



RPA Newsletter

Newsletter for the Radical Philosophy Association

06-25-2018

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Greetings from the Co-Coordinator

Tanya Loughead and Brandon Absher

Greetings RPA-ers,

Welcome to our newly re-started RPA Newsletter!

As most of you know, the newsletter of the RPA was once a central feature of the activities of the organization. In recent years, however, we have not produced a newsletter. There were many reasons for this, but the foremost reason was the ongoing work to launch the [RPA Mag](#). We believed previously that the RPA Mag could serve the prior function of the newsletter - updating and connecting members, establishing a community of conversation for radical scholars, and conveying the news of the organization. As the RPA Mag has taken shape though, we have come to consider it much more as an "outward looking" vehicle for allowing radical philosophers to reach popular audiences with work that is timely, provocative, and accessible. We are therefore re-starting the RPA Newsletter so that we remain connected to one another and able to carry on the important "inward looking" conversations that are necessary for the RPA as an organization in this very dark time.

Our hope is that going forward the newsletter will be an annual production where members can achieve these important goals. To that end, in this newsletter, you will find discussions of the pre-history and future direction of the RPA as well as updates concerning the goings-on and business of the organization. As with the RPA Mag, we hope to see the newsletter continue and expand as a collaborative effort. If you would like to contribute photos, art work, updates, or short articles, please let us know. Short responses to pieces that appear in the newsletter are also encouraged.

As always, please remember to renew your membership. You can do so through the [Philosophy Documentation Center](#). For those of you who are able, please contact your college or university library and ask that they get an institutional subscription to the *Radical Philosophy Review*. It is a wonderful resource to have on hand and every subscription helps us to ensure that the RPA continues to thrive.

Finally, please hard copies of this newsletter are available by request. Please email Tanya Loughead at loughead@canisius.edu.

Marxist Activist Philosophers: A Prehistory of the RPA

by Ken Megill

I don't remember the exact date, but I do remember it was a glorious Spring day when a few philosophers gathered on the Swathmore Campus to invent a new way to do philosophy. It was in the early seventies. There were less than a dozen of us. We were remnants of New University Conference, an organization we called the "grown up SDS".

Richard Schmitt was there and can no doubt give a more accurate description of who was there and what we were trying to do. I know Milt Fisk was also there and Richard Schultheiss who was our host at Swarthmore. There were a few others.

NUC had wisely dissolved – we were heavily infiltrated by FBI spies and SDS had disintegrated. Only a few of us had survived the repression. We were the ones whom, as the Joe Hill song says, they forgot to kill.

We issued a proclamation and pledged to do a new kind of philosophy. (The proclamation and other early documents are probably in my papers in the [University of Florida Library](#).)

We issued a proclamation and pledged to do a new kind of philosophy.

We had been involved in the establishment of the Radical Philosophers caucus at the American Philosophical Association and a publication called the Radical Philosophy Newsjournal. This was one of many groups designed to take over control of professional associations. These takeovers were discussed and organized by the New University Conference. Our purpose was to seize the institutions. The most successful take-over was at the Modern Languages Association. We philosophers were able to get anti-war resolutions through the APA. In 1972, the APA passed a resolution condemning my firing at the University of Florida. We were serious about seizing power, which meant seizing control of our profession and our institutions but we were defeated as the liberals and reactionaries took back full control of the APA and its conferences.

RPA became one more section of the meetings. The Radical Philosophy Newsjournal was relegated to the dustbin of history. A "radical" journal was published mimicking other journals. Papers were delivered at sessions just like the "real" sessions. The work of "radicals" mirrored that of the "profession" we failed to seize. The dream of a new way to do philosophy was stillborn.

We need to remember how close we came to taking power in the 60's and early 70's and how complete the repression was.

MAP was created once it was clear we were defeated in our attempt to take control of the universities and professional institutions. We had given up taking power. We were trying to survive. As I recall, we agreed to:

1. **Coordinate research and writing.** Rawls' book on justice had just come out and Milt Fisk suggested, and we agreed, that we should mount a coordinated attack. We would write a series of papers and attack the liberal ideology underlying the fascist institutions where we worked. We would defeat Rawls and his ilk on the battlefield of philosophy. We would coordinate our writing.
2. **Combine theory and practice.** Most of us had adopted some form of Marxism by that time and knew that good theory could only come from good practice. We would be active in the "movement" which was in disarray.

