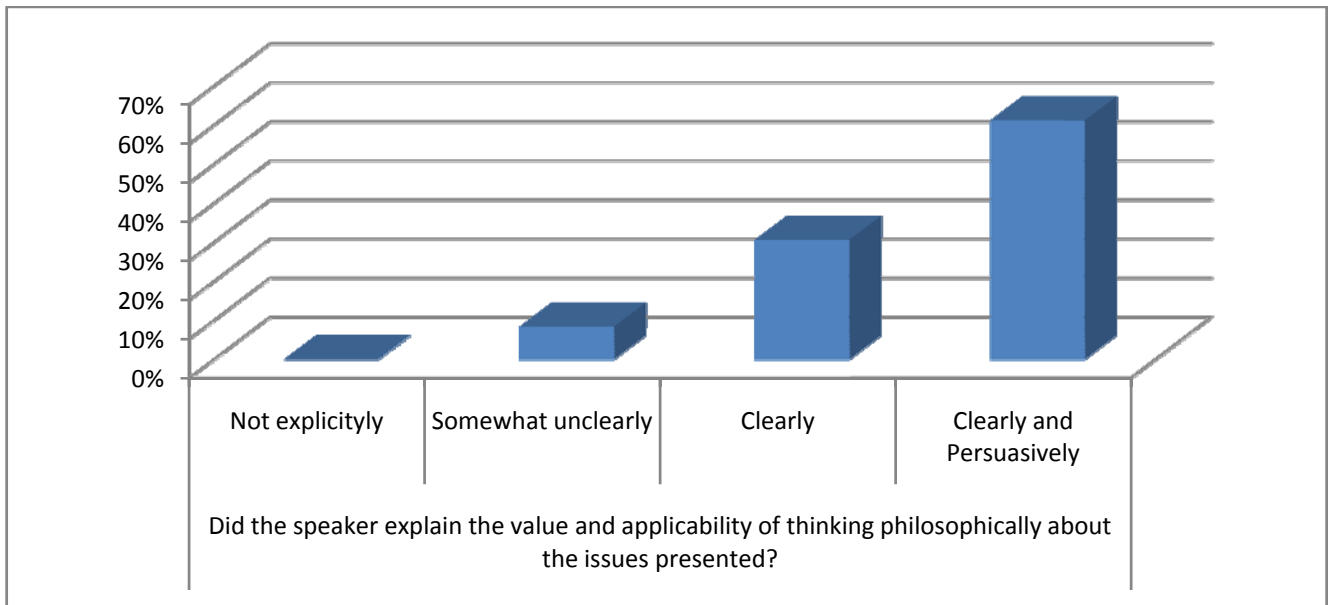
No	Somewhat unclearly	Clearly	Very clearly	Total Responses
0	0	11	25	36



