

APA Committee for Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers

2009 Report

Annual Report 2008–2009

Submitted by William O. Stephens, Chair

Inquiries

Between July 2008 and June 2009 the Committee received four inquiries (complaints) that did not lead to formal investigations or cases.

One complaint was issued by the Chair of a Philosophy Department who argued that his/her college was violating the academic freedom and the professional rights of philosopher instructors by acceding to that institution's accrediting agency's and the Department of Education's requirement of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for all courses. The complainant contended that these SLOs—specified goals for the outcome of a class used to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching—were singularly inappropriate in the discipline of philosophy. I referred the complainant to the Web site of the APA Committee on Teaching and Workshops and explained that the articulation of SLOs by philosophers for the evaluation of their own courses, though time-consuming and possibly onerous, did not pose a violation of either their academic freedom or their professional rights.

The same individual related an account about his/her philosophy adjunct faculty member colleague. This adjunct, the account claimed, was fired from a college where he/she was teaching as an adjunct because one of his/her students complained about the adjunct showing in a philosophy class the film *Happiness* (1998) directed by Todd Solondz. Moreover, the story continued, the adjunct was “being hassled” by another colleague where he/she was teaching for showing the film *The Ten Commandments* and using the book *The Satanic Verses* in his/her philosophy class (the Philosophy Dept. having been put under the jurisdiction of the Sociology Dept.). The account indicated that the adjunct told him/her that the teachers' union showed no interest in his/her case. I replied to the individual relating this account that the adjunct in question would need to submit documentation describing the specifics of these incidents to the Committee in order for us to be able to investigate. No formal complaint from the adjunct in question was received.

Another individual emailed me about a complaint he/she submitted to the Committee in 2006. This individual reported that the CDPRP investigated the case and concluded that the institution in question had not violated the complainant's professional rights. This individual reported that he/she decided to protest the Committee's judgment by not submitting any paper to present at any of the APA divisional meetings for one year. The individual then submitted a paper to one of the divisional meetings in 2008, and the paper was accepted. The individual expressed ambivalence about accepting this honor and wanted to appeal the decision of the 2006 CDPRP to the 2008 Committee. I suggested to the individual that the decision of the 2006 CDPRP really had nothing to do with his/her presenting a paper at a divisional meeting. I congratulated the individual on the acceptance of his/her paper and urged him/her to present the paper at the meeting. Since the individual submitted no new evidence pertaining to his/her 2006 case, I saw no reason to re-open the case adjudicated by the 2006 Committee.

The fourth complaint was forwarded to me by a previous Chair of the Committee, Prof. Nails. A philosopher at a foreign university was assaulted by his/her Chair. The philosopher was told not to file a formal complaint against the Chair under threat of being fired by the university. The philosopher filed the complaint. The Dean informed him/her that his/her employment would be terminated at the end of that academic year because his/her publication record was deficient. Yet the philosopher's publication productivity was equal to or better than that of his/her colleagues who were not terminated. Prof. Nails advised the philosopher (1) to look for a better job at another university in his/her country, and, failing that, (2) to file a lawsuit against the offending university. In either case (I concurred with Prof. Nails), nothing the CDPRP and the APA could do would be helpful to the foreign philosopher since the case occurred outside the United States.

Case

The Committee continued its investigation of a denial of tenure case opened in April 2008. A philosopher was denied tenure at his/her university, appealed the decision on the basis of procedural violations to his/her university, his/her appeal was rejected in such a way as to commit yet another procedural violation, and the philosopher sent the Committee documentation of these violations of his/her professional rights. The CDPRP sent letters soliciting information from the individuals involved at the university. The replies of those individuals were incomplete, unresponsive to specific inquiries made, and overall unsatisfactory. Follow-up letters to the Provost were ignored, as were follow-up phone calls to the letters. The Committee unanimously voted to recommend to the APA's Board of Officers that the university in question be censured. (In September 2009 the Committee sent its formal recommendation to the Executive Director.)

Policy Issue

In April and May 2009 the Executive Director of the APA forwarded to the CDPRP (1) Prof. Charles Hermes' petition concerning the APA's policy against discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation and the APA's enforcement of that policy, (2) a counter-petition to the Hermes petition, and (3) a motion regarding (1) and (2) passed by the Pacific Division at its Business Meeting so that the CDPRP could contribute to the discussion of these matters by the relevant standing committees of the APA. As revised versions of some of these documents were sent to the CDPRP in August and September 2009, the Chair forwarded these documents to the 2009-2010 members of the Committee. The members of the 2009-2010 CDPRP are in the process of discussing these documents as of the writing of this report.

Committee Members

Members of the 2008–2009 Committee were Michael Goodman, Alison Jaggar, Larry May, David Shier, Nancy Sherman (*ex officio*, Eastern Division), Marilyn Friedman (*ex officio*, Central Division), Heather Battaly (*ex officio*, Pacific Division), and Laurie Shrage (APA Ombudsperson for Nondiscrimination).