

# Committee on Public Philosophy

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## *2012-2013 Membership*

Eric Weber, chair (2014)

Owen Anderson (2013)

Michael Cholbi (2014)

Darrel Moellendorf (2015)

Pablo Muchnik (2014)

Shane Ralston (2015)

James South (2015)

Kyle Whyte (2013)

Rega Wood (2014)

Paul Woodruff (2013)

# Committee on Public Philosophy, American Philosophical Association Chair's Report for 2012-2013

Dr. Eric Thomas Weber  
September 30, 2013

It has once again been an honor to chair the APA's Committee on Public Philosophy for this second of three years, from July 2012 through June 2013. This report details 10 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 2012-2013 rolled off the committee: Dr. Owen Anderson, Dr. Kyle Whyte, and Dr. Paul Woodruff. We are grateful for their service and also welcome our new members who have rolled onto the committee in July of 2012, including three new members, namely Dr. Erin McKenna, Dr. Tom Rockmore, and Dr. David Schwartz, as well as our new Associate Chair, Dr. Lynne Tirrell.

Again this year, though our members only occasionally met, 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 these documents, we gather our ideas and initiatives, comment on them together, such as on what it would take to move them forward, and vote on various elements that require official decisions. These "Progress Reports" serve as virtual minutes of exchanges via email that we treated as meetings. Through this mechanism, we organized and pursued the following 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 Maintained and Expanded, though Still in Development**

Over the course of the year, the Committee on Public Philosophy used our Web site, <http://www.publicphilosophy.org>, as one of several measures to spread the word about CPP activities. We used the site to track our activities, such as our panels organized at divisional meetings of the APA and our yearly op-ed essay contest. Through our Web site, APA members reached out to the committee for various forms of support regarding public philosophy, such as a poll submitted to the committee about philosophy (m5 & m6). In the future, we still need to add links to our "Links" page, such as to share better the resources already available for public philosophy. Adding to that would enable us more effectively to "make common cause" with other relevant organizations (m9). In addition, there is a growing desire to gather existing ideas and proposed practices for making the most in promotion of the yearly World Philosophy Day, organized by UNESCO. Information on such activities could prove helpful if added to our "Resources" page (m1, m2, m4).

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

This past year, we planned, announced, and have nearly completed a public philosophy op-ed essay contest for pieces published in 2012. Dr. Kyle Whyte of Michigan State University chaired the subcommittee effort. We will soon finish our selection process and announce the awards. Winners from our last contest were announced on the APA site and on our own, <http://publicphilosophy.org/activities.html#oped>. Once we have finished judging the present contest, the winning authors will each receive an award of \$100, as well as professional acknowledgement of potential value in their institutions for the important public philosophical work that they are doing (m7).

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

CPP members and other APA members are encouraged to participate in the National Humanities Alliance's Annual Meeting and Advocacy day (<http://nhalliance.org/>). At the March 2013 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 then 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 once again had a chance 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. In addition, we heard talks and met with Senator Elizabeth Warren and Senator Dick Durbin. In the future, our committee could do more to promote this event among the membership of the APA, although securing funds to travel to Washington, D.C. in such service may prove difficult for many. Nevertheless, more philosophers may be able to participate, and therefore it could be wise to plan a serious effort to encourage philosophers to participate in this effort (m8).

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

We sponsored the Public Philosophy Network's conference on March 14-16, 2013, at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. The conference drew nearly 200 attendees, though it was only the second such event organized by the PPN. The conference attracted philosophers of varied backgrounds as well as some practitioners and opinion makers from beyond philosophy or beyond the academy, who appreciate public philosophical engagement and contribute to it themselves. 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 presently are planning events on an 18 month cycle. They have continued to develop their Web site that serves as a social networking tool for public philosophers: <http://publicphilosophynetwork.ning.com/>. The Committee on Public Philosophy has made use of the PPN Web site as another excellent avenue for spreading the word about opportunities related to the Committee on Public Philosophy and our mission (m1, m8, and m9).

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

Over the last year, we organized 5 panels for 2012-2014 APA meetings (having to plan early for the 2014 events). 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. We are planning to develop a mechanism through which we will invite APA members to submit proposals for panels to the committee for divisional meetings. In 2013-2014, we plan to develop our strategy.

### **6. 2012 Book Signing**

We planned and executed a Book Signing event at the December 2012 meeting of the Eastern APA. In time, we hope to formalize the process for future years. One option for collaboration would involve connecting with book publishers who attend the APA to encourage them to suggest authors who might be interested in participating (m2 and m4).

### **7. Recognition for Public Philosophers**

Last year, we began discussions to plan regular, formal recognition for scholars who exemplify great work in public philosophy, beyond the efforts of our op-ed contest and traditional panels. One panel that we organized for the 2012 Eastern division meeting of the APA recognized and addressed Dr. Jim Sterba's work (Notre Dame University). Depending on our resources, we may wish to host events

larger than panels, or which include an award. One senior philosopher at the APA suggested that junior scholars tend to be those who most need the encouragement and recognition of such opportunities and awards. We may wish to recognize one or two more senior scholars as well as a number of junior scholars. Our discussions on this front have only been preliminary (m7).

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

In the last few 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, but again, they remain to be completed. At this point, we have volunteers for a subcommittee but have not yet reviewed together the initial drafts of procedural language to guide future decision-making. In some areas, we have drafts of suggested procedures and timelines for progress on various initiatives, including for our Op-Ed Essay Contest. These are ongoing tasks.

### **9. Informal Developments Suggesting an Addition to the CPP Mission**

A former leader in the APA informally began discussions with the CPP Chair about the need in the CPP mission for a charge that relates “Philosophy and Social Responsibility.” These discussions have only been preliminary so far, and will be discussed further over the next year, perhaps resulting in a formal proposal to the committee.

### **10. World Philosophy Day**

In the previous year, some committee members were approached about 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, which occurs in mid to late November each year. We appreciated the idea and have some developed interest among our committee members in gathering ideas and beginning initial efforts for making World Philosophy Day a valuable opportunity for raising public awareness about philosophy and its value (m9).

Although in some ways, 2012-2013 proved more difficult a year for the committee, or at least for its Chair, we nevertheless remained active. We achieved the tasks that we did because of the energy and enthusiasm of our committee members. I am looking forward to a fruitful final year as Chair of this important and dynamic committee.

Sincerely,



Dr. Eric Thomas Weber, Chair  
Committee on Public Philosophy  
The American Philosophical Association  
Web site: <http://www.publicphilosophy.org>