Committee on Philosophy and Computers

2019-2020 Membership

Piotr Boltuc, chair (2020), newsletter editor

B. Jack Copeland (2020)

Gary Mar (2020)

Robin Smith (2020)

Susan G. Sterrett (2020)

Daniel Susser (2020)
Report from the Chair.

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On July 01/2019 I began my one year term as the final Chair of the APA Committee on Philosophy and Computers; by decision of the APA the Committee is one of the three ‘philosophy and...’ committees sunsetted mid-2020.

During its last year the Committee decided to take up the following tasks:

1. To make deep changes to the Committee’s Mission Statement so as to reflect the committee’s actual function and the approval of this new mission statement by the Board of the APA. This was for two reasons: to make sure that the committee’s role was well understood, and to pave a clear path for the new affiliate organization.

The Committee approved the new mission statement in the Fall. To our pleasant surprise, with support from Amy Ferrer, the Board approved the new mission statement in November 2019, despite the fact that the Committee was to function only for about seven months after that.

The new affiliate organization (see point 5 below) adopted as its own the Committee’s new mission statement, with minor chances.

2. To award the Barwise Prize for 2019 and 2020. Also to make sure that people familiar with the area of computing and philosophy would be involved in awarding the future Barwise Prizes.

The Committee awarded the 2019 Barwise Prize to Prof. Margaret Boden (University of Sussex) and the 2020 Barwise Prize to Prof. Aaron Sloman (University of Birmingham). Aaron Sloman’s note has been published right in the final issue of the Newsletter on Philosophy and Computers.

As a result of discussions with the Committee, the APA agrees that at least one former Barwise Prize winner and at least one representative of the new affiliate organization, being a follow up on this committee (provided such exists and functions in a regular fashion), would be joining the APA’s selection committee in their role as full members of that committee in so far as the selection of Barwise Prize winners.

3. To organize one or two sessions of the Committee on Philosophy and Computers at every of the three APA Divisions, during the academic year 2019/20.

The Committee proposed, had accepted and organized one session at the Eastern APA (organized by Daniel Susser) and two sessions at the Central APA, (organized by Susan Sterrett and Gary Mar respectively). There were also two sessions proposed and accepted by the Pacific division – the Barwise Prize Lecture by Gualtiero Piccinini (the 2019 winner), and a sessions organized by Josha Bach and Peter Boltuc devoted to machine consciousness. Those sessions
did not happen due to cancellation of the Pacific APA on 2020; we hope that those session would be re-scheduled for Pacific Division 2021

5. To secure the legacy, and some level of continuity, to the APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Computers.

As the table of content of the current and last issue indicates, the APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Computers has published original articles by luminaries of our discipline (e.g. two original articles by Hintikka). Such papers were made available to us under presumption that they are, and would remain, available free of charge to the world philosophical community. It would be highly unfortunate if those were to be lost, or made password protected and limited to a limited group of paying customers.

We have an understanding with the current APA leadership that those issues would remain accessible at the APA website indefinitely; however, the current leadership cannot prejudge decisions of the follow-up boards. Thus, we proposed that this, and other, APA Newsletters be made open access based on Creative Commons. The APA Executive Director, Amy Ferrer, indicated that the issue is worth taking up with the new Board of the APA later in 2020. In particular, the new organization (APC, see point 5 below) would like to mirror those issues on our website (not just link them to it) for the sake of stability and securing those valuable pieces of philosophical work.

In terms of continuity, we have an offer, addressed to P.B., to host a permanent section devoted to philosophy and computing, within an online journal Philosophies (MDPI) This is an interesting offer, although some of the articles would have to incur processing fees. The APC decided to avoid engaging in recurring costs of publication, which resulted in putting aside some other offers that required such payments by the new association. Those topics are still somewhat open as of September 2020.

5. Create a follow-up organization, based on the APA’s initiative to award it a status of APA affiliate organization.

This last task has taken the longest. The new organization was taking shape gradually. It shaped up in May and early June as The Association for Philosophy and Computing (APC).

The note by Robin Hill, the secretary of the APC, that closes the final issue of the Newsletter, discusses the main aims and structure of APC. Importantly, and despite some level of similarity among the names, APC is not in the same niche as the IACAP (International Association for Computing and Philosophy). First, in the latter’s name Computing comes first, while APC is primarily focused with philosophy. More importantly, we do not aim at being ‘international’ (thought we have two or three international members in the initiating committee), we are primarily an APA affiliate with a programmatically limited scope of operations. Today mid-size professional organizations seem not to be doing very well. One either joins a dominant professional society, which in philosophy is the APA, or a volunteer-based, inexpensive to run
local (either geographically or in its scope) organization. In the area of Philosophy and Computing, recent *de facto* disappearance of the International Association for Computing and Philosophy IACAP (organization which influenced the creation of the APA Committee on Philosophy and Computers in 2000/20011), is symptomatic to the abovementioned trend. While its conferences at Ferrara 2016, Stanford 2017 and Warsaw 2018 (the latter attended by Ned Block, Ed Zalta and Riccardo Sanz, among others) were great success, the latter may have been the first one with no post-conference publication plans or clear leadership transition after the term of Don Berkich expired. IACAP in Mexico City in June 2019, did not seem to solve leadership or future location either, which has happened several months prior to COVID pandemics. While we hope for IACAP to come back in strength in the near future, its problems are symptomatic of a more pragmatic attitude of most universities, where organizing conferences on a local campus or giving some non-instructional assignments for leading such groups has become insignificant for tenure and promotion and a low funding priority.

It seems that the role of representing various areas of research within philosophy has been now delegated largely to the affiliate organizations of the APA; thus the Committee on Philosophy and Computers has been offered an opportunity of organizing, or animating, such affiliate organization. With the current pandemic, which has affected several colleagues already and made face-to-face meetings practically impossible – this is not the best possible time for taking up such a task. However, committee members are lucky to have been joined by such active, responsible members as Robin Hill (APC secretary) and Kristen Zbikowski (APC treasurer); largely thanks to them and Daniel Susser (who developed the group’s preliminary website and was active in crafting up the statute of APC) the organization is taking shape. More information can be found on the website of APC: http://www.philosophyandcomputing.org/

Peter Boltuc, Chair, Committee on Philosophy and Computers

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1 First issue of this Newsletter https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/collection/EADE8D52-8D02-4136-9A2A-729368501E43/ComputersV01n1.pdf emphasized IACAP to the point that the note ‘From the Editor’ by John Dorbolo, which opens the first issue, is devoted to creation of IACAP and detailed presentation of its governance structure. Also Robert Cavalier, in his ‘Report from the Chair’ (after which I titled this paper, somewhat nostalgically) mentions activities of this committee as CAP activities at various APA divisions; thus the committee functioned a bit like an affiliate organization, not quite as a proper committee.