



ISHPSSB

International Society for the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology

Biannual Newsletter

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President's Corner

Montpellier is almost upon us. We will soon be rushing from session to session (and perhaps occasionally allowing ourselves a break in a café) at the largest ever meeting of the society with an expected 700 participants. Constructing the four-and-a-half day program with up to fifteen parallel sessions has been an extraordinary effort by the Program Co-Chairs Michel Morange and Thomas Pradeu. We owe a considerable debt of thanks to them, and to the other members of our Program Committee, Maria Jesus Santamases, Judy Johns Schloegel, Edna Suarez, Karola Stotz, Chris Young, and Patrice David.

The practical organization of the conference has been an equally large job and has required time and dedication in equal and large measures from the Local Arrangements Co-Chairs Jean Gayon and Philippe Huneman, from the rest of the local organizing committee, Paul Luu, Bernard Hubert, Brigitte Cabantous, Isabelle

Olivieri, Pascal Nouvel, Antonine Nicoglou, and Francesca Merlin. This has been a full-time job for Francesca Merlin in recent weeks and many of you will have been in contact with her as she has answered practical queries from members.

The local organisers have once again raised considerable sponsorship for the conference, enabling us to keep the registration fees to a reasonable level, helping us with the important task of providing student travel support, and allowing us to provide some free social events for conference attendees. Our primary debt is to the two academic institutions that are co-hosting the meeting, the Institut d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences et des techniques (IHPST) in Paris and Agropolis International in Montpellier. Important financial support has also been provided by the city of Montpellier, the Languedoc-Roussillon regional government, by the universities located in

Montpellier, and by several other French academic institutions. These sponsors are all listed on the conference webpage.

We also acknowledge the continuing support of the conference by Springer Publishing. Over the past year I have been in discussion with Springer about the possibility of providing free access to the content of relevant journals for members of the society. This would be of great value to independent scholars and to our members at institutions with limited library budgets. Sadly, we have not been able to reach an agreement to provide such access in time for this year's meeting, but discussions continue and I have not given up hope that we may be able to negotiate an arrangement.

The Montpellier meeting also marks the end of my term as President, when I pass the reins to the experienced hands of Werner Callebaut. I feel a real sense of privilege in having been asked to hold this

position by the members of ISHPSSB, the community of scholars amongst whom I fell most at home and from whom I am forever learning.

I look forward to seeing you all in the very near future.

*Paul Griffiths, ISHPSSB
President 2011-13*

2. Please attend the Members Meeting!

While the Biennial Meeting is a busy time for all of us, please take the time to attend the General Meeting of the ISHPSSB, Thursday 2.30 – 4.30 (Amphitheatre Giraud). This is the opportunity for all members to make themselves heard in the affairs of the society. It is a chance to be informed and ask questions about the proposed site for the 2015 meeting and to vote on endorsing the proposal of the site selection committee. You will also meet the newly elected Officers and members of Council, and be able to applaud the winners of the David L. Hull Prize and the Marjorie Grene Prize.

Student members also have the chance to elect the new Student Representative to council at the **Graduate Student Meeting**, Wednesday 12:30pm-2:30pm in Colloque 1.

3. Election Results

Thanks to the work of Ana Barahona, ISHPSSB Past-President and Chair of the Nominations Committee, and the members of that committee, Edna Suarez, Judy Johns Schloegel, Dick Burian, Sabine Brauckman, and Marion Blute we had a very strong list of candidates for the positions up for election this year. We thank all

those who agreed to stand and hope that those who were not elected will stand again in future elections, and also make themselves available for cooption to committees – your enthusiasm is the society's most valuable asset.

The results of the election were:

President-Elect 2013-2015:
Michel Morange

Secretary 2013-2015: Anya Plutynski

Treasurer 2013-2015: Laura Perini

Program Co-Chairs 2013-2015:
Mark Borrello and Rob Wilson

Council Members 2013-2017:
Rachel Ankeny, Maria Kronfeldner and Alan Love

The Nominations Committee reported that the use of electronic voting was a success. The participation rate was high, the computer system worked flawlessly and it also compiled the results for us.

ISHPSSB does not, as a matter of past practice, publish result totals. If you have any questions about the vote, please direct them to Ana Barahona (contact details on back cover).

