

THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

THE SOCIETY FOR THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

DIVISION 24 OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION FALL 2015 PRESIDENTIAL NEWSLETTER

MARK FREEMAN, PRESIDENT, DIVISION 24

Dear all,

I am writing now to provide an update on divisional activities and initiatives and also to share a few thoughts as I conclude my term as President of the Division. I should note that, ordinarily, you would have been hearing from my successor at this time rather than me. But as most of you know, my would-be successor, Steve Harrist, passed away last year. As a result, Thomas Teo and I agreed to split the year between us, with me continuing to serve as President of the Division until January 1 and Thomas taking over after that. The Division's Executive Committee found this to be a workable plan and therefore voted to support it.

For those of you who didn't know Steve Harrist—and, of course, for those of you who did as well—he was a soft-spoken, kind, extremely thoughtful person. He was also a strong and loyal member of the Division, who, in his own understated way, was a powerful force. The power had to do with the clarity and tenacity of his thought. As for the force, it had to do with Steve's being a force for *good*. It came as no surprise that he and Josh Clegg, this year's Program Chair for the APA meeting in Denver this August, had settled on "Psychology's Moral Vision" for the year's theme.

It should be noted that Steve and Josh had settled on this theme well before the news broke about the Hoffman report. That's no doubt because the issue of psychology's moral vision—and, at times, lack of it—was a fundamental concern. Identifying this theme turned out to be all too prophetic. Let's do what we can to honor it this year. It will be a fitting tribute to Steve. It's also extremely important work for the Division. Indeed, there is no APA division better poised to think about psychology's moral vision than our own.

Let me now call to your attention some notable divisional activities and initiatives.

- **Division 24's 2015 Midwinter meeting** was held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from March 5-7, and in my (admittedly biased) view, it was a terrific and truly memorable one. Serving as our Planning Committee Co-Chairs were Mary Beth Morrissey and Chris Ramey.

Joining them on the Planning Committee were Gregg Henriques, Katie Howe, Jordan Hyde, Lisa Osbeck, Jeff Reber, and Brady Wiggins. I also want to note the contributions made by Snjezana Huerta and Tyler Lefevor, Co-Chairs of the Division's Student Committee. These people deserve our deepest gratitude for making it all happen and happen well. Some notable events included a plenary session called "Critique and Creation: Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology's Role in Understanding and Transforming Culture"; an inspiring lecture titled "Revisiting the Role of Introspection in William James' Psychological Theory," presented by Professor Saulo de Freitas Araujo, who traveled all the way from Brazil to join us; "A Conversation About Teaching and Theory & Philosophy in Psychology"; and an interactive symposium on "The Female Voice in Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology," which did wonderfully well to generate significant dialogue about some vitally important issues.

Alongside these plenary events were numerous symposia and paper sessions, all of which made for a rich intellectual atmosphere; and alongside the realm of events were those less formal gatherings that brought people together to break bread, stroll through the city, and share some quality time. Especially significant in this latter, less formal context was the presence of students, who really seemed to connect with one another and with the Division. All told, I think I speak for all who attended the meeting in saying: it was an excellent and most worthwhile gathering.

- In accordance with the APA Committee on Aging (CONA), **a new task divisional committee on older adults and aging** was formed in June 2015. As noted in one of its communications, "CONA works within the Public Interest Directorate to ensure that older adults, especially the growing numbers of older women and minorities, receive the attention of the Association." It also "works toward the optimal development of older adults, expanding scientific understanding of adult development and aging, and the delivery of appropriate psychological services to older persons." Upon being asked if there might be interest in this initiative among our members, I wrote to the Division and was eventually contacted by some ten individuals who were indeed interested in getting involved. I also asked Mary Beth Morrissey, our divisional Treasurer and someone with extensive experience studying aging and related policy matters, whether she would be willing to serve as the point person for the committee, which she graciously agreed to do. On behalf of the Division, I wish to express my thanks to Mary Beth and others who have stepped forward to contribute to this initiative.
- **The annual meeting of the APA** was held in Toronto, from August 6-9. Thanks especially to the good work of Sunil Bhatia, last year's Program Chair, the Division's program was an outstanding one. The program did particularly well to embody last year's divisional theme, "Theory, Practice and Identity in a Global and Culturally Diverse World," and featured both divisional "veterans" and newcomers to the Division. I also want to note the contributions made by Marissa Barnes and Basia Ellis, who ran the hospitality suite program. They did a wonderful job and deserve our heartfelt thanks – for their planning and organizational skills, their expertise and good taste in food and drink, and, not least, their hospitality.

