Committee on Philosophy and Medicine

2013-2014 Membership

Nir Eyal, chair (2016)
Leonard Fleck (2016)
Nancy Jecker (2015)
Fabrice Jotterand (2015)
Peter Schwartz (2014)
Miriam Solomon (2014)
Andrew Ward (2016)

Mary Rorty, newsletter editor
Mark Sheldon, newsletter editor
Let me start by describing briefly our Committee-sponsored sessions, partly a collaboration between the new Committee and the preceding year’s Committee, which was led by immediate past Chair Rosamond Rhodes.

The Committee-sponsored session for the APA Eastern Division meeting, titled “Epistemology of Medicine,” was put together by Miriam Solomon (Temple University), who chaired it. This panel addressed questions at the intersection of epistemology and medicine. Epistemological inquiry can help evaluate central trends in contemporary medicine. Cases in point include the shift from reliance on clinical judgment to evidence-based medicine, the extensive use of meta-analyses, new attention to the potential biasing effects of conflicts of interest, and the shift from basic science to more translational medicine. Doctors rarely heed insights in epistemology (and in cognitive psychology) that bear on methodology in medicine—but these insights remain pertinent. This panel sought to learn from such insights on the merits of recent trends in medicine. In “How to Think about Mechanisms in Medicine,” Robyn Bluhm (Old Dominion College) explored the role of mechanistic reasoning in the evidence-based paradigm that typically eschews discussion of mechanisms. In “Studying studies, induction of inductions, and hearing hearsay: the continuing challenge of computational meta-analysis,” Kenneth Goodman (University of Miami) explored epistemological controversies about meta-analysis. Finally, Jason Scott Robert (Arizona State) looked at the translation “from bench to bedside” that is needed in clinical research.

For the APA Central Division meeting, former Committee member Leonard Kahn (United States Air Force Academy) organized (I chaired, since he couldn’t make it) a panel on “Ethics in Reproductive Technology”. In the panel, the talk “Reproductive Technologies in Contexts of Injustice” by Leslie Francis (University of Utah) discussed the relevance of ongoing injustice (e.g. disability discrimination, and injustices with respect to access to health care) to the use of advanced reproductive technologies. In "Is There a Duty to Adopt over Having IVF Treatments?”, Matthew Liao (New York University) argued against the position that infertile couples should adopt, instead of using publicly-financed assisted reproduction to create new children. In “Against Mitochondrial Replacement”, Françoise Baylis (Dalhousie, replacing a speaker who dropped out last minute) mounted a feminist- and cost-effectiveness based case against this technology. In "Conditions under which the Law May Legitimately Regulate Reproductive Behavior", I. Glenn Cohen (Harvard University) assessed the conditions under which the law may legitimately regulate reproductive behavior and which theories might grant it such legitimacy.
The APA Pacific Division included a Committee-sponsored panel on the definition of death and the so-called “dead donor rule.” That “death panel” debated when you are dead and whether we need to wait for you to die in order to whisk away your organs. The panel was orchestrated by Michael Nair-Collins (Florida State University), who also chaired. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (Duke University) discussed what makes death bad and how this evaluation affects how we should define death in transplantation practices and laws. Joan McGregor (Arizona State) discussed philosophical problems in the 2009 President’s Council on Bioethics report which that argued the concept of brain death lacks adequate scientific and pathophysiologic evidence and concluded that a new philosophical rationale was needed for brain death. George Khushf (University of South Carolina) defended the dead donor rule and a so-called “whole brain criterion” for determining death. Don Marquis (University of Kansas) attacked the dead donor rule and the whole brain criterion, as well as the (present) cardiac death criterion for determining death in transplant settings.

Our other activities included:

- new Committee newsletters
- transitioning to the new APA website
- with help from former Committee member Leonard Kahn, work on a new webpage and a potential blog.