Report from the Chair of the Committee on Philosophy and Medicine

Thus far in 2011, the Committee has presented two sessions at Division meetings. A third session is planned for the Eastern Division meetings. Additional sessions are in being discussed. We continue to publish presentations from those sessions along with other submissions in the Newsletter on Philosophy and Medicine.

Sessions at Division meetings

Central Division 2011 Meetings
Topic: “Potentiality at the Beginning and End of Life”
Chair: Leonard Kahn (USAir Force Academy)
Speakers:
  Bertha Alvarez Manninen (Arizona State University)
  David Hershenov (University at Buffalo)
  Jason Eberl (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis)
  John Lizza (Kutztown University of Pennsylvania), Chair: Leonard Kahn (United States Air Force Academy)

Pacific Division 2011 Meetings
Topic: "When should a bioethicist speak out?"
Chair: Sandra Woien (Arizona State University)
Speakers & titles:
  Leslie Pickering Francis (University of Utah) “Speaking Out as an Obligation of Justice”
  Laurence B. McCullough (Baylor College of Medicine) “Intellectual and Moral Integrity in Bioethics Advocacy”
  Ken Kipnis (University of Hawaii at Manoa) “Bioethics and the Socratic Conception of Philosophy”
  David Magnus (Stanford University) “Academia and Activism in Bioethics”

The Committee on Philosophy and Medicine continues our two-pronged effort of bringing issues in the philosophy of medicine to the attention of the broader APA audience and involving philosophers with a broad spectrum of interests in the bioethics dialogue. In accordance with that broad agenda, we have organized three intriguing sessions for the 2011-2012 APA Division meetings.

Focusing on a pair of classic issues in medical ethics, we have designed a pair of sessions aimed at understanding the concepts of “health” and “disease.” One’s understanding of these concepts becomes critical when policy makers and theorists employ notions of health and disease to determine whether or not an individual is entitled to medical services and to delineate which services should be provided for a population.

For the 2011 Eastern Division meeting, Leonard Kahn from the USAir Force Academy will be chairing a session focused on defining “health” and exploring the implications of various approaches to that definition. The panelists will included Anita Silvers from San Francisco State University who will discuss "Health and Aging," Michael Boylan from Marymount University who will discuss "Health and Self-Fulfillment," and Rosemarie Tong from the University of North
Carolina, Charlotte, who will address "Health in the Context of Care."

A parallel session is planned for the 2012 Central Division meetings. There the Committee’s session will be chaired by Mark Sheldon and address the concept of “disease.” The speakers will include Daniel Hausman of the University of Wisconsin, Luc Faucher of the Universite de Quebec, and Peter H. Schwartz of Indiana University School of Medicine.

We hope to make the proceedings of these sessions available to everyone who cannot attend both sessions by publishing the proceedings in future issues of the Newsletter on Philosophy and Medicine. We expect the collection to constitute a valuable resource for the field by expanding upon and updating some of the traditional views on these concepts.

In addition to these foundational issues, the Committee also wants our sessions to address emerging controversies. In these cases our aim is to identify the philosophical issues involved and shed some light on how they should be resolved.

For the 2012 Pacific Division session, we have decided to host a panel on “Access to Investigational Drugs Outside of Clinical Trials.” This session is, in part, a response to the case of Abigail Alliance for Better Access to Developmental Drugs v. Von Eschenbach, 445 F3d 470 (DC Cir. 2006), which raises questions about the individual rights of terminally ill patients and the liberties of drug manufacturers. The Plaintiff in that case argued that access to Phase I drugs for terminally ill patients is a substantive due process right under the Fifth Amendment. They maintained that their proposed bill to amend the Federal Food Drug and Cosmetic Act would secure the right of seriously ill patients to access available investigational drugs, biological products, and devices” (U.S. Congress: ACCESS Act 2005). This case raises a central conflict in political philosophy between individual freedom and the duty of the government to protect its citizens by assuring, in this case, the safety and efficacy of new drugs and the liberty rights of individuals. The session will be chaired by Inmaculada de Melo-Martín of Weill Cornell Medical College of Cornell University. Panelists for this session will be Heidi Malm from Loyola University Chicago, David Adams from California State Polytechnic University, and Ana Iltis from Wake Forest University.

For the future, we are considering two other controversies. One revolves around a recent case of a couple who chose to end their lives by not eating or drinking. Bernard Gert, K. Danner Clouser, and Charles Culver, as well as experts in palliative care, have long held that this approach to hastening death provides a peaceful end and avoids the controversy surrounding euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. Nevertheless, the assisted living facility where the couple resided evicted them because of their choice. This case raises new issues of personal and corporate liberty and the limits of controls that groups may exert on individuals, particularly in the privacy of their own homes.

The other topic that we are considering involves the pressures that women are subjected to related to reproduction. The pressure to reproduce or not to that some women experience may come from social attitudes or a partner. The pressure to undergo a Cesarean delivery or fetal surgery may come from medical professionals. The pressure to reduce a multiple pregnancy can come from a number of sources. One question that this topic raises is sorting out legitimate encouragement from coercion.

The Committee’s discussions will try to crystallize the issues in these cases and consider these topics along with other suggestions so as to offer APA members philosophically valuable and thought provoking sessions at upcoming division meetings. We are trying to identify an
The Newsletter on Philosophy and Medicine

Mary Rorty and Mark Sheldon continue to do a superb job with the Newsletter on Philosophy and Medicine. They solicit paper versions of presentations at the Committee sponsored sessions and also accept other submissions.

Some problems have arisen. The APA website appears to have eaten the links to back issues. It would be great to have them restored.

In the past, the Newsletter content was indexed in MedLine. That appears to have ended. Mary Rorty has inquired about the matter. There has been no word on MedLine indexing yet.

Request to the APA Board of Officers

Production of Newsletter on Philosophy and Medicine takes a significant amount of effort. If APA members knew about it and its contents, it would be a valuable resource to them, particularly those who teach moral and political philosophy and touch on issues related to medicine and the biological sciences. The Newsletters used to be mailed to all APA members, then to only those who paid the cost of mailing, then not mailed out at all. It is now only available electronically.

An electronic announcement is often sent out to notify members when a new Newsletter is published electronically. It would be tremendously helpful if the email announcement of the Newsletter publication would include the full table of contents with electronic links to allow APA members to read or download the articles that interest them. This change could add substantial value to the Newsletters while costing the APA almost nothing at all. I hereby make that request.

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