In terms of hospitality suite programming, two events deserve special mention: a conversation among those interested in exploring issues related to the psychology of aging (in light of the aforementioned initiative) and one dedicated to exploring the Hoffman report and how the Division might best contribute to future efforts in rethinking ethics in the APA. On behalf of the Division, I want to recognize and express my gratitude to Lisa Osbeck, the Division's Council Representative, who worked hard to address issues tied to the Hoffman report and kept the Division abreast of any and all relevant Council activities. We are fortunate to have Lisa serving in this important role. We are also fortunate to be able to welcome new members of the Division's Executive Committee: Mary Beth Morrissey (Treasurer), Brent Dean Robbins (Member-at-Large), and Thomas Teo, who will be serving as both President-elect and, beginning in January, President. Joining them on the Division's extended Executive Committee is Cacky Mellor, who, along with Snjezana Huerta, will be leading this year's Student Committee.

At our annual business meeting in Toronto, we had the opportunity to honor the winners of **divisional awards**. These included Jack Martin (Award for distinguished theoretical and philosophical contributions to psychology), Jeff Reber, (Distinguished Service Award), John Roberts (Sigmund Koch Award for early career contribution to psychology), Tyler Lefevor (Outstanding Student Service Award), and John Shotter (Theodore Sarbin Award). Student paper awards were also presented to Pavan Brar, of York University (for his paper "Schizophrenia, medical discourse, and the meaning of psychotic experiences: Ethical and practical considerations"), and Zhipeng Gao, also of York University (for his paper "Dialoguing on identity within the research relation: A reflexive encounter"). Congratulations also go to Jeff Reber and Kate Slaney, who were named Fellows in the Division. Finally, I want to recognize Sunil Bhatia, last year's recipient of the APA's International Humanitarian Award for his extraordinary work addressing sanitation issues in India. Congratulations to all, once again!

- One important outcome of discussions held in Toronto was the decision to form a **divisional task force to address issues that emerged in the wake of the Hoffman report**. Some of these issues would no doubt be Hoffman-report specific. My own hope, however, was that the task force would see the Hoffman report as a site for thinking about larger ethical and moral questions and concerns. More specifically, as I wrote to the task force and members of the Executive Committee at the time, my hope was "that this task force [would] be able to offer a statement that somehow speaks not only to the specific issue of torture (important though that is) but to the entire disciplinary matrix within which it has emerged." On my reading, the ethical and moral issues to be considered go deep and the challenging of thinking them through is a large one. Here too, I noted, "there is no division better poised to take this on than ours." Chairing the task force are Dan Aalbers and Lisa Osbeck. Other members are Josh Clegg, Phil Cushman, Rebecca Gordon, Gregg Henriques, Ron Miller, Mary Beth Morrissey, Jeff Reber, Brent Slife, and Alan Tjeltveit. Where their work will end up is difficult to say; it's still early in the process. But it's a terrific group of people, and I am confident that their work will lead us forward in our thinking about psychology's ethical and moral foundations. Please join me in thanking them for stepping forward to contribute to this important initiative.

- Another important event, sponsored in part by Division 24, was the **2015 Psychology and the Other Conference**, held at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts this past October. Owing especially to the excellent work of David Goodman and Brian Becker, this conference proved to be another extraordinary opportunity for scholars from around the world to share ideas pertinent to understanding, healing, and serving other people and, more generally, “thinking otherwise” about certain features of the psychological world. Of special relevance to the Division were invited addresses and featured presentations by some notable divisional figures as well as “critical conversations”—extended interview/dialogues—with a number of others in the Division. These conversations will ultimately find their way into a Palgrave Macmillan volume edited by Heather Macdonald, David Goodman, and Brian Becker titled *Critical and Theoretical Perspectives in Psychology: Dialogues at the Edge of American Psychological Discourse*.
- Calls have gone out for **Division 24’s 2016 Midwinter meeting**, to be held in Salt Lake City once again, from March 11-13. Serving as Program Chairs this year are Gregg Henriques and Brady Wiggins, so we’ll be in very good hands. As already noted, we have adopted the theme that the late Steve Harrist had intended for his presidential year: “Psychology’s Moral Vision.” For further details, please see the “Call for Proposals” sent out a short while ago.

Now that I have reviewed some of the divisional activities and initiatives that have taken place over the course of the past year, I want to share a few thoughts about the Division, the APA, and the discipline of psychology.

