

# Committee on Public Philosophy, American Philosophical Association Chair's Report for 2011-2012

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It has been an honor to chair the APA's Committee on Public Philosophy for this first of three years, from July 2011 through June 2012. This report details 11 general categories of activity in which the CPP worked and organized efforts over the past year. These efforts were made possible through the generous and thoughtful contributions of our committee members. Three of our members for 2011-2012 rolled off the committee: Dr. Lawrence Becker, Dr. Tom Powers, and Dr. Kendall D'Andrade. We are grateful for their service and also welcome our new members who have rolled onto the committee in July of 2012.

Although our members only occasionally meet, especially at APA meetings, including usually just two or three of us who can get together, we made considerable progress on several initiatives through the use of "Progress Reports," in which we gathered our ideas and initiatives, commented together on what it would take to move them forward, and voted on various elements that required official decisions. These "Progress Reports" served as virtual minutes of exchanges via email that we treated as meetings. Through this mechanism, we organized and pursued the following 11 initiatives. In each step of the following, where appropriate, I mention the item in our committee's charge to which the relevant activity is connected. "m1," for example, refers to *item 1 in our mission*. Our mission is listed on the APA's site as well as on our own (<http://www.publicphilosophy.org/mission.html>).

## **1. Web site launched, Resources Gathered and in Development**

Prior to July 2011, we began developing a CPP Web site, which we officially launched this year: <http://www.publicphilosophy.org>. APA member Dr. Markate Daly kindly offered us the Web address for use for the committee's work. There, we posted information on the nature of the committee, its charge, activities, resources, members, and more. The site only has a few entries on its "links" page, but we will update that over time, and invite suggestions. We also posted the recordings that were made several years ago for the centennial of the APA, the public service announcements from John Cleese: <http://publicphilosophy.org/resources.html> (m5 & m6).

## **2. Philosophy Op-Ed Contest**

This year, we planned, announced, and completed a public philosophy op-ed essay contest for pieces published in 2011. Dr. Kyle Whyte of Michigan State University chaired the subcommittee effort, which received 23 submissions and recognized 5 outstanding pieces. The contest winners have been announced on the APA Web site, <http://goo.gl/FoSqt>, and on our own, <http://publicphilosophy.org/activities.html#oped>.

We selected 5 outstanding pieces that successfully blend philosophical argumentation with an Op-Ed writing style. Winning submissions called public attention directly or indirectly to the value of philosophical thinking. The pieces were judged in terms of their success as examples of public philosophy, being accessible to the general public, concerned with important topics of public concern, and characterized by clear reasoning. The winning authors will each receive an award of \$100. (m7).

## **3. National Humanities Alliance and Advocacy Day**

Per the encouragement of the former Executive Director of the APA, Dr. David Schrader, CPP members and other APA members were encouraged to participate in the National Humanities

Alliance's Annual Meeting and Advocacy day (<http://nhalliance.org/>). At the March 2012 meeting, our members in attendance met with representatives of the National Endowment for the Humanities as well as many other organizations supportive of the humanities. We also met with our Representatives and Senators to relate to them the public value of philosophy and other areas of humanistic study, the support for which has been under threat for many years. We had a chance also to meet with NEH Chairman Jim Leach, a long-time Iowa Representative, who has been greatly supportive and vocal about the value of the humanities. From our efforts, we received explicit feedback about the tangible consequences of our visits, such as that a particular Senator decided to join the Senate's Cultural Caucus, upon hearing from us and agreeing to join in greater support of the humanities (m8).

#### **4. Sponsored and Participated in the Public Philosophy Network Meeting**

We sponsored the Public Philosophy Network's 2011 event. Several CPP members attended the event and found it to be a great success. The Public Philosophy Network is an organization that was created and run by a number of philosophers, some of whom have previously served on the Committee on Public Philosophy. They organized a very successful 2011 event and are presently organizing a program for 2013. They have developed a Web site that serves as a social networking tool for public philosophers, which has grown quickly: <http://publicphilosophynetwork.ning.com/> (m1, m8, and m9).

#### **5. APA Panels Organized Calling Attention to Public Philosophy**

Over the last year, we organized 7 panels at 2011-2012 APA meetings, including one on "Professional Philosophical Bloggers," chaired by Dr. Andrew Light (George Mason University) and written about in *The Washington Post* (see point 6 in this report). For information on our panels, visit <http://publicphilosophy.org/activities.html#events>. We have also begun discussions about how best to solicit future panel proposals for APA meetings.

#### **6. Public Attention Garnered**

In the last year, the CPP and related organizations garnered some public attention in the media, including a *Washington Post* piece – [http://www.washingtonpost.com/gIQA4qjzUP\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/gIQA4qjzUP_story.html) – about the APA panel we organized on "Professional Philosophical Bloggers." Next, both public philosophy and our committee were recognized in an extended piece published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: <http://chronicle.com/article/Philosophers-Put-Their-Minds/130066/> (m3).

#### **7. Book Signing Plans in the Works**

We have initiated plans for a first CPP book signing, to be held at the 2012 Eastern division meeting of the APA in Atlanta, GA. We have begun plans for a news release about it. In time, we hope to formalize the process for future years (m2 and m4).

#### **8. Recognition for Public Philosophers**

This year, we began work to plan regular, formal recognition for scholars who exemplify public philosophy, beyond the efforts of our op-ed contest and traditional panels. One panel organized for the 2012 Eastern division meeting of the APA will recognize and address the work of Dr. Jim Sterba of Notre Dame University. For details, visit <http://publicphilosophy.org/activities.html#upcoming> (m7).

#### **9. Drafting Procedures to Guide and Enable CPP Efforts**

In the past two years, fundraising efforts for the APA Berry Fund were completed. The Berry Fund will generate resources on an annual basis to support public philosophy. We have been tasked with drafting official procedures and guidelines for the use of these funds, and have made some progress, still to be completed. In other areas, we have begun drafting official procedures and timelines for

progress on various initiatives, including for our Op-Ed Essay Contest. We are also planning mechanisms and guidelines for organizing, soliciting, and proposing panels for APA meetings. We may complete these over the course of the next year.

### **10. 2011 APA Board Meeting**

At the December 2011 Eastern APA conference, other committee chairs and I had the chance to meet and speak with the APA Board. Representatives in attendance were highly encouraging and expressed repeatedly their deep appreciation and strong support for the mission of the committee on public philosophy. Relevant comments were made in relation to recent public and financial problems, which have motivated cuts to the humanities. Some philosophers raised for discussion the need for greater social responsibility in the public sphere. On this latter point, an informal proposal to the APA board was discussed, in which considerations were raised suggesting the creation of a committee on “Philosophy and Social Responsibility.” A number of the relevant initiatives proposed seemed to overlap with the charge of the committee on public philosophy. If a fuller proposal on possible additions to the committee on public philosophy’s charge is welcome and would be considered carefully.

### **11. World Philosophy Day**

Some committee members were approached at the 2011 Eastern APA with the idea that the CPP might do more to promote and take advantage of World Philosophy Day, a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) initiative, held on Thursday, November 15, 2012. We appreciated the idea and may develop in time ways to take advantage of this useful day of celebration. For now, we will primarily call attention to the day and to those efforts already under way to celebrate it. We will revisit the opportunity to take advantage of the UNESCO celebration (m9).

I hope that over the next year, we will continue to see the progress that we enjoyed in 2011-2012. Again, our progress was only possible because of the numerous volunteered contributions of kind, generous, and encouraging committee members.

Sincerely,



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