Conference Evaluations

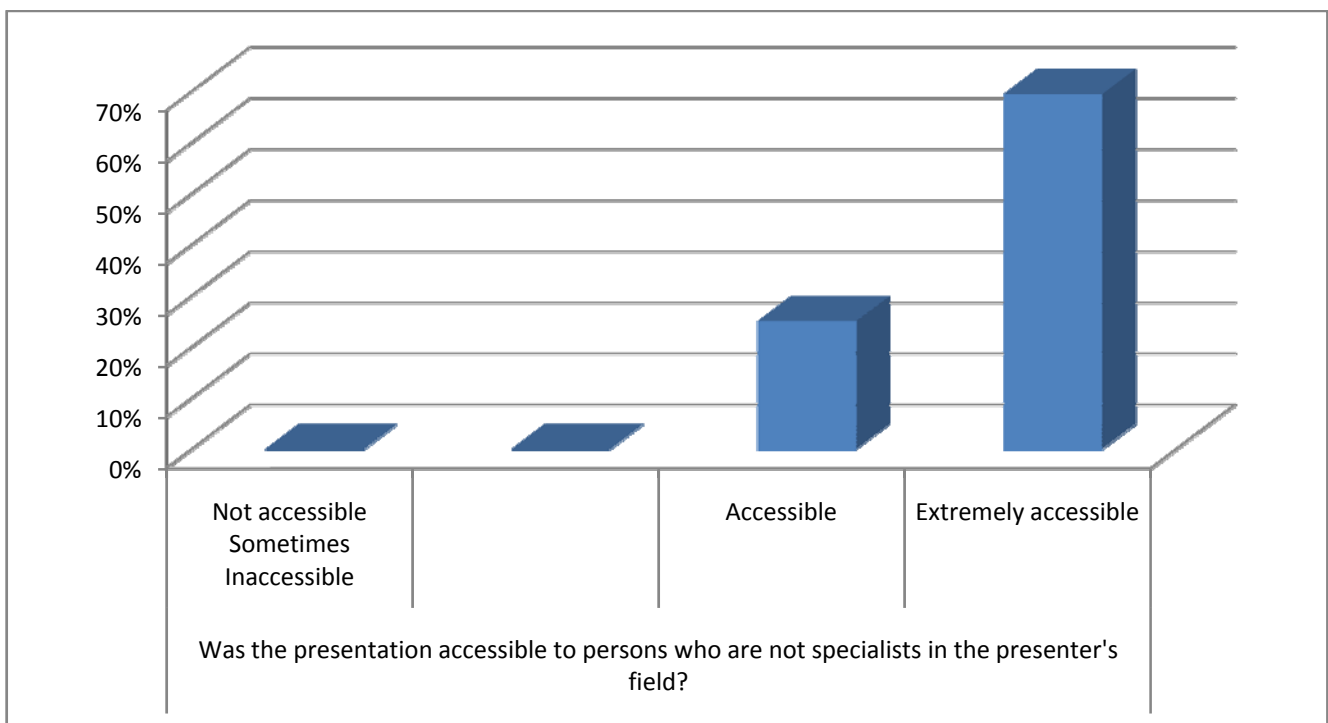
2. Did the speaker explain the value and applicability of thinking philosophically about the issues presented?

Not explicitly	Somewhat unclearly	Clearly	Clearly and Persuasively	Total Responses
0	3	11	22	36



3. Was the presentation accessible to persons who are not specialists in the presenter's field?

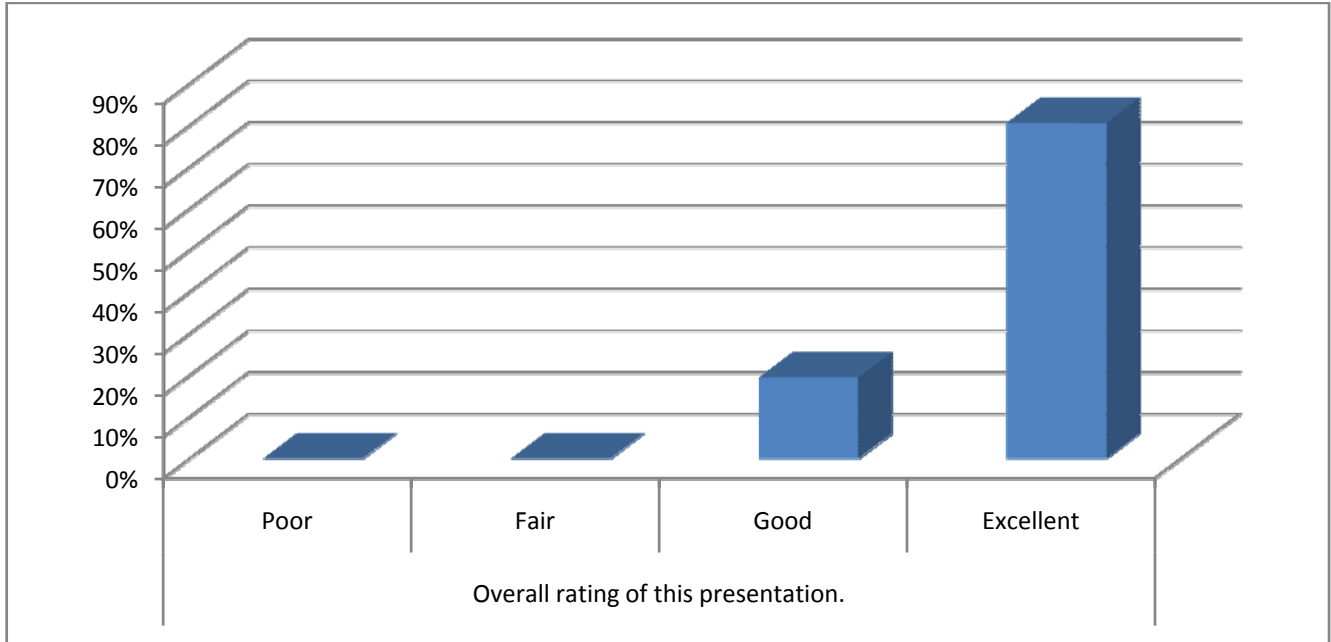
Not accessible	Sometimes Inaccessible	Accessible	Extremely accessible	Total Responses
0	0	9	25	36