APA programming and our relationship to the APA. As some of you may recall, I addressed this in the newsletter I sent out last winter. As I noted at the time, we were informed that there would be a progressive reduction in divisional program hours over the course of the coming years. As I also noted, this doesn’t bode well—for comparatively small divisions, like our own, especially. It might be argued in this context that the rise in collaborative programming somehow compensates for the loss of divisional hours. But the fact is, despite our best efforts to contribute to such collaborative efforts during the last couple of years, the opportunities for actually doing so have been rare. (Few of the proposals that have been submitted have been accepted.) It’s difficult to know why this is. Some of it may be the proverbial luck of the draw. But some of it may also have to do with the fact that many of our favored topics don’t quite mesh with those being promoted by APA. Whatever the reason may be, we need to come to terms with the fact that our divisional presence at the annual meeting is diminishing. I therefore ask: How much do we care about this? More to the point (and as I asked last year): What exactly do we want as a Division? How important *is* the APA meeting? Indeed: How important is the APA for the likes of us?

As was the case last year, my own answer varies quite a bit—and suffice it to say, the Hoffman report certainly hasn't helped matters. I might note here that, at one point last year, I was told by someone in no uncertain terms that, in view of the report, the only truly responsible thing to do would be to leave the APA entirely. For, how could one possibly, in all good conscience, continue to be a part of this enterprise? What I said at the time, what I said toward the end of my presidential address in Toronto, and what I am prepared to say again, is that I still think it's important for us to stay the course and be a part of the APA enterprise. As I put the matter in my address, "if there's a reason to stay in the APA, at least for a while—aside from all the good people who are here and who make this division the excellent one it is—it has to do with the prospect of building [a discipline] that's better: more adequate, more humane, more ethically sound, more true." As I went on to say, "There really is no rational reason to remain. But there's an ethical reason. We owe it to our students and to future generations to remain a part of this potentially noble and valuable endeavor. I hope you agree."

Here, of course, it could be argued there is an important distinction to be made between our commitment to the discipline of psychology and our commitment to the APA. Indeed, it could be argued that the best way of serving the former is to lessen our ties to the latter. It could also be argued (as it was, by some people last year, responding to the Hoffman report) that our commitment ought to be *neither* to the discipline nor to the APA but to *people*, to the flesh and blood human beings we are seeking to understand and serve. I sympathize with aspects of each of these arguments. Nevertheless, I still find myself wanting—and wanting all of you—to stay the course. Part of the reason is the ethical commitment to students and to future generations just referred to. And part of it has to do with the fact that organizations as massive as the APA desperately need the kind of critical voice we in the Division are prepared to offer. Massive though the APA is, transformation surely remains possible. We ought to be a part of it.

The issue of divisional identity. I just referred to the Division's ability—and responsibility—to provide a "critical voice" in regard to APA matters. We can extend this idea to our role in relation to the discipline of psychology more generally. It's a vitally important one, to be sure. Indeed, it seems safe to say that our division, perhaps more than any other, has this critical dimension as its "signature," its defining feature. At the same time, I continue to find myself asking what else we stand for—or might stand for. It was for this reason that, at last year's Midwinter meeting, I helped to organize the symposium on "Critique and Creation: Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology's Role in Understanding and Transforming Culture," which, among other things, was about "taking stock of who and what we are as a division, and working both critically and creatively to reimagine our shared enterprise." I was particularly attracted to the "creation" part, not least because it was geared toward addressing not only what was "wrong" with the discipline but what it might take to make it (closer to) right.

In many ways, the issue of divisional identity remains a vexing one. On the one hand, many find it appealing to have a strong divisional signature, and the project of disciplinary critique has generally done well to maintain it. There are, of course, other defining features of the Division as well—for instance, tied to the primacy of interpretation, the sociocultural constitution of experience, the centrality of the idea of personhood, the value-ladenness of psychological inquiry, and more. Many of us have come to speak a somewhat common language, and that's made for a sense of intellectual community that's extremely valuable. On the other hand, many

in the Division have expressed a desire to see it become more pluralistic, more welcoming of those perspectives—and people—that might take us in new directions. So it was that, in my previous newsletter, I had encouraged us “to work toward building a more inclusive division,” which I meant “not only in terms of important dimensions such as gender, race, and ethnicity but in terms of ideas, practices, and bodies of theory.” I still encourage us to do so. But what exactly does this mean? In the context of dimensions such as gender, race, and ethnicity, I think it means expanding our reach and doing so in as thoughtful and intentional a way as we can. I was especially encouraged by last year’s Midwinter symposium on the “female voice” in theoretical and philosophical psychology. Difficult though some of the discussion proved to be, it was a meaningful and important one, and it inaugurated a new awareness and a new openness to imagining what the Division might become.

