



British Philosophical Association

Newsletter 2013

www.bpa.ac.uk

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Anita Avramides (Oxford)
David Bain (Glasgow)
Michael Brady (Glasgow)
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John Callanan (KCL)
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Tim Crane (Cambridge)
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Brendan Larvor (Hertfordshire)
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Herjeet Marway (Birmingham)
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It was a great honour to be elected as President of the BPA, and I have enjoyed my first year of tenure. Of course, Philosophy in Britain faces its fair share of difficulties, and we are all doubtless aware of the various pressures that the discipline faces – from the charging of fees, to the uncertain impact of ‘impact’, to the fall-out from REF2014, to the cloud that perhaps still hangs over A-level philosophy. And while our own government hasn’t perhaps come up with the sort of know-nothing comments that emerged from the recent election in Australia, one fears some of their attitudes may be similar. For all these reasons, then, a body like the BPA is needed, and we hope it will continue to find widespread support.

To help resist these external pressures, we must therefore do all we can to put our own house in order. For example, on issues to do with women in philosophy, the BPA continues to push for change, while also seeking for greater engagement between the discipline and schools, and the general public. We are also hoping to help the position of postgraduate students, and to find ways to smooth the very difficult transition from the PhD to permanent employment.

At a more personal level, I would like to thank Chris Hookway and Tom Sorell, who have left the BPA Executive after periods of very helpful service. It is also important to note with great sadness the untimely death of Gillian Howie, who was a great friend to the BPA and to the philosophy community in general.

I hope that the activities detailed in this Newsletter will be of interest. Should you have any suggestions of how else the BPA should be involved, please to let either myself or Michael Brady know, as we are keen to make the BPA as relevant to the needs of the discipline as we can.

Robert Stern

President of the BPA

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A note from the Director

I am pleased to report that philosophy in the UK has continued to flourish, despite continued threats and financial worries.

In the past year we have been doing our best to promote and sustain the study of philosophy in the UK. We have been working with the REF Philosophy sub-panel to inform departments about the forthcoming research exercise; we have organized meetings with UK Heads of Department to discuss grant capture and postgraduate issues; we have continued to campaign on behalf of women in philosophy, to support departments that are under threat, and to improve our connections with and support for the postgraduate community; and we have joined forces with other subject associations in order to oppose elements of the Government's proposals for Open Access publishing.

These activities have, of course, been made possible largely by the work of a small group of philosophers who have willingly given up their spare time. But most of our activities also cost money. We need to do mailshots, pay committee members' travel expenses to attend meetings, pay for the design and upkeep of our website, and pay our excellent Executive Secretary, Herjeet Marway, for her work.

We are very grateful to our individual, institutional, and departmental members for their continued support, but we desperately need more resources. Aside from the occasional bonus of revenue for advertising on our website, all of our income comes from our members. So if you are reading this and are not a member of the BPA, **please consider joining**. (If you're not sure whether you're a member, ask yourself whether you were invited to nominate someone to the Executive Committee recently. If you weren't, you aren't.)

I hope that the BPA will go from strength to strength in the coming years. But this will only happen if we are able to fund our activities; and that will only happen if the philosophical community supports us – not merely in spirit, but in cash. So please do join and help to support philosophy in the UK.

Michael Brady

Director of the BPA

BPA activities 2012-13

The BPA Executive Committee has been active on various fronts during 2012-13. More information on some of its activities is provided in the news items below, but here are some potted highlights. The various letters, proposals, and consultation responses are all available on our website.

Research Excellence Framework: The BPA organized a meeting of Heads of UK Departments with Alexander Bird, Chair of Sub-Panel 32, in September 2012. The purpose of the meeting was for Alexander to provide information about the exercise, and to answer questions from those present.

Open Access: The BPA responded to the HEFCE consultation on Open Access in publishing, writing a position paper, and endorsing joint statements and open letters about the issue from other subject associations.

Resisting Closure and GTA leaflets: We produced two leaflets: the first provided information about how departments can build profile and resist closure, which we hope will prove useful for departments under threat; the second raised issues about Graduate Teaching Assistant conditions of employment and offered 'best practice' advice for HoDs.

Executive Committee

The members elected to the BPA Executive Committee in July 2012, to serve a three-year term, were David Bain (Glasgow), Kimberley Brownlee (Warwick), Michael Lacewing (Heythrop), and Brendan Larvor (Hertfordshire).

Robert Stern (Sheffield) took over from MM McCabe as President in July 2012. Alessandra Tanesini (Cardiff) agreed to serve a third term as a co-opted member.

Open Access

The BPA responded to HEFCE's consultation process and produced its own position paper on the issue. The latter provided information about the Government's proposals, stated the BPA's views on and criticisms of various aspects of the policy, and suggested ways in which philosophers might respond so as to protect and promote philosophy publishing. Both of the papers are available on the BPA website (see www.bpa.ac.uk/policies/). The BPA has worked closely with the Arts & Humanities Users' Group in highlighting worries about the proposals, and in advertising our support for the 'green' model of open access. We will continue to develop our links, so that the Group can be a more effective lobbying organization on behalf of philosophy and other subjects in the humanities.