We were serious about being revolutionaries. We were keenly aware that we had been defeated. Our best hope was for a few of us to find a new way to do our work.

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MAP did survive, but not at all as we hoped and wished. I remember sitting in the back of a rather large room at an APA conference in Washington, DC a dozen or more years later listening to a discussion on the "real character" of MAP. There were earnest speeches about the "True Meaning" of MAP.

I kept quiet, but afterwards I did tell a few folks who recognized me that we made up the name as a joke after we agreed to work together. It was time for us to depart and we decided we needed a name. I had gotten into union organizing by then and cited the lessons I had learned from my mentor in propaganda writing. It had to be short. It had to be memorable. We wrote down a whole bunch of words on the board and then settled on MAP since it was short and had good letters and described those of us in the room – we were Marxists, we had been activists and we were "professional" philosophers. The real meaning of MAP is that it was a neat word – and short.

I was never able to get back into professional philosophy – although I tried many times. I went on to two or three more careers. For the past couple of decades I have worked, both practically and theoretically, to find how to use digital tools in knowledge work.

I would like to think that this MAG might be a tool to enable some of the vision we had in Swarthmore to take root.

I am interested in what others might remember about MAP and how we might do philosophy today.

Why didn't it work?

Is collaborative work possible now in ways it was not before?

What is the knowledge work?

How do we do it?

Whither the Radical Philosophy Association?

by Richard Peterson

In looking forward to this autumn's RPA conference (2018), we might return to questions that were raised at the 2016 plenary panel about future directions of our organization. Though it had been planned long in advance, that panel gained a certain urgency thanks to the presidential election that had just taken place. But, so soon after the event, much of the discussion had less to do with the impending political crisis than with worries that the RPA had lost its political edge and had become more like a conventional professional association of specialized scholars. Against that prospect, the meeting ended with resolutions about working groups that would address mentorship, race and racism, gender, sexuality, and environmentalism. This was in the spirit of an organization of intellectuals whose work depends on the activity of social movements and resists conventional academic specialization – and that assumes that philosophical insight has a place in genuine social change.

By now – 15 months into the Trump regime – the dangers it presents are no longer just matters of worried speculation, and they should be very much the focus of RPA discussions. How best to respond may not be obvious, but it is clear that the political issues our society faces are not only about specific policies or the psychopathology of a particular leader. And they are not restricted to the US. It is a crisis of liberal democratic institutions, and concerns political organizations as well as the very nature of political discourse in an expansive and crisis-ridden capitalism. No doubt there are associated fundamental questions about ongoing travails of the globalized economy, the advancing environmental catastrophe, and the deepening racial, ethnic, and religious divisions that fuel actual and potential civil wars throughout the world. But, in the first instance, we face the danger of what some writers see as the symptoms of a new era of fascism: in the context of unresolved economic crisis the rise of xenophobic authoritarian nationalism that readily sets aside democratic process and human rights as it pursues increasingly militarist policies.

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How should the RPA respond? It should at the very least foster debates about how to conceptualize this dangerous historical moment. These should address theoretical questions, but they should also take up the practical roles of intellectuals in the various social contexts in which they are active – for example, education, public debate, and in political movements. Apart from their political aspects, these are contexts of cultural practice, and philosophy is, among other things, a key facet of cultural life insofar as it works on the most general terms of the understanding of social life and the formation of agents. To appreciate this, one need go no further than cite the creepy suggestion that we live in a “post-truth age.”

Can we – as an organization – be more specific about our tasks as intellectuals? The RPA has never projected a political line even though its history is inseparable from specific political experiences and trends. For thinking about where we need to go, it helps to consider where we've been.