But what does it mean for the Division to become more pluralistic in terms of ideas, practices, and bodies of theory? *How* pluralistic should the Division be? What are its “proper” parameters? Should it have any? Or should it move in the direction of becoming more of a clearinghouse for (good) theoretical and philosophical work, whatever it may be? I would venture that many in the Division would be reluctant to move too swiftly in this direction, precisely out of a concern that it might lose some defining features of its identity. The question then becomes: How can the Division retain its distinctive signature while both expanding its purview in a truly substantial way and more readily welcoming newcomers into the mix?

Bringing the next generation into the Division. This issue, of course, isn’t unrelated to the first two. At a most basic level, it has to do with sustaining—and, as appropriate, transforming—the Division’s work. As I stated last year, the numbers issue—i.e., the issue of how to increase membership in the Division—is one reason. But as I hastened to add, the more substantive reason is that there’s some excellent work being done out there, and these people are the future of the Division. We therefore need to cultivate them and do what we can to help them find work that matches their passions and talents. We also need to encourage them to stand forth and be heard, to undertake initiatives of their own, and to see themselves as active players in the life of the Division. One of the things I found most enlivening about last year’s Midwinter meeting as well as the APA meeting in Toronto was the energy and sense of commitment among students and early career scholars. My hope is that this will continue into the future. It’s vitally important—for the Division and for the discipline.

Engaging the world of contemporary culture as well as the wider world. As part of the “Critique and Creation” symposium referred to earlier, we had sought to identify and explore “those issues in contemporary culture that ‘call out’ to us as theoretical and philosophical psychologists” as well as those we are “called upon, perhaps even obligated, to address.” As suggested at the time, these issues needed to be addressed on two distinct planes: that of contemporary experience (such that we would seek to address those features of experience that might be deemed particularly troubling, even pathological) and that of the discipline of psychology (such that we would seek to address comparably troubling features of the discipline itself). As we also went on to ask—in a way that now, in the wake of the Hoffman report, seems all too prescient—“Are there dimensions of the discipline of psychology that mirror troubling trends in the broader culture? To what extent is the discipline complicit in furthering these trends? And what are our own responsibilities in addressing them?”

These sorts of questions and concerns remain live ones for many of us in the Division, and my hope is that they will continue to animate our work. At this particular moment, though, I also encourage us to extend our reach even further. Not long ago, I sent a note to the Division's Executive Committee in which I called for suggestions about "large" symposia or discussions—i.e., ones that really took on some important issue or set of issues. "Speaking for myself," I wrote, "I'm finding myself asking a large question these days that's emerged in the wake of the Paris bombings, the Trump candidacy, and more. It might be titled something like: "Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology on the World Stage: What Might We Contribute"? Some members of the EC were excited about the prospect of moving in this direction. Others expressed caution about our trying to tackle issues for which we might not have sufficient expertise. This makes sense; it's important that we know what we're talking about before we talk about it. This qualification notwithstanding, I do wonder, still, whether we might work toward supplementing our tendency to look inward—whether at ourselves, the discipline, or contemporary Western culture—with an increased effort to look outward and to become more engaged, theoretically and philosophically, with the wider world.

One might of course ask in this context: Does the world really need us? According to Marco Rubio, among many others, the answer is clearly No. "Welders make more money than philosophers," Rubio recently told us. Consequently (the logic is indeed curious here), "We need more welders and less philosophers." Perhaps we do need more welders. But he's quite wrong about philosophers—and theoretical and philosophical psychologists. Rubio's statement is an especially crude one; most politicians would at least have the decency to keep sentiments like these to themselves. But what Rubio said isn't all that different from what many of our colleagues might say: We need more studies, they might argue, more data, more results, able to find their way into "top tier" journals; as for theoretical and philosophical psychology, it can't help but be seen as a useless frill. Let's resist this way of thinking as strenuously as we can. And let's continue to do our work, looking both inward and outward, as thoughtfully and imaginatively as we can. It's extremely important that we do so.

As noted earlier, I will be stepping down as President of the Division at the end of the month, at which time Thomas Teo will be taking over. For now, I simply wish to say that it's been an honor and a privilege to serve the Division. Please know that I will continue to serve the Division in whatever way I can going forward.

All the best,

Mark