APA Committee on Philosophy and Medicine
2009 Annual Report
Submitted by John P. Lizza, Chair
September 30, 2009

The Committee on Philosophy and Medicine has undergone changes in membership over the last year. Kenneth Richman (Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Boston) completed his three-year service on June 30, 2009, and Inmaculada De Melo-Martin (Weill Cornell Medical College) and Bonnie Steinbock (State University of New York at Albany) joined the committee on July 1, 2009. We thank Ken for his many contributions and welcome our new members.

Continuing our collaboration with the American Society of Bioethics and Humanities, the Committee on Philosophy and Medicine sponsored a panel on “Common Morality Revisited” at the 10th Annual Meeting of ASBH on October 23-26, 2008, in Cleveland, Ohio. Common morality theory has been accepted as the basis of bioethics by a number of eminent philosophically trained bioethicists, including Tom Beauchamp, James Childress, Bernard Gert, Ruth Macklin, and Robert Veatch. The theory has also evolved since its formulation in the 1970s. Tom Beauchamp (Georgetown), and Bernard Gert (Dartmouth) presented their latest versions of common morality theory, and John Arras (University of Virginia) provided critical commentary. Robert Baker (Union College and Mt. Sinai) served as moderator.

At the 2008 Eastern Division Meeting on December 27-30, 2008 in Philadelphia, we sponsored a panel on “Ethical and Conceptual Issues in the Classification and Treatment of Mental Illness.” Dominic Murphy (California Institute of Technology), Claire Pouncy (Temple University), and Jennifer Radden (University of Massachusetts, Boston) gave talks. Kenneth Richman chaired the session. This topic is of particular and immediate concern, given the increased use of psychoactive drugs in young children and the increasing suspicion with which the public views pharmaceutical companies.

At the 2009 Central Division Meeting in Chicago, the Midwestern members of our committee organized a session on ethics codes. Bette Crigger of the American Medical Association gave a presentation on the work she is doing to revise the AMA code of ethics. A round table discussion followed with prepared comments by Michael Davis (Illinois Institute of Technology), Tod Chambers (Northwestern), and Jason Eberl (Indianapolis - Purdue University). Kevin McDonnell (Saint Mary’s College) chaired the session.

In response to recent controversy over the neurological criterion for determining death and the 2008 White Paper: Controversies in the Determination of Death by the President’s Council on Bioethics, the Committee on Philosophy and Medicine sponsored a session on “Is ‘brain death’ death?” at the 2009 Pacific Division Meeting in Vancouver. Our panel consisted of three physicians, D. Alan Shewmon (UCLA), Robert Truog (Harvard) and Ari Joffe (University of
Alberta), and the philosophers, Bernard Gert (Dartmouth) and Don Marquis (Kansas). John Lizza (Kutztown University) moderated and provided commentary at the session.

At the Pacific Division Meeting, the Committee also organized a gathering of members working in the field of philosophy and medicine in the hope of generating new ideas for the Committee’s work and submissions for the Newsletter for Philosophy and Medicine. As there were many sessions on bioethics and philosophy of medicine on the meeting program, we hoped that our gathering helped to facilitate dialogue and networking among the members with shared interests.

The Committee on Philosophy and Medicine will continue its collaboration with the Association for Bioethics and Humanities by sponsoring a panel session on “Translating ‘brain death’” at the 11th Annual Meeting of the ASBH in Washington, DC, October 15-18, 2009. The panelists, James Bernat (Dartmouth), David DeGrazia (George Washington), and Stuart Youngner (Case Western), will address the practical difficulties and ethical issues involved with communicating “brain death” to patients and families, particularly in the context of organ donation.

For the 2009 Eastern Division Meeting, the Committee has organized a session on Health Care Reform that will feature Daniel Callahan (Hastings Center), Norman Daniels (Harvard), and Leonard Fleck (Michigan State). Rosamond Rhodes (Mt. Sinai) will chair the session. We intend to allow ample time for discussion of this moving target.

Plans for the 2010 Central and Pacific Division Meeting are in the works. At the Central Division Meeting, Jim Nelson will chair a session on the “Dead-Donor Rule,” that will include a joint presentation by Frank Miller (Johns Hopkins) and Robert Truog (Harvard). For the next Pacific Division Meeting, the Committee is collaborating with the Society for Philosophy and Technology to jointly sponsor a session on “Neuroimaging and Human Nature.” Inmaculada De Melo-Martin will chair a panel that so far will include Patricia Smith Churchland (University of California, San Diego), Fabrice Jotterand (University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center), and Robert Rosenberger (Georgia Institute of Technology).

The APA Newsletter for Philosophy and Medicine is thriving under the editorialship of Mary Rorty and Mark Sheldon. The recent issues have included papers presented at our sponsored APA sessions, book reviews, and more. We are looking at ways to improve the electronic circulation of the newsletter to interested members.