Conference Evaluations

4. Overall rating of this presentation.

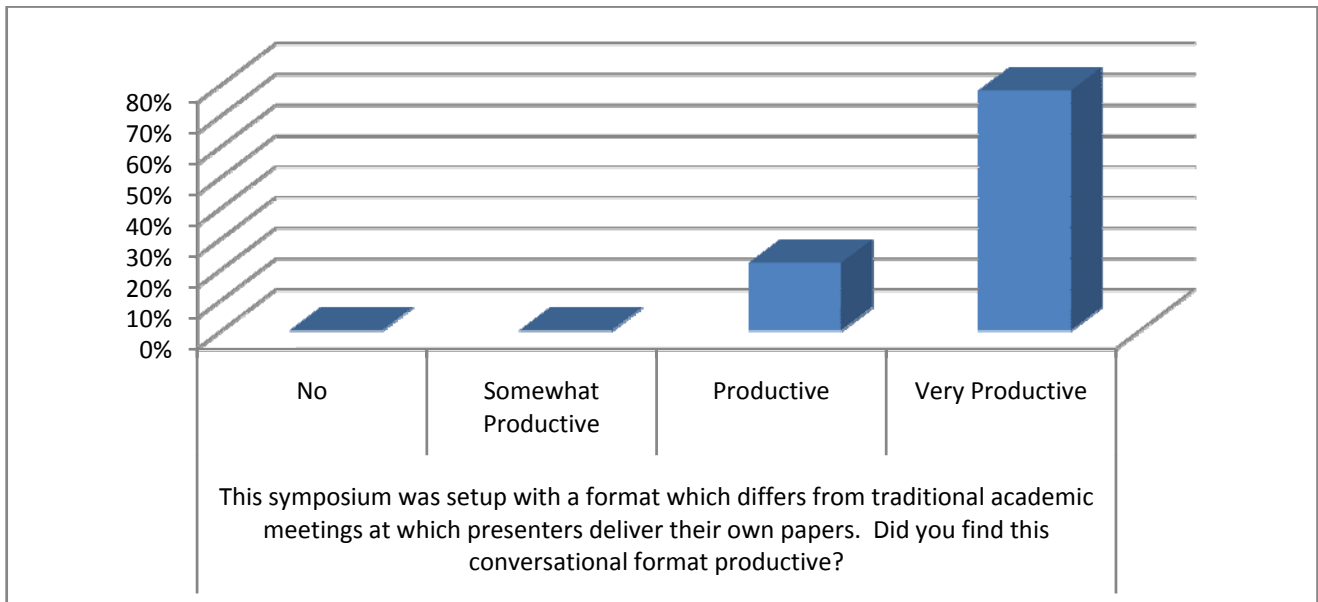
Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Total Responses
0	0	7	29	36



Evaluation of the Symposium's Format

1. This symposium was setup with a format which differs from traditional academic meetings at which presenters deliver their own papers. Did you find this conversational format productive?