4. Report of the Education Committee

The ISHPSSB Education Committee identified two objectives for its activities in the current term. Both relate to the mission of enhancing the educational mission of the society, and especially the interdisciplinary thrust that represents its distinctive character. While the biannual meeting remains a unique opportunity for interdisciplinary exposure, the expansive development of the life sciences

highlight the need for an increasingly mutual engagement between the three intellectual strands of our community. This is particularly relevant for younger scholars, in order to bring to full fruition the Society's potential.

The first objective is to develop a proposal for a summer school aimed at graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. This model builds on the extensive experience of several committee members with the summer school format, and with the increasing relevance of such formats in the educational setting of the life sciences. The goal is to organize thematically focused summer schools in the off-years (ie. those in which the biannual meeting is not held). These should be explicitly interdisciplinary, as reflected in the analytical perspectives as well as in the selection of tutors and students. The committee will develop a concrete plan of action for this proposal, in order to present it to the Society membership at the Montpellier meeting and move then towards its implementation.

The second, synergistic objective is to develop a shared educational resource in the form of an online syllabus, meant as an all-encompassing educational resource including both texts and slide presentations. Also in this case, the aim is to have an eminently interdisciplinary syllabus, which overcomes the traditional and still entrenched disciplinary boundaries by offering contemporary students a truly innovative site where to locate key texts in the history, philosophy and social studies of science, linked and ordered around the main thematic areas of the contemporary life sciences.

Members of the Education Committee: Giuseppe Testa (Chair), John Beatty, Manfred Laublicher, Charbel El-Hani, Ageliki Lefkaditou, Christopher C. Dimond.

5. Report of the Student Advisory Committee

The committee announces a Student Advisory Workshop at ISHPSSB 2013, "Navigating Intellectual and Professional Transitions in an Interdisciplinary World." All student members (and any other interested members) are encouraged to attend.

Time: 1pm on Tuesday, July 9th (note: this is during the 2-hour lunch recess, which begins at 12:30, so there will be time to get lunch before the workshop)

Location: Colloque 1

Overview: This workshop focuses on advising students looking ahead at the rest of their PhD program and transition to professional life. Students in the history, philosophy, and social studies of biology face particular opportunities and challenges in engaging with multiple disciplines. Pursuing a doctoral degree and career in these fields can involve major intellectual and professional transitions, e.g., from the context of a pure humanities background to engagement with the life sciences, or from an interdisciplinary PhD program (like HPS or HSS) to professional life in a traditional disciplinary department (like Philosophy, History, or Sociology). There will be a panel discussion on issues involving these transitions, and time for audience Q&A.

Chair: Sandra Mitchell (U. of Pittsburgh)

Panelists include:

- Rachael Brown (U. of Western Ontario)
- Maria Kronfeldner (U. Bielefeld)
- Lukas Rieppel (Northwestern University)

Members of the Student Advisory Committee: Emily Parke (Chair), Rachael Brown, Anya Plutynski, Maria Kronfeldner, Andrew Hamilton, Sandra D. Mitchell

6. Hull Prize

The International Society for the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology awards the David L. Hull Prize biennially to honor the life and legacy of David L. Hull (1935-2010). It is awarded to an individual who has made extraordinary contributions to scholarship and service in ways that promote interdisciplinary connections between history, philosophy, social studies, and biology and that foster the careers of younger scholars. These are strengths that reflect the contributions of David Hull to our professions and to our society.

The inaugural recipient of the David L. Hull prize in 2011 was William B. Provine, the Andrew H. and James L. Tisch Distinguished University Professor at Cornell University. The 2013 recipient is William C. Wimsatt, Winton Professor in the College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota, and a fellow of the Minnesota Center for Philosophy of Science. Wimsatt is also the Peter B. Ritzma Professor of Philosophy and Evolutionary Biology (Emeritus) at the University of Chicago, to which

he has devoted most of his career since starting as a post-doc in 1969-70 with Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins and then as an assistant professor in 1971.

Bill Wimsatt's creative research, generous mentorship of young scholars, innovative teaching, and broad ambassadorship for interdisciplinarity in general and philosophy of biology in particular exemplify the values of our society and of David L. Hull. Like David Hull, Bill Wimsatt is equally regarded as a philosopher and as a theoretical biologist. In 1977, Bill was a faculty member in the Council for Philosophical Studies Summer Institute on "Biological and Social Perspectives on Human Nature" in Colorado, where the first stirrings began that led to ISHPSSB. He has been an active part of ISHPSSB since its founding.

