

Committee on the Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers

2017–2018 Membership

Scott A. Anderson, chair (2020)

Heimir Geirsson (2018)

Connie Rosati (2018)

Marcy P. Lascano (2019)

Timothy C. Shiell (2019)

Ann Garry (2020)

Mark Pickering (2020)

Andrea C. Westlund, *ex officio* (2018)

Jennifer Whiting, *ex officio* (2019)

Janet Stemwedel, *ex officio* (2020)

Annual Report of the APA Committee for the Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers

2017-18 Membership:

Scott Anderson, chair (2020), Heimir Geirsson (2018), Connie Rosati (2018), Marcy P. Lascano (2019), Timothy C. Shiell (2019), Ann Garry (2020), Mark Pickering (2020), Andrea C. Westlund, ex officio (2018), Jennifer Whiting, ex officio (2019), Janet D. Stemwedel, ex officio (2020)

The committee received several requests for assistance or guidance in the 2017-18 term. An unresolved complaint from the previous term (see Judith Lichtenberg's chair report for 2016-17) remained active and unresolved as of July 2018. Some progress was made in eliciting further information, and counseling the complainant on their options, and preparations were made to discuss possibilities for further action early in the new term for the committee (2018-19).

The committee received notice from a concerned member of the profession about the decision by the administration of a small college to greatly curtail its philosophy program, eliminating its philosophy major, and dismissing a junior tenure-stream faculty member who had not at the time received tenure. (This notice was not from one of the college's own faculty.) I made contact with some of the affected faculty members there. As it seemed to me to be more a matter of concern to the APA more generally, and was not a complaint about any specific violation of the professional rights of an APA member, I referred this matter to the Executive Board of the APA, which I believe did subsequently reach out to the affected faculty to offer its assistance and support.

The committee received a message expressing worries and seeking guidance on behalf of a scholar employed in a short-term position whose work and philosophical interests were being targeted by some local activists in popular media. These activists sought to shine negative attention on this scholar's work due largely to the kinds of topics the scholar studies and taught, and the scholar's own history of activism, which appear to be ideologically at odds with that of the activists. I replied to the message explaining that the scope of the committee's charge did not encompass this sort of worry, but asked the writer to make the scholar aware of our existence, and to ask the scholar to contact us if there were professional impacts of this attention that fall within the scope of our charge.

The committee received a referral from the APA Ombudsperson regarding a situation regarding a faculty member who had reported a very distressing, threatening interaction with another faculty member. I made contact with the threatened faculty member, to offer such resources as this committee can provide. After a few messages back and forth, no request for our intervention was made and it may well have been resolved or abated in the meantime.

I believe the above constitutes the full range of requests for the committee's services in the past year.

The committee as a whole had little work put before it this year, after a similarly quiet year last year, which may be a reflection of the narrowness of our mandate, as well as the significant limitations of the kind of help the APA can provide as an institution. One sort of service that seems like it would be useful for the APA to offer is to provide mediation and conflict resolution to parties who find themselves in employment disputes which would be either inappropriate for litigation or where the costs of litigation would overwhelm the potential sums at stake. While this does not seem to me to be a task for which this committee is well suited, I think that many of concerns that are brought to us lately could be more

usefully addressed by a skilled mediator than by a committee whose only power is to recommend sanctions in the form of public censure or letters of concern made against institutions.

I conclude by reiterating a summary comment by my predecessor, Judith Lichtenberg, in her final report as chair of this committee. She wrote, "it would help if the APA could think through what it means by 'the professional rights of philosophers' and state the charge of the committee more clearly, for the sake of future members who are asked to invest significant time investigating these cases, as well as those who approach the committee in the belief that they have been mistreated." It is my hope to engage the committee in further reflection during the next year regarding its mandate and role in the APA.

report prepared by Scott A. Anderson, Chair