As I think of it, the RPA arose as response of philosophers to institutional crises and political initiatives that are now very much a thing of the past – the experiences of the sixties and seventies. The artfully ambiguous term “radical” had a special force in that setting. It was not an abstraction that simply promoted a kind of pluralism of views and interests rooted in movements that were on their separate trajectories, nor was it a covert nod to Marxism. Of course it did signal an appreciation of diversity on the one hand and an interest in thinking about change in systematic ways on the other. But, in contrast to pluralism, “radical” also signaled a commitment to practical solidarity and intellectual synthesis at a time when different social movements were challenging a variety of forms of oppression. For many, it meant developing a different practice of philosophy.

In these respects, the radicalness of the RPA resulted from a kind of learning about domination and exploitation that some intellectuals underwent during that period. This learning drew from the Civil Rights Movement and the struggles over racism that ensued, the student movement and the interrelated struggles of the Anti-Vietnam War movement, and, quite crucially, the rise of a new feminism. A variety of Marxisms offered ways to connect these movements to capitalism as a social form, but none of them had really achieved a synthesis that balanced interconnections with the distinctiveness of specific oppressions and struggles. Of course there was much more to this history, but my point is that the early RPA asserted a radicalism that was specific to a historical moment, however long lasting the resulting questions have proven to be.

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If in fact today the RPA is more pluralist than synthesizing, more conventionally academic than politically engaged, this is not just a generational matter, but reflects a changing context and changes in politics. It’s partly a matter of the kind of success that movements supported by the RPA have had, as feminists, anti-racists, environmentalists, and others have formed their own organizations, publications, and contributed to what has been a (perhaps unavoidable) fragmenting logic. Success within intellectual institutions has resulted in a kind of professionalization of different strands of radical discourse, co-existing with the rise of neoliberalism.

If we can contrast at least two phases of the RPA, perhaps today we see the beginnings of a third as it responds to a new context. The burst of activism against the Trump regime may be part of a pattern of resistances, occupations, and other initiatives in the decade since the financial crisis. And this is tied to a renewed interest in radical thought, indicated by new journals, discussions of socialism, and yet more rethinking of Marx’s legacy. Where this may lead is unclear: it takes place in a weak political culture and so far lacks effective unifying organizations.

This brings us back to the crisis of political institutions and discourse that I’ve claimed defines our present moment. In this setting, failing to overcome the fragmentation of critical thought means taking a serious risk. **Fragmented consciousness within an increasingly extensive – and intensive – net of commodification and other normalizing practices is a hallmark of our times. But this is even more dangerous when constraints on institutional and direct violence grow weaker.**

My point is philosophical: at a moment of deepened uncertainty about institutional possibilities, there is great need for rethinking concepts proper to social criticism. We need to think through what is specific to our world, with its mix of stasis and change, reaction and resistance, a loss of confidence in the old and the lack of agreement about real options. The question of labor evolves with the reordering of economic life in more global forms that coincide with dramatic changes in technology and social existence. If such change harbors the possibility of a post-scarcity economy, the imagery of mass culture favors dystopias of post-apocalyptic survival or social life administered by machines.

Radicals have to acknowledge the historical disasters associated with projects of revolutionary change along with the shortfall of reformist statism. How should we think about change in ways that accommodate this history while clarifying the destructive logic of the status quo? What notions of freedom and individuality can accommodate resistance to contemporary forms of power while not falling into the clichés of the old liberalism? What forms of social agency can emerge in post-industrial conditions where solidarity is not so easily associated with evolving forms of socialization? What notions of solidarity make sense in a world of renewed racism, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism? What are the conditions for a renewed ethical language proper to a world of problematic traditions, technocratic double-speak, and clashing identities?

It's possible to go on and on in this vein. In any case, the point is not to propose an agenda for the RPA, much less to suggest that I've provided an authoritative analysis. But I do think that being radical today requires a renewed challenge to think our times in thought, as a necessary aspect of contributing to a generally emancipatory and democratizing politics.

A Response to 'Whither the Radical Philosophy Association?'

by Richard Schmitt

I am grateful to Richard Peterson for his reminder that our philosophy is radical and that that means that we need to rethink the present moment in our history as philosophers. I would like to mention some other issues that radical philosophers also need to confront. I will limit these suggestions to the radical philosophers who are also teachers.