Universities under threat

Economic uncertainty and fee increases have increased the threat to philosophy teaching and philosophy jobs, especially in post-92 or 'new' universities. One of the things that the BPA has done to address this issue is to publish a leaflet, written by Mark Addis and Brendan Larvor, on ways in which staff can raise the profile of philosophy and resist the threat of closure. The document, which is available on the

BPA site, has very helpful suggestions about building alliances with other subjects, strengthening links and alliances with students by involving them in departmental activities, developing connections with local schools and teachers, and emphasizing the value of philosophy to parents and university managers. We would be happy to hear other suggestions that might be incorporated in a revised version of the document, so please do get in touch with us if you have any examples and advice that could help colleagues.

Women in philosophy

The BPA has a joint committee with the Society for Women in Philosophy, and this year has produced drafts of a number of 'best practice' documents on issues including conferences, gender bias, learned societies, sexual harassment, and staff-student relationships. We will circulate the documents to Heads of UK Departments for feedback and publish revised versions by the end of 2013. The BPA and SWiP will also hold a joint workshop on issues concerning women in philosophy early in 2014, and will invite all UK HoDs to attend.

Philosophy in schools

The BPA continues to work on a number of issues related to teaching philosophy in schools, and we are particularly grateful to Michael Lacewing and Tom Sorell for all of their hard work in this area. We have been working with the AQA examination board about changes to A level structure and syllabi. In particular, the BPA has been liaising with the AQA to form a group of academics to develop a new specification for A levels, and to nominate people who will help with a more rigorous process for setting exam questions and producing marking schemes. We are also working with the AQA in supplying a list of teachers that we would be happy to endorse as examiners, in order to address a concern as to whether the AQA provides enough training in philosophical content. And we are continuing to examine ways in which we can help to train teachers and to get more philosophy PhD students into teaching, with a view to improving teaching and examining at A level.

The BPA is also working to promote the teaching of philosophy more widely, and to this end we have entered into discussions with two organizations involved in the teaching of philosophy in pre-16 schools and in communities, the Philosophy Foundation and SAPERE.

A particular issue of concern during the past year was a document produced by the Russell Group – called 'Informed Choices' – which was intended as a guide for students making decisions about post-16 education. Following discussion with A level teachers, it became clear that certain sections of the guide were deterring schools from offering, and students from taking, A level philosophy. We wrote to the person responsible for the guide, outlining our concerns, and asking for changes to how the information is presented.

Postgraduate issues

In September 2012 the BPA produced a leaflet on Graduate Teaching Assistant pay and conditions, in response to worries, initially raised by the BPPA, as to divergence

between rates of pay, working conditions, and expectations for GTAs in UK universities. We brought these issues to the attention of Heads of Philosophy Departments, both in order to raise awareness of the problems that GTAs had reported, and to get feedback from HoDs on these topics. The leaflet – available at the BPA website – presented the findings of our survey, highlighted examples of what we regard as ‘best practice’ concerning pay and conditions, and made suggestions as to the kind of information that HoDs and teaching conveners should convey to GTAs, and the kind of expectations GTAs should have of their departments and institutions.

We will continue to listen to and support postgraduates in the UK, and the presence of Roxanna Lynch, a postgraduate representative on the BPA Executive Committee and co-author of the leaflet, has been very valuable to this end.

BPA online

The BPA website has been extensively revamped and placed on a new server, in part to house many of the Philosophy and Religious Studies’ (PRS) online resources, and in part because of ongoing problems with hacking and updating. Suggestions for additional content – especially in the Resources section of the site – are welcome. The BPA now has a Facebook page, and will be setting up a Twitter account; suggestions as to how to improve and expand our online presence would be welcome.

Public engagement

It is important, especially given pressures on philosophy, for us to promote philosophy to the general public and to help to raise the profile of the subject. We are therefore delighted to announce that Angie Hobbs, Professor for Public Understanding of Philosophy at the University of Sheffield, has agreed to join the BPA Executive Committee as a co-opted member. We hope to work closely with Angie to explore avenues for public engagement, and to think of further ways in which the value of our subject can be advertised to a wider audience.

Services for members

Book and journal discounts

Individual BPA members can take advantage of many discounts on books and journals. For example there is a significant discount for BPA members on *Mind*, plus a standard 20% discount on OUP, Palgrave Macmillan and Routledge philosophy books. We will be sending all members an updated list of discounts in due course.

Departments under threat

We see it as a core part of our mission to assist philosophy departments (and other units providing teaching and research in philosophy) that are threatened with closure or the winding-up of degree programmes. Please let us know if your department or degree programme is under threat, and we will help you in any way we can.

Join the BPA!

Individuals can now join online by filling in a simple form on our website, and then sending a cheque (£15 waged, £8 unwaged) or setting up a standing order. (Please make the date of the standing order 30 September.)

Learned societies can now also pay by standing order. Membership forms for learned societies, philosophy departments and equivalent units, and schools are available from our website.

New and renewing individual members will be sent information about how to claim book and journal discounts from publishers.

www.bpa.ac.uk/join_the_bpa