Committee on Philosophy and Computers

2015-2016 Membership

Thomas Powers, chair (2016)
Marcello Guarini, associate chair (2016)
  Fritz Allhoff (2016)
  Jeffrey Coombs (2016)
  Colin Allen (2017)
  William Barry (2017)
  Fritz J. McDonald (2018)
  Susan Schneider (2018)

Piotr Boltuc, newsletter editor
APA Committee on Philosophy and Computers
Annual Report 2016

Chair: Marcello Guarini (2019)

Members:
Colin Allen (2017)
William Barry (2017)
Fritz J. McDonald (2018)
Susan Schneider (2018)
Gary Mar (2019)
Dylan E. Wittkower (2019)

Newsletter Editor: Piotr Boltuc

Past Chair (and author of this report): Thomas M. Powers (2016)
New Additions to the Committee

The APA Committee on Philosophy and Computers welcomed new members William Barry (Notre Dame de Namur), Susan Schneider (Connecticut), Gary Mar (Stony Brook), and Dylan Wittkower (Old Dominion); Associate Chair Marcello Guarini of the University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada, became Chair of the CPC in July of 2016.

Reconsideration of the Charge of the CPC

During the fall 2015 biennial review conference call with the APA Board of Officers, members of the Board broached several questions concerning the current charge of the Committee, which has been in effect since its founding in 1985. The current charge is:

The committee (created by the board in 1985) collects and disseminates information on the use of computers in the profession, including their use in instruction, research, writing, and publication, and it makes recommendations for appropriate actions of the board or programs of the association.

The Board invited the Chair to survey the CPC members about a revision of the charge and, if appropriate, perhaps a change in name.

In subsequent conversations, members of the Committee acknowledged that the interests and activities of the CPC, as manifest in its sponsored division-meeting panels and the articles in the Newsletter on Philosophy and Computers (see below), is much broader than the current charge would suggest. In addition to the practical and professional issues concerning the use of the computers in philosophy, the orientation of the Committee is now (substantially) a scholarly one--to advance research at the intersection of philosophy and computing. The selection of the Barwise prize winner is just one indication of that change, but an important one. To be sure, the Committee has continued to fulfill the current charge; in the last three years it has reported to the Board on issues such as MOOCs, open-access journals, and the use of Skype for job interviews. But it is time to revisit the charge to better reflect the role of the CPC is this fast-growing area of philosophy. The Past Chair (yours truly) began that conversation with members of the CPC right after the biennial review.

Since 2016 was a leadership-transition year for the CPC, the incoming Chair formed a subcommittee consisting of CPC members and former Barwise Prize winners to draft a new charge. After the new charge (and perhaps name change) is finalized, the CPC as a whole will vote on the revised charge and send it to the Board in 2017. In our discussions, the general consensus so far is that the pedagogic, professional, and scholarly functions of the CPC have greatly advanced the cause of "philosophy and computing," and that the CPC plays a role that is not duplicated by any American philosophical organization at this time. The members also recognize
that the field of philosophy and computing is enjoying rapid expansion internationally. The CPC would like to continue to play this role in both advising the APA Board and its members, and supporting the growth of a vibrant intellectual community.

Collaborations

The APA CPC has strengthened collaborations with other organizations. Philosophers in the International Association for Computing and Philosophy (IACAP), the International Society for Ethics and Information Technology (INSEIT). This year, the CPC explored some ideas for joint panels with the recently-formed Consortium For Socially Relevant Philosophy Of/In Science And Engineering (SRPoISE)

Barwise Prize awarded to William Rapaport

The winner of the 2015 Barwise Prize is William Rapaport. Bill Rapaport has been one of the pioneers of the Computers and Philosophy movement, and a long time friend of this committee. Bill has a PhD in philosophy, taught in philosophy before moving to the computer science department at SUNY Buffalo, and spent most of his long career publishing at the intersection of philosophy and computing, including AI and cognitive science. From very technical (i.e. computationally and logically savvy) contributions to the structure of knowledge representation in computing meaning from context, to general and wide-ranging work in philosophy of mind/psychology/AI, to pedagogical work published in Teaching Philosophy, his work covers an impressive range of issues at the intersection of philosophy and computing -- theoretical, practical/ethical, and pedagogical. Bill is especially well known for his work on intentionality that bridges the gap between computer science, philosophy and what we would call today cognitive sciences. (from Piotr Boltuc and Marcello Guarini)

APA Pacific Division Symposium

The CPC co-sponsored (with the Society for Philosophy and Technology) a panel discussion entitled "AI, Automation and the Good Life." The panel was organized and moderated by Shannon Vallor (Santa Clara University), and took place on March 31, 6pm-8pm, at the Runway Incubator Space in the Twitter building in downtown San Francisco. The panelists were: Don Howard (Notre Dame), Patrick Lin (Cal Poly SLO), John Sullins (Sonoma State) Jerry Kaplan (GO Corporation), and Ajung Moon (UBC). Over 50 audience members--philosophers and members of the tech community--were in attendance.

The APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Computers

The Newsletter continues (since 2007) under the editorship of Professor Piotr Boltuc, the Louise Hartman Schewe and Karl Schewe Professor in Liberal Arts and
Sciences at the University of Illinois, Springfield. The Newsletter remains an often-cited scholarly resource, with a broader remit than peer-reviewed journals such as Minds and Machines and Ethics in Information Technology. Discussions on the prospect of turning the Newsletter into a peer-reviewed open-access journal have begun this year. That decision will of course depend in part of the reformulation of the charge of the CPC.

Further Publications

The Proceedings of the Joint International CEPE-IACAP meeting, which the CPC co-sponsored, have been submitted to Springer publishing. It is expected that a volume of selected papers, entitled Philosophy and Computing: Proceedings from the 2015 CEPE-IACAP Conference will be published in 2017.

For the Committee on Philosophy and Computers

Thomas M. Powers, Past Chair (2013-16)
Department of Philosophy
University of Delaware