In the first place, radical philosophers who teach need to struggle to hold onto the jobs they had difficulty getting in the first place. They need to compete on the academic job market and they need to publish books and articles and academia has fairly clear expectations for all this. A good deal of what we would like to write as radical philosophers is not publishable. There is considerable pressure on academic philosophers to write about the view that philosopher X has on the thesis put forward by philosopher Y or how philosopher A misinterprets philosopher B. **"Radical" philosophy is not a clearly established way of working. Efforts to develop a genuinely radical philosophy are diverted by the demands of academic job market, as well as Deans and chairs of philosophy departments. How to protect and advance efforts to clarify a genuinely radical philosophy is a real challenge.**

Even when one is comfortably placed in a job there are serious difficulties. How does one, while teaching, open one's students minds to a radical perspective? Thinking of the teaching that I have done, and I suspect others have done also, I now think that marching into the classroom as a radical and assuming that the students are interested in politics or know something about politics is a big mistake. "Laying" Marxism or radicalism on students is probably a complete waste of time. I have taught classes where at the end everyone was convinced that only a revolution would solve our problems. The majority of them planned to attend Harvard Law school after graduation. So much for revolution.

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It is a real challenge to address ordinary American students and make them wonder about the state of the world. It is obviously very worthwhile talking about that among ourselves to share brilliant classes we have taught and failures we have suffered.

And then there are relations to colleagues. What many of us do, and I did, is to act so as to easily get stereotyped as a "radical." That means that no one has to take you seriously because you're obviously crazy. We might well profit, then, from talking to one another about how to take some political leadership and how to raise painful questions in such a way that colleagues have to take you seriously.

Treasurer's Report

Submitted by Harry van der Linden, Treasurer

January 1, 2017-December 31, 2017

Income

- RPR, RPT (subscriptions, online articles)
7835.28
- International Herbert Marcuse Society support for RPR 20.1
1700.00
- RPA conference at University of Kentucky
1559.79

Total: 11,095.07

Expenses

- PDC Subscription Fulfillment Services 2016
2213.14
- Printing, typesetting, and editing RPR 19.3, 20.1, 20.1
9917.36
- Support for Turkish Academics
250.00
- "Office" (tax attorney, domain name, stamps)
78.25

Total: 12,458.76

Deficit: 1363.69

Funds on hand on 1/1/2017: 14,952.59

Funds on hand on 12/31/2017: 13,588.90

(15.90 petty cash; 13,573.00 in bank account)

Minutes from 2016 Business Meeting

Submitted by Richard Peterson, Secretary

RPA Business Meeting, November 12, RPA 12th Biennial Conference, Nov. 10-12, 2014, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY.

1. Meeting called to order by Tanya Loughead and Brandon Absher (Co-coordinators) at 5:20 pm.
2. Minutes from the business meeting from the previous conference at Stony Brook University (Nov. 8, 2014) were presented by Richard Peterson (Secretary) and approved by the body.
3. Treasurer's Report. Harry van der Linden distributed an accounting that shows a current balance of \$15,252.59, noting an outstanding printing cost of the RPR of around \$3500. Virtually all budgetary activity this past period concerned the journal, which breaks even. So, some money is available for special projects.
4. *Radical Philosophy Review*: Editor's report. Harry van der Linden noted the departure from the normal publishing schedule of two issues a year made possible by subsidized special issues in collaboration with the Herbert Marcuse Society. He expects that we will return to the normal schedule for the foreseeable future, and will aim to produce around 150 pages per issue. Sarah Vitale and Sebastian Purcell will co-edit the coming issue based on this conference's proceedings. Harry urges efforts to expand our institutional subscriptions and asks for volunteers to help with reviewing submissions to the journal; prompt turnover is essential to this process.
5. Regional Planning Committee reports. Ali Kashani reported on programs held at Pacific APA meetings and notes some problems coordinating with that conference. We look forward to reports from the other two regions.
6. Report from the Center for Global Justice. Cliff Durand noted that the Center is a self-supporting part of the RPA and runs educational events, often for "visiting gringos." Their film showings, lectures and short courses reach around 1000 persons a year. The Center also sponsors trips to Cuba (four last year, and four next year), and can arrange customized courses (e.g., for visiting student groups) on (or in) Cuba and in Mexico (e.g., to Chiapas to study the achievements of the Zapatista Movement) or to the cooperative resort depicted in this conference's film, *The Cooperative Alternative: Cooperativa Ejidal: Grutas de Tolantongo*. The Center has also worked on the study and promotion of workers' cooperatives in Mexico.
7. RPA Personnel Matters:
 - Tanya Loughead was nominated and unanimously approved for a second term as co-coordinator.
 - Sebastian Purcell was nominated and elected without opposition as Central Region coordinator. The body thanked Forrest Perry who has served diligently in this post for some years.

