

Committee on Public Philosophy – Annual Report: 2010-2011
Elizabeth Minnich, Chair

The CPP continued to sponsor sessions at all three APA conferences. Rather than listing them as I have previously (proud as I am of them, they do of course appear in the APA bulletins), I will use them instead to note something that strikes me as I reflect on my three-year term as second Chair of this committee. In an effort to respond to the differing expectations and interests our colleagues appear to have with regard to this committee, we have begun a pattern of dividing our panel offerings and to some extent most of our work into three areas: ***Issues for public philosophy*** (e.g. our panel questioning the status of “expert knowledge” in the context of public discussions directed toward democratic decision-making); ***Philosophy and the media***; and ***Fundraising for public philosophy projects***.

Another major area we have found to be of interest to colleagues that might be responded to via a panel discussion in future, but has already led to some work we have done, is ***evaluating public philosophy*** so that those who practice it are not by default professionally disadvantaged.

Regarding ***philosophy and the media***: In the short life of the CPP, it has repeatedly been suggested that the committee undertake to prepare lists of philosophers by areas of expertise that might be of public interest for use by the media. Efforts to do so have met with little success or, indeed, real interest on the part of philosophers. CPP has therefore encouraged philosophers instead to work directly with the communications officers on their own campuses (which officers do not always have clear and distinct notions of what philosophers do and so may well welcome collaboration). Note: following a CPP session on the media, we circulated a video clip showing an interview (by Stephen Colbert, no pushover, shall we say) with a philosopher that an experienced media expert judged to be very effective. Such examples might perhaps also in future be made available via the CPP website.

Fundraising for public philosophy projects: Among other emphases, CPP has been encouraging philosophers to look into NSF (National Science Foundation) grants since those might not otherwise come to mind. A couple of CPP members have participated in the National Humanities Advocacy Day to lobby Congress (on the invitation and with the leadership of David Schrader). CPP has also encouraged philosophers to reach out to their state’s Humanities Council. These are funded by the N.E.H. (and often also by state legislatures and private donors as well). Philosophy is rarely well represented in the public humanities programs funded by the state councils, I fear, but that is not for lack of interest or willingness.

Evaluating public philosophy: In May of 2010, CPP issued a call for examples of provisions for including and evaluating ***public philosophy***, or “engaged scholarship” more generally, in hiring, tenure, promotion considerations at APA members’ home institutions (our call was published in APA “Proceedings”). No responses were received. We did find a few resources, though, e.g. *Imagining America’s* “Curriculum

Project Report” (cf. “What [Public] Good are the [Engaged] Humanities?” by Gregory Jay); statements from Syracuse University (cited in the call of May 2010, above); and, especially, a joint report from the National Council on Public History, the American Historical Association, and the Organization of Public Historians “offering best practices for evaluating public or ‘applied’ scholarship.” The report is available at <http://ncph.org/cms/careers-training/#Promotion&Tenure>. There are many more such resources. It could be a fine project for CPP to take on to review them and publish its own guide as turns out to be appropriate, effective, and needed.

Publicity, too: Since models and examples not only reveal and can help establish standards of judgment but also speak more widely than more abstract principles, it might also be decided that CPP’s session at Central honoring a public philosopher -- in that first instance, Lawrence C. Becker -- for a lifetime of public philosophy ought to become an annual, or biannual, or whatever event. Thus far, the very good session honoring Professor Becker with papers by others who could themselves be thus honored stands as a one-time event, but that may be a mistake, a lost opportunity.

It has also been suggested that CPP sponsor prizes and awards for public philosophy (best paper, best new book, best project, etc.) Again, such recognition is worthy unto itself; it can also be used for publicity, and is helpful in forwarding the cause of evaluating public philosophy work. We have as yet done nothing along these lines, however.

Sponsoring, co-sponsoring, collaborating, exploring possibilities: Most important, the Public Philosophy Network is off to a good start on its own. Do visit its website for an overview, and then, if you will, join and make use of the opportunities of the social network model on which it is built to facilitate differing sorts of collaborative work among philosophers and others engaged in public action and policy. This October, 2011, the PPN is putting on a very interesting conference in the D.C. area (again, see the website, easily found via google).

CPP can and should do more *collaborative work*. Little has yet come of mutually expressed interest in several promising instances that were nonetheless explored (among them, collaborations with other APA committees; public philosophy publications and radio shows such as “Philosophy Talk”; individuals and publications also seeking broader public audiences) but with further effort, something might develop. Such relationships, especially those outside of the APA, of course, take time, care, and sometimes (well, usually) funding to establish in ways compatible to and useful for all parties, so they are to be entered into with caution as well as hopes. As CPP’s purposes and identity continue to crystallize, it may be possible to move more quickly and effectively, however.

Website: With admiring and grateful thanks to committee member Eric Weber, CPP has a website. In 2010, we began discussing how best to make it a committee (rather than one person) task. Clear, public policy remains to be developed with the

full participation of the CPP, in consultation with APA head office (given that any committee reflects on its parent organization, of course).

One of CPP's founding members, Sharon Meagher, also has a website that took on some of the functions a CPP site might have before there was one. It is still a resource, providing information on public philosophy websites, among other things: <http://philosophyandthecity.org/publicphilosophy/publicphilresources.html>. Another CPP member early on, Noelle MacAfee, started her own blog when CPP had none (still doesn't) in order to allow people to post their own links and comments on public philosophy: <http://gonepublic.wordpress.com>.

Funding: Thanks to the extraordinary generosity, support, encouragement of a colleague of significant standing in the world of philosophy as well as a number of kind donors who helped raise matching funds, the CPP has a fund that should soon be available. Guidelines for all aspects of the fund are being developed for APA Board approval.

Finally: The wide range of possibilities for such a new committee with what turns out to be an ambiguous title remains difficult to negotiate, but I do believe, as I said above, that we are clarifying the differing areas that can realistically be addressed and finding ways to do so appropriately and, again, realistically for an APA committee. The limitations on what any committee with far-flung, regularly changing membership, unclear powers, and limited resources (of time as well as money, support staff, shared records, etc.) have led to frustrations, of course. But increasingly, there is a track record and greater clarity of specified, publicly available policy and practice, and it is to be hoped, and expected, that the committee is poised to become more effective still in the near future.

Thank you to all with whom I have had the pleasure of working as chair of CPP for these three years.