Committee on Philosophy and Medicine

2016–2017 Membership

Jennifer S. Hawkins, chair (2019)
Matthew C. Altman (2017)
J.S. Blumenthal-Barby (2017)
Moti Gorin (2018)
J. P. Kelleher (2018)
S. Matthew Liao (2019)
Kristin Voigt (2019)

Mary Rorty, newsletter editor
Mark Sheldon, newsletter editor
This was my first year as chair. Our primary activity, as usual, was putting together Committee-sponsored sessions.

This year we organized two sessions, both of which occurred at the Eastern Division Meeting, January 2017.

Our first session at the Eastern was titled “Distributive vs. Relational Equality: Implications for Health Policy.” This session was chaired by Paul Kelleher (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and was organized jointly by Paul Kelleher and Kristin Voigt (McGill University). The speakers and their talk titles were as follows:

(1) Carina Fourie (University of Washington) “Gender, Status, and the Social Gradients in Health.”
(2) Rekha Nath (University of Alabama) “Stigma in Medical Classification.”
(3) Brian Berkey (University of Pennsylvania) “Relational Egalitarianism and the Grounds of Entitlements to Health Care.”
(4) Christian Schemmel (University of Manchester) “Health and Relational Egalitarianism.”

Our second session at the Eastern was titled “What is Enough? Sufficiency, Justice and Health.” It was chaired by Leonard Fleck (Michigan State University) and was jointly organized by Leonard Fleck and Carina Fourie (University of Washington). The speakers and their talk titles were:

(1) Sean Aas (Georgetown University and Kennedy Institute of Ethics) “Disability, Disease, and Health Sufficiency”
(2) Efrat Ram-Tiktin (Bar-Ilan University) “Basic Human Functional Capabilities and Sufficientarian Distribution in Health Care.”
(3) Lian Shields (University of Manchester) “Some Questions (and Answers) for Sufficientarians”

Both sessions went off quite well and were well attended. However, the second one was not as well attended as the organizers hoped, and they felt that had to do with the timing (it was put in the 7:30-10:30 time slot).

In general, the only problem encountered by the Committee this year was that the transition to the new Chair did not go as smoothly as might have been hoped. A miscommunication about a spring planning meeting meant that we got started late trying to organize the final two sessions for 2017. And sadly, because of the timing it just turned out that not enough of the speakers we wanted were available. In future
we plan to try to start earlier and improve communication a bit. Nonetheless, we were extremely happy with the two sessions that occurred.

Our main activities have remained the same, though as a new chair, I am hoping to make some useful changes. In particular, I am writing up a document outlining in some detail my present understanding of how this committee works and the timelines that work best for accomplishing the yearly tasks. I intend to pass this along to the next Chair in the hopes of creating smoother operations in the future.

I have also noticed that in the past communication with Committee members sometimes seemed difficult and ad-hoc. Skype meetings with many people are difficult to pull off well. As a result, one thing I have done is to create a Dropbox site for our Committee, which all members have access to, and I have placed documents there that we can all see. For example, I created a template for members who wish to propose a session to the rest of the Committee, as well as a template for letters of invitation to be issued to potential speakers and so on. All proposals this year went into Dropbox. Everyone could then read and comment on the various proposals before we had a vote. This has worked very well so far.

Planning for 2017-2018 has gone extremely well. We have six panels planned for 2018—two for each of the divisional meetings.


Finally, I want to initiate some discussion this coming year of what the newsletter is, and what we [the committee members, but also those APA members who are affiliated with us through the Philosophy and Medicine Group (236 members as of the writing of this report)] want it to be. In this era when there are so many publications people can submit to, many of which are better known and thus more advantageous purely from the standpoint of one’s CV, the editors tell me they often have difficulty getting enough high-quality submissions. I want the Committee to look into how widely read the newsletter is, and whether it continues to serve a good function for the APA. At this point we are open to any and all suggestions, including the suggestion to leave well enough alone. But we need to look into these matters since the role of the Committee and the desires/interests of APA members may have changed considerably since the original creation of the newsletter.