- Lila Wakeman was nominated and approved without opposition as Graduate Student Representative to the Advisor Committee
- Jeffrey Nicholas was nominated and elected without opposition as an at-large member of the Advisory Committee. He will replace Peter Amato, whose many efforts for the organization were noted and appreciated by the body.

8. RPR Personnel Matters: in keeping with the procedures adopted at the last meeting for determining the editorial personnel of the journal, the body voted its acceptance of the Advisory Committee's recommendation that Jose Mendoza continue as Co-editor, that Harry van der Linden continue as Editor, and that Richard Peterson continue as Book Review Editor.

9. Discussion of the arrangements for the next RPA conference (2018). Sarah Vitale was selected to head the Program Committee. Corwin Aragon, Anne Pomeroy, Sebastian Purcell, and George Furlas agreed to serve on the Committee and were approved by the body. Jose Mendoza suggests to the group's approval that at least other four other groups be invited to organize panels for the next meeting. This would enhance our links to like-minded groups and perhaps add to a sense of the organization's political commitments. Jose also suggested that our next conference be held at his home institution, University of Massachusetts/Lowell, which has appropriate facilities and is near a major metropolitan center. The body gratefully accepted his offer.

10. Presentation of a proposed online *RPA Mag*. Brandon Absher and Tanya Loughhead demonstrate of the online magazine/blog that they have been developing. The aim is to provide a forum for discussion and news of interest to RPA members. The former Newsletter may be reworked in this new format. Members will be invited to submit short pieces that would be reviewed by the editorial group. We will be hearing more soon.

11. New Business.

- Discussion of committees that would pursue themes discussed at the previous day's plenary on future directions of the RPA. The focus of such groups might be mentorship, race and racism, gender, sexuality, and environmentalism. Such working groups might develop panels for conferences, specific projects, contribute to the proposed magazine/blog, and so on.
- Carl Davidson described the On Line University of the Left and encouraged participation in it by members of the RPA.
- Richard Schmitt raised the possibility of on-line meetings that would be less expensive and less hard on the environment. Others spoke for the advantages of face-to-face meetings.
- Christian Lotz cited problems for the program committee caused by late cancellations by scheduled participants and the resulting shifting of the schedule. Relevant issues might be discussed with the new Program Committee, e.g., regarding Thursday and Sunday scheduling, venue of the conference, and so on. Members of the RPA are asked for their views and suggestions.

12. After hearty thanks from those present to the conference organizers, especially Lila Wakeman and Arnold Farr, the meeting was adjourned, at 6:30 pm.

Radical Philosophy Review Report

Submitted by Harry van der Linden, Editor

The format of having an editorial executive committee with an editor and three coeditors running the daily operations of the journal continues to work well. Articles are submitted to the editor and then the executive committee decides who will become the lead editor of any specific submission. Our diversity of interest and specialization usually makes this an easy procedure. The lead editor reads the article, sends it to two referees, or proposes that the article is rejected “in-house.” Similarly, the lead editor recommends to the committee the acceptance status of any given submission on basis of the referee reports. All final decisions are made by the executive editorial committee through consensus. A significant number of submissions are not mailed to referees so as not to overburden our valuable group of reviewers. Their time and efforts are essential to the quality of the journal and **we very much welcome new referees.**

The current submission rate is such that we anticipate to publish during years without a special issue with RPA conference papers about 8-12 articles per year. This leaves room for special projects and themes, an occasional review essay or book discussion, and about 10 book reviews per year. The assumption here is that each regular issue is around 150-175 pages.

The journal is on sound financial footing, but it would help to increase the number of institutional subscriptions. This also would add to its reputation and access. The journal would also benefit if those linked to the journal would consistently renew their subscription.