Wimsatt was elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2006 and has served on, and chaired, the nominating committee of Section L. He has served on program committees for the Philosophy of Science Association and the American Philosophical Association. He has served as a member of the governing boards for the Society for Philosophy and Psychology and the Philosophy of Science Association. He has given over 400 invited lectures, seminars, and workshops at professional meetings, special institutes, and universities in the US, Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, Australia, China, England, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Spain, France, Israel, Turkey, Austria, and Germany to audiences of philosophers, historians, scientists, and computer users.

Bill Wimsatt is, in the words of one nominator, “the storm in the eye of the calm,” productively stirring, mixing, and blending up ideas, methods, and fields. His “signature contribution,” the nominator continued, “was never to trash the ideas of others, but to find what was interesting, novel, or otherwise merit-worthy, and suggest several ways that they might be developed further or connected with other ideas that their author might not be aware of.” Bill’s inquisitiveness and drive to understand has made him a superb ambassador of interdisciplinarity, within ISHPSSB and to the many specialties in which he participates, from cognitive psychology, evolutionary anthropology, and the ISHPSSB specialties of history, philosophy and social studies of biology, to other specialties, such as philosophy of mind, general philosophy of science, and analytic philosophy more generally.

Wimsatt’s teaching and university service have been both broad and innovative, spanning three of the four divisions at the University of Chicago: humanities, biology, and social sciences. His appointments list at Chicago reads like a campus-wide web page: Department of Philosophy, Biology Collegiate Division, Committee on Conceptual Foundations of Science, Program in History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Science, Committee on Evolutionary Biology, M. A. Program in the Social Sciences, and the Fishbein Center for the History of Science and Medicine.

Wimsatt’s courses have been wide-ranging: from Philosophy of Biology and Philosophy of the Social Sciences; to Genetics in an Evolutionary Perspective;

Biological and Cultural Evolution; Scientific and Technological Change; Boundaries, Modules, & Levels; and Philosophy of Mind and Science Fiction. He has directed over 40 dissertations and served as a reader on over 60. He has been an external examiner of 5 more and has supervised 3 post-doctoral researchers. He received the Burlington-Northern Foundation award for outstanding graduate teaching. He has trained many philosophers of biology now active in the field.

Perhaps his most important innovations in teaching include



introducing computational modeling into philosophy courses. He hacked programmable HP calculators to allow them to do more interesting stuff than HP thought they should. He and his students developed innovative teaching software for model-building and biological modeling, which won an EDUCOM Distinguished Natural Sciences Curriculum Innovation Award as part of John Jungck’s project

BioQUEST. Wimsatt also received grants from the Annenberg Foundation, Hewlett-Packard, and Apple for his work on modeling in the curriculum. More recently, Wimsatt developed the Big Problems Curricular Initiative at the University of Chicago, for which he received an Arthur Vining Davis Foundation grant.

A hallmark of Wimsatt’s teaching is, as one nominator put it, “that he never set out to teach his students. He was most excited about learning from them ... for Bill, learning from his students was a source of joy, excitement and some of his own best ideas. This certainly holds for his graduate students — but it was also true of undergraduates, post-docs, and really any young (or not so young) scholar who had the good fortune to cross Bill’s path.” Bill teaches by mentoring and mentors by engaging everyone around him as colleagues, fellow travelers, and co-discoverers.

Bill Wimsatt excels at breaking down barriers among specialties. One nominator wrote that he didn’t think Bill “ever saw disciplinary *boundaries* at all. His work speaks to his deep engagement with the practice of biology, and I think it is only in recent years that we recognize how profound and ahead of its time his core work is and was.” Bill is an integrator who is interested in pretty much everything, who will talk to anyone in any specialty about pretty much anything, and who takes as much interest in reading and promoting novices and students as in the work of very senior folk with track records and distinguished positions. Bill manages to find time to read, understand, and *metabolize* new work by young scholars. Bill’s

constant promotion of the ideas of others has connected many of us to wider worlds of scholarship than we otherwise might have experienced and pitched the importance of our work to others in ways we could not have imagined, nor expected. One nominator wrote that Bill has “been one of the most significant mentors I have had the great pleasure to have known. He was not my adviser. Nor was he on my committee. He has simply always been around.” Bill has fostered a style of working that is an integrative, cooperative, and humble philosophical approach open to historical and social studies of science and deeply informed by the biology.