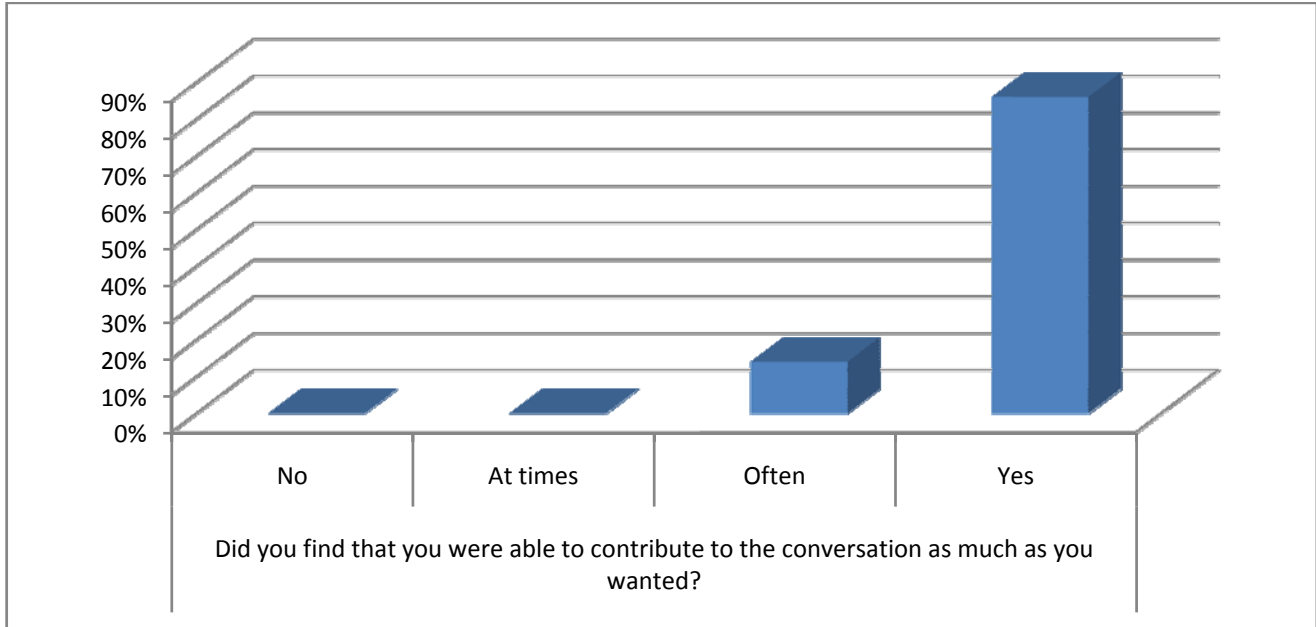
No	Somewhat Productive	Productive	Very Productive	Total Responses
0	0	8	28	36