We welcome feedback.

Introducing RPA Mag

Submitted by the Editors: Tanya Loughead, Richard Schmitt, José Mendoza, and Brandon Absher

RPA Mag is an online publication of the [Radical Philosophy Association](#). With this online magazine, we hope to allow philosophers, who are often engaged in highly technical and abstract debates, to reach a wider public and to promote discussion of important issues from a radical philosophical perspective.

The urgency and necessity of such an intervention of radical philosophy into public debate is hard to overstate. Since the Occupy Movement of 2011, the United States has seen waves of protest and social struggle unlike anything since the 1960s — culminating in the [unprecedented Women's March](#) in response to the inauguration of President Trump. At the same time, young people in the United States are [increasingly sympathetic to socialism and critical of capitalism](#). Yet, regressive forces have also grown in strength. The rise of Donald Trump to the US presidency was unmistakably fueled by both racist and sexist reaction and popular resentment of the political establishment. Along with him, organized white supremacist, anti-immigrant, and sexist organizations have seen a rise in visibility and popularity. These trends are being replicated all around the globe. Given the current state of things, it seems, the center cannot hold.

There is much to fear in this situation. As Noam Chomsky has [stated repeatedly](#) and as recent events have made apparent, the presidency of Donald Trump poses an existential threat to humanity. The absurdity of his crude posturing aside, his escalation of nuclear tensions around the world and his willingness to use unimaginably devastating conventional weapons raises the likelihood of a world-ending war to [levels unseen since the fall of the Soviet Union](#). His climate denialism and pro-fossil fuel policies are no less dangerous — even if their effects unfold at a slower pace. Sea levels are rising and climate related natural disasters likewise appear to be increasing in frequency and ferocity. The world is already experiencing the first intimations of a [massive climate refugee crisis](#) — likely exacerbating nativism and anti-immigrant attitudes in the affluent centers of global capitalism — but the leader of the world's largest economy and most powerful military cannot be relied upon to even face the problem. Nonetheless, in this midst of this crisis there is much room for hope.

We are at a crossroads. But another world is possible. Please join us here at RPA Mag as we explore the possibilities of this radical alternative!

We accept submissions for publication from members of the Radical Philosophy Association. You can go [here](#) to join the RPA. For instructions about how to sign up and submit, take a look at our About Page. Please share what you read here widely and follow the discussion on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Upcoming 2018 Meeting

THE 13th BIENNIAL RADICAL PHILOSOPHY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Strategies of Resistance

University of Massachusetts Lowell

November 8 to 10, 2018

Keynote Speakers

Dr. Linda Martín-Alcoff, City University of New York

Dr. Tommy Curry, Texas A&M University

Dr. Todd May, Clemson University

The 13th biennial conference of the Radical Philosophy Association will be held at the University of Massachusetts - Lowell from November 8 to 10, 2018. In response to the racist, sexist, nationalist, transphobic, nativist rhetoric and policy of the Trump White House, our conference theme this year is "Strategies of Resistance." Across the globe, individuals and communities are joining together to resist neo-liberalism, climate change, and global capital. They are practicing significant actions of solidarity and creatively imagining and prefiguring a new and more just world. From the Black Lives Matter movement, to rising antifascist activism in the U.S. and Europe, to solidarity with the Dreamers and their families as well as migrants across the world, we are living in an age where people are resurrecting old ways and finding new possibilities of joining together to resist unlivable and inhumane conditions. As members of the RPA, we stand together against the growing police state, the erosion of healthcare policies, a colonialist and aggressive foreign policy, and tax policy that benefits the wealthy at the expense of basic human needs. As much as ever, we recognize the importance of resistance and solidarity. With the rise of right-wing, anti-immigrant parties in Europe and the reappearance of blatant white supremacist rhetoric on the mainstream news in the United States, it is incumbent upon the left to join together to imagine, share, and act upon our strategies of resistance.

For further information, contact the conference Program Committee:

Sarah Vitale, Program Committee Chair: sevitale@bsu.edu

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Visit us on the web at www.radicalphilosophyassociation.com.

Be sure to check out the [RPA Mag](#) and join the conversation!