

April 2, 2009 (slight revision of letter dated March 20)

Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah
Chair, Board of Officers of the American Philosophical Association
Laurence S. Rockefeller University Professor of Philosophy, Princeton University
Princeton, NJ 08544

Dear Professor Appiah:

The Calvin College Philosophy Department has been characterized in recent on-line petitions and blog postings as refusing to honor the nondiscrimination policy of the American Philosophical Association in its hiring practices as regards gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered philosophers.

This characterization is incorrect. APA policies bar discrimination in hiring on the basis of sexual orientation. Calvin College and its Philosophy Department are in full compliance with that policy: applicants for faculty openings are not asked about their sexual orientation, and those who choose to disclose it are not disqualified from further consideration on the basis of information that they disclose.

Those who accept an invitation to join the Calvin College faculty are expected, in light of the mission of the college as a Christian liberal arts institution affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church in North America, to adhere to standards of conduct consistent with that church's expectations of its members. These standards include refraining from extramarital sexual relations, whether with persons of the same sex or of the opposite sex. Our sponsoring church, acknowledging its past and present mistreatment of gay and lesbian persons, has called on its congregations to welcome them into its fellowship and, in addition, to condemn every sort of homophobic speech and conduct. It has also called on its homosexual members, and on its heterosexual members who are unmarried, to abstain from sexual relations. The college's policies and practices adhere to these church guidelines, although they are a topic of active discussion among faculty, staff, and administrators.

It is alleged in a recent petition directed to the Board of Officers of the APA (text cited below; www.petitiononline.com/cmh3866/petition.html) that any such directives regarding faculty conduct violate the APA's nondiscrimination policy. This allegation is unfounded. The APA's policy barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was adopted by the Board of Officers in October 1989, during my term as Executive Director of the APA. Taking up a matter that had been considered at the Board's previous meeting and postponed for further discussion and redrafting, the Board adopted a policy that, it was explicitly acknowledged, would demand changes in hiring practices at some institutions but would have no bearing on rules of conduct for heterosexual or homosexual faculty during their term of employment. More restrictive policies of various kinds were considered and rejected by the Board. (The APA's policy is also cited below.)

Among philosophers, and among members of the academy and the broader society, there is deep disagreement over whether any moral distinction can be made between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Some argue, on Christian, Jewish, Islamic, or nonreligious grounds, that such a distinction can and must be made; others cite reasons, religious or nonreligious, for rejecting it. This disagreement carries over into the academic realm in the form of differing institutional missions and differing expectations of faculty members. My colleagues and I at Calvin College are committed to candid and open dialogue on these matters. We are aware that our policy imposes a much greater burden on gays and lesbians than on heterosexuals, since marriage is a possibility open to the latter but not the former, and we are ready to listen to those who hold that our policies are fundamentally unfair to gay and lesbian colleagues. Arguments based on the presumption that faculty members at every institution possess a fundamental right to behave as they please in all nonacademic matters, it is true, will fall on deaf ears.

Those who urge that a change in policy would advance the college's mission and better reflect Christian moral commitments, on the other hand, will receive a serious and thoughtful hearing.

I do not believe it is the proper role of a national scholarly association, however, to settle these matters by pronouncement. Nor is it useful for individual philosophers to attempt to resolve them through petition campaigns. I support the current nondiscrimination policy of the APA, as do my colleagues, and I am confident that the Philosophy Department at Calvin will continue to adhere to its requirements. But I urge the Board of Officers not to construe or enforce this policy in the novel and expansive manner recommended by the author of the petition mentioned above.

Respectfully,

David A. Hoekema

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Note: This letter expresses the personal views of the author and not those of his department or college.

Cc: Leslie Francis, Chair, Committee on Career Opportunities
Cheshire Calhoun, Chair, Committee on Inclusiveness
David Schrader, Executive Director of the APA
Claudia Beversluis, Provost, Calvin College
Del Ratzsch, Chair, Philosophy Department, Calvin College

Addendum 1: APA Statement on Nondiscrimination

The American Philosophical Association rejects as unethical all forms of discrimination based on race, color, religion, political convictions, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identification or age, whether in graduate admissions, appointments, retention, promotion and tenure, manuscript evaluation, salary determination, or other professional activities in which APA members characteristically participate. At the same time, the APA recognizes the special commitments and roles of institutions with a religious affiliation; it is not inconsistent with the APA's position against discrimination to adopt religious affiliation as a criterion in graduate admissions or employment policies when this is directly related to the school's religious affiliation or purpose, so long as these policies are made known to members of the philosophical community and so long as the criteria for such religious affiliations do not discriminate against persons according to the other attributes listed in this statement. Advertisers in *Jobs for Philosophers* are expected to comply with this fundamental commitment of the APA, which is not to be taken to preclude explicitly stated affirmative action initiatives. The APA Board of Officers expects that all those who use the APA Placement Service will comply with the letter and spirit of all applicable regulations concerning non-discrimination, equal employment opportunity and affirmative action.

Addendum 2: Text of the petition discussed above

To: American Philosophical Association

Many colleges and universities require faculty, students, and staff to follow certain "ethical" standards which prohibit engaging in homosexual acts. Among these institutions are Azusa Pacific University, Belmont University, Bethel University [*sic*], Biola University, Calvin College, Malone College, Pepperdine University, Westmont College, and Wheaton College. All of these institutions advertised in 'Jobs for Philosophers' between 2006-2009. Further, none of these institutions were listed as censured institutions.

The American Philosophical Association professes to uphold the following anti-discrimination policy: [quotation omitted; the policy is as quoted above]

We, the undersigned, request that the American Philosophical Association either (1) enforce its policy and prohibit institutions that discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation from advertising in 'Jobs for Philosophers' or (2) clearly mark institutions with these policies as institutions that violate our anti-discrimination policy. If the APA is unwilling to take either of these measures, we request that the APA publicly inform its members that it will not protect homosexual philosophers and remove its anti-discrimination policy to end the illusion that a primary function of the APA is to protect the rights of its members.