Conference Evaluations

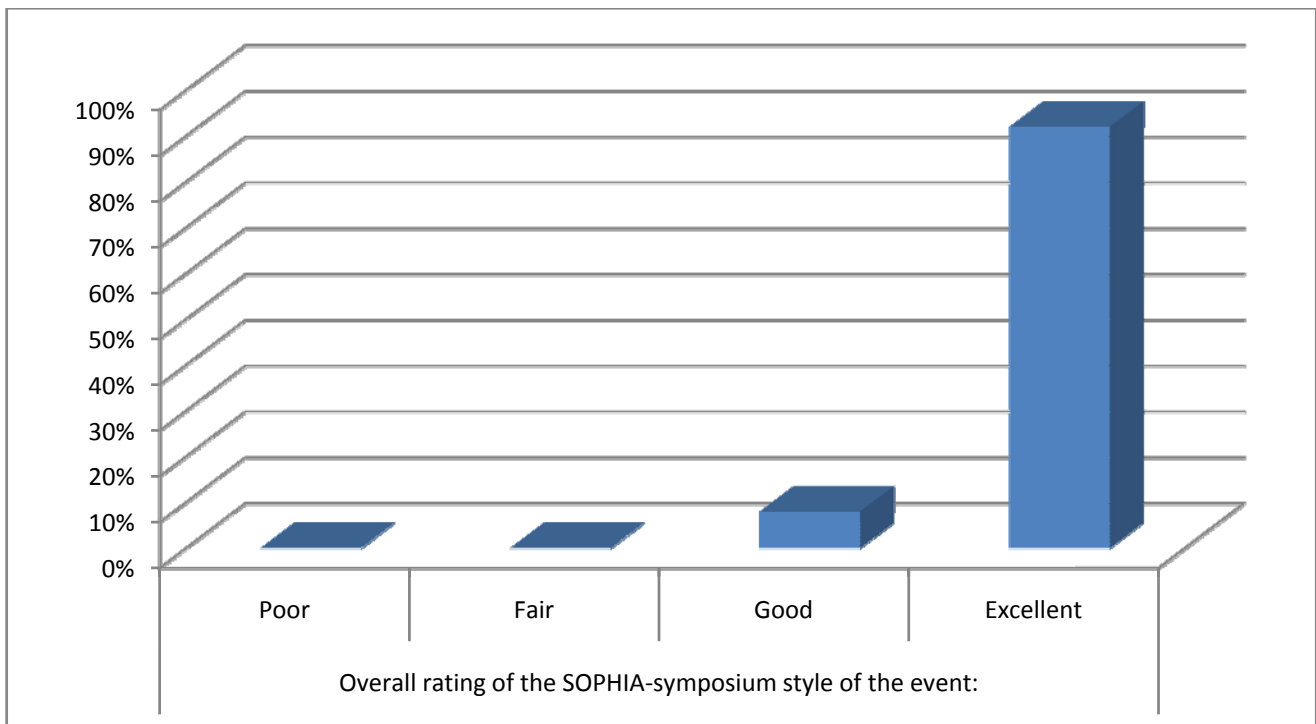
2. Did you find that you were able to contribute to the conversation as much as you wanted?

No	At times	Often	Yes	Total Responses
0	0	5	31	36



3. Overall rating of the SOPHIA-symposium style of the event:

Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Total Responses
0	0	3	33	36



Conference Evaluations

Audience make-up (marking each relevant category)

<u>Oxford Community members</u> 12	<u>UM Students</u> 8	<u>UM faculty</u> 7	<u>Philosophers from MS</u> 6
<u>Philosophers from other states</u> 2	<u>Social Workers</u> 9	<u>Nurse</u> 1	<u>Hospice Workers</u> 4
<u>Lawyers</u> 1	<u>Retired Persons</u> 2	<u>Other</u> M.D. Community College Instructor College Library Director Healthcare Professional Surgical Tech, Outreach Coordinator Middle School Behavioralist	

Free-Form Comments

Each of the following quotes was given along with explicit permission to quote the author.

"This forum provided me with an opportunity to dialogue with other professionals and scholars about issues of great relevance to both my profession and current life; I felt invigorated by hearing other's views-however opposing- on these issues."

"Very interactive! I attended this symposium for personal reasons, now, I have decided it is time for me to begin the process of initiating a living will with advanced directives."

"Lachs was superb!"

"Having expertise from medical and legal fields present and contributing lent much light to what too often are murky philosophical questions."

"Dr. Weber [most likely "Lachs" was intended here] was particularly helpful in how he guided the overall flow of discussion."

"I really liked the 'cozy-ness' and openness fostered by the way this symposium was set up. It was much more conversational than what I had anticipated and invited comments rather than inhibited them."

"This event did as good a job as I've ever seen of getting philosophers and the public into conversation. We need more gatherings like this."

Conference Evaluations

"The symposium was very informative and the format helped to make it much more productive. When dealing with such fundamental topics such as bioethics and personal freedom it is very important to include all points of view in the debate."

"Very thought-provoking but not real life."

"Very good and informative! Very wonderful facility! Enhances the knowledge!"

"Perfect format and facilities."

"I would like to see more MHC funded events like this. This was far more engaging than traditional lecture model."

"This is one of the most enjoyable events I've attended. The symposium format, coupled with the chosen location, provided an opportunity for active interaction among all attendees. My compliments to the symposium planners as well as to Dr. Lachs."

"I think it's important for people to realize that this topic discussed at the symposium crosses all professional disciplines .ie., nurses, doctors, social work, etc. But, the person (patient) facing the issue should be able to choose or plan their own end life process."

"This was a wonderfully rich symposium on a very important topic. Thanks."