One nominator summed up Bill’s mentoring service to the community in an analogy: “In graph theory, certain nodes in a network [are] hubs.” Hub is an apt term expressive of Wimsatt’s character. The nominator continues: hubs “have a lot of connections with nodes in diverse groups. Wimsatt is a hub, connecting biology with its history, with its philosophy, with engineering, with cognitive science, and with social science.”

Wimsatt’s research of over forty years has been central to the growth and development of the philosophy of biology, has had important influence on social and historical studies of biology, and has helped to open and maintain important connections with the work of evolutionary biologists. Many of his students have gone on to make significant contributions of their own, broadening and deepening his impact in the field. His major contributions include characterization and conceptual tools for understanding complex

functional systems and levels of organization, studies of heuristics and their role in scientific work, an account of reductionistic research strategies, the role of robustness and false models, generative entrenchment as a major factor of evolution, history of classical genetics, studies of cultural evolution, and studies of visualization and the role of diagrams in the development of modern biology. Wimsatt is a leading figure in the development of the philosophy of biology as a fruitful specialty interacting freely and productively with other specialties.

Wimsatt pioneered the style of philosophy of biology in which close philosophical investigation is linked with attention to the development and use of concepts in empirical and theoretical scientific practice. In the 1970s, Wimsatt showed how teleological language and reductionism could be understood as parts of respectable empirical practices of investigating complex functional systems. In the 1980s, he linked the investigation of units of selection to a rich understanding of levels of organization in complex biological systems and the deep connection between heuristic research strategies and the organization of adaptive systems.

Also in the 1980s, he began to articulate his well-known “engineering” philosophy of scientific practice, in which deliberately false models are made to be broken. Understanding, he argued, derives as much from studying how things fail systematically as how they work. In the late 1980s and 1990s, he added generative entrenchment to the

fundamental principles of Darwinian evolution for complex adaptive systems and also spearheaded philosophical and historical attention to the roles of scientific visualization in his “analytic geometry of genetics,” with studies of Weismann diagrams, Punnett Squares, and models of genetic recombination. In the late 1980s to 2000s, Wimsatt developed a novel approach to the difficult concept of emergence by recognizing it as a family of concepts of different modes of failure of aggregativity. This simple shift of focus allowed Wimsatt to recognize deep connections between emergence and reductionistic research, again centering attention on the role of these concepts in scientific practice. Wimsatt’s 2007 book, *Re-Engineering Philosophy for Limited Beings: Piecewise Approximations to Reality*, offers new insight into the coherence and systematic character of the body of Wimsatt’s work and brings some of his classic essays to new audiences.

Since retirement from the University of Chicago in 2007, Wimsatt moved to the University of Minnesota as Winton Professor of Liberal Arts where he has been pioneering the study of yet another major concept: scaffolding in development, evolution, cognition, and culture. This is a concept derived partly from developmental psychology, but one which resonates with Wimsatt’s deep abiding interest in all things constructional, reductionistic (in the sense he has made respectable), and heuristic. There is no evidence at all that Wimsatt is slowing down in his “golden years,” with seven papers and an edited volume in press in 2013 and a book on generative

entrenchment in the works.

Bill Wimsatt has been an agenda-setting pioneer in the philosophy of biology and philosophy of science in practice, an enthusiastic yet humble advocate for interdisciplinarity, a founding member of ISHPSSB, a mentor to young scholars across the spectrum of science studies specialties, a good friend to David Hull and those who treasure the values and spirit that define ISHPSSB, and above all, a real mensch.

*David L. Hull Prize
Committee: Garland Allen,
Ana Barahona, Werner
Callebaut, Lindley Darden
(Chair), Jim Griesemer, and
Michael Dietrich*

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If you experience any difficulties, please contact Anya Plutynski at secretary@ishpssb.org

As a benefit, members receive a variety of journals at reduced rate, including ISIS and JHB.

If your membership has expired some time ago (approximately 6 months), you may be put in the “archives” of the membership database. In order to be removed from the archive, you must contact Anya Plutynski at secretary@ishpssb.org