Committee on Philosophy and Medicine

2018–2019 Membership

Jennifer S. Hawkins, chair (2020)
  S. Matthew Liao (2019)
  Kristin Voigt (2019)
  Nir Ben-Moshe (2020)
  Nada Gligorov (2020)
  Anna Gotlib (2020)
  Laura Specker Sullivan (2020)
  Mary Rorty, newsletter editor
  Mark Sheldon, newsletter editor
This was my third year as chair. Although this Committee is being phased out after one more year, we continue for now to plan Committee-sponsored sessions. However, for several reasons, we had fewer sessions this year (2 in all). Some of the momentum of the Committee was also lost once people realized that the Committee is going out of existence. Moreover, two sessions that we attempted to organize simply fell through because we could not find enough speakers to address the issues we wanted to address.

Nonetheless we were quite happy with the two panel sessions that we did organize. The first session was held at the Eastern APA meetings in New York City in January 2019 and was co-sponsored by the Society for Philosophy and Disability.

The title for the panel was “Choosing Down Syndrome.” The panel was charged with thinking about, and responding to, the fact that prenatal testing followed by selective abortion is fast leading us into a world where children with Down Syndrome no longer exist. Is this a good thing or not? And how do prejudicial attitudes towards cognitive impairment and lack of information about Down Syndrome contribute to these choices? The questions were considered against the backdrop of a powerful new book by Christopher Kaposy (itself entitled Choosing Down Syndrome), arguing against the widespread use of such testing and in favor of allowing more children with Downs to be born. Although Kaposy’s book was part of the background for the panel, we deliberately decided not to make this an author-meets-critics session, since we wanted our speakers to feel free to address the topics from their own perspectives, and not feel constrained to simply reply to Chris. However, Chris was a central part of the panel, and for his presentation he gave a brief version of the argument from his book.

The details for the session were as follows:

Chair:
Jennifer Hawkins (Duke University)

Chris Kaposy (Memorial University, Newfoundland, Canada)
“Why More Parents Should Choose Children with Down Syndrome”

Dana Howard (Ohio State University)
“What Can I Learn From Other Parents? Adaptive Preferences, Attachment, and Transformative Choices”

Eva Kittay (Stony Brook University)
“The Need for Information and Supports in Making Prenatal Decisions”
David Wasserman (National Institutes of Health) “Is Prenatal Therapy for Down Syndrome a Reasonable Alternative to Prenatal Selection Against It?”

At the last minute, for personal reasons, Eva Kittay was unable to give her paper. However, she attended the session and participated actively in the discussion that followed. The session was an amazing success. We filled the entire room assigned to us, and actually had many people listening from the hallway and/or sitting on the floors.

II.
Our second panel was held at the Pacific APA in Vancouver, BC in 2018. It was entitled: “Justifying Conscientious Objection in Medicine”

Our description of the panel topic (which was sent to all invitees) was this:

“Conscientious objection in medicine has become a topic of heated debate in recent years. On the one hand, studies have shown that many healthcare providers believe that they are not obligated to refer patients to a non-objecting provider and that providers have the right to conscientiously object to any procedure. Moreover, various professional organizations and institutions allow for some degree of conscientious objection by healthcare providers. On the other hand, answers to the question of how to justify conscientious objection in medicine have proven to be elusive. The panel will discuss the ways in which conscientious objection in medicine ought to be justified: should an appeal be made to the moral integrity of the objector, to tolerance of various points of view, or to the correctness of the normative claim being made? Moreover, should individual healthcare providers have to convince others of the genuineness, the reasonableness, or the correctness of their objection, or should they simply state their conscientious objection?”

The Participants were:

(1) Nir Ben-Moshe
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Chair of Session

(2) Daniel Brudney
University of Chicago, Chicago Illinois
"Conscientious Objection: Integrity and Its Limits"

(3) Robert Card
SUNY Oswego, Oswego, NY
"Justification of Conscientious Objections in Medicine"

(4) Carolyn McLeod
Western University, London, Ontario
"Is Conscientious Objection Justified?"

(5) Udo Schüklenk
Queen’s University
"Conscientious Refusal and Medical Professionalism are Incompatible: An Argument Against Accommodation"

This panel too was a great success with a large audience turnout.

Our committee has one more year of organizing before we phase out. We are hard at work planning these sessions. Although the role of Chair would usually only be a three year term, I am doing a fourth year to see the Committee through to its end.