



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

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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

In retrospect, one of the curiosities of the 1918 flu pandemic is that it left such a faint imprint on the wider culture. On the whole, unless you're looking for the pandemic, it's easily missed. In a [recent, lengthy survey](#) of the English-language books that became talking points in 1920, for example, the novelist Nicholson Baker found no trace, or none worth mentioning at any rate.

It remains to be seen what the cultural legacies of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic will be. For our Society, the most pressing question of course is about the shape of our 2021 meeting, due to take place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from 11–16 July. As you'll see from the update below, local organizers Chris Young and Nigel Rothfels are doing a fantastic job with planning, so that, come what may, our members will continue to benefit in the customary ways from participating in an ISHPSSB meeting.

Other learned societies too are having to make adjustments. From the “silver-lining” department, I'm pleased to report that a postponed Society for Philosophy of Science in Practice (SPSP) conference has been rescheduled for 7–9 July 2021 in Lansing, Michigan—by American standards, a hop and a skip from Milwaukee. So, virus permitting, anyone coming to the next ISH meeting can also consider attending the SPSP meeting, thus minimizing the financial and ecological impact of travel while maximizing the intellectual impact. Chris and Nigel are already collaborating with the SPSP organizers to make getting from one conference to the other as easy and enjoyable as possible.

Meanwhile, we're pressing ahead with Society business. Our Program Co-Chairs for the Milwaukee meeting, Roberta Millstein and Luis Campos, are preparing the calls for abstracts and session proposals. Our Off-Year Workshops Committee, led by Matt Haber, has selected three marvellous-sounding workshops for Society backing, which you can read about below, though for updates on timings and formats please keep an eye on our website, [ishpssb.org](http://ishpssb.org), and Twitter feed, [@ISHPSSB](https://twitter.com/ISHPSSB). (You don't follow us on Twitter? Now is your moment! 300 followers and counting...) And our Site Selection Committee, led by Rachel Ankeny, is currently inviting proposals for hosting ISH 2023 and beyond; if you're interested to find out more, please email her at [rachel.ankeney@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:rachel.ankeney@adelaide.edu.au)

Below you'll also find, among other things, a call for ISH-y symposia proposals for the annual Philosophy of Science Association meeting; an update from our Student Advisory Committee about their new institutional email address and upcoming mailing list; an invitation from our Education Committee to help them assemble materials so that teachers and learners around the world, at every educational level, can more easily access (via our website) the special insights of our fields into the COVID-19 crisis; and an obituary notice of a much-missed ISH regular, Rafi Falk.

At this moment of dislocation and dismay, a little historical perspective can be a tonic. I love Nicholson Baker's concluding reflection, at the end of his time-travel trip: “Everything was different in 1920, and yet nothing really has changed.”

*Greg Radick*  
President

## ISHPSSB GATHERING IN MILWAUKEE (MKE 2021)

*Save the date: July 11–16, 2021*

While maintaining physical distance, we're focusing a lot of energy right now on bringing people together in July 2021! Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on the shores of Lake Michigan, has always been a great place to gather. And for those who have never visited this city, prepare to be surprised. Why? Just search the internet with the words Milwaukee and “underrated” to find the buzz. All of that has been to support our bid to host ISHPSSB in MKE 2021! (And a few other events, truth be told.)



*A view of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, with Lake Michigan and the surrounding neighborhoods. The downtown district to the south is in the background.*

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee is the state's second-largest university, located just blocks from the bluff overlooking the lake. From rooms in the residence hall, you will awaken each morning to a shimmering blue that will tempt you to head down to the beach. But first, a full breakfast buffet (included in the cost of your room, less than 55 USD per night), and an abundance of session options to stimulate your academic interests. All of the meeting rooms can be found in the University Student Union. The campus is fully accessible, with the Union, library, and residence hall situated within a few hundred meters. Coffee and tea will be provided throughout the morning and during an afternoon recess, and additional food service is ready at hand. Lunch is available as part of the housing plan or on demand.

The afternoon recess will afford time to take a self-guided walking tour near campus or to plan a longer excursion in the evening to nearby restaurants, pubs, microbreweries, biergartens, lakefront paths, and riverside hiking trails. Milwaukee's East Side is a mix of Frederick Law Olmstead parks, Frank Lloyd Wright homes, modest apartments, modern development, and urban green space.

As local arrangements co-chairs, we have had the wonderful privilege of working closely already with Roberta and Luis to envision activities and logistic structures that encourage multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary engagement. We will provide space for interaction among scholars in different fields to share common interests and inspire new thinking. Whether it be large lectures, diverse panels, or a cup of tea with longtime friends or a new mentor, you'll find a seat at the table.

And yes, we are prepared to revise plans for all kinds of contingencies. We hope everyone can travel from across the globe to join us. Making you all comfortable and connected here is our top priority. Just as you all have learned to adapt in the past several weeks, so have we. Please know that our plans will be communicated as they develop.

We will launch our ISHPSSB in MKE 2021 website soon. We will provide details about affiliated scholarly activities and conferences, arrival in Milwaukee, housing and food options on campus, hotels, dining, and entertainment. Watch for updates linked from the main [ishpssb.org](http://ishpssb.org) page, and check back regularly.

To entice you further to include Milwaukee in your list of destinations for summer 2021 travel, you'll notice our



*The Milwaukee Art Museum on the Lake Michigan shoreline, at the heart of the city.*

close proximity to Chicago. And if avoiding Chicago is more your style, you can cross the lake on the high speed ferry to Michigan. Or head west and visit Madison with its many lakes. Tour "The Shack" where Aldo Leopold pioneered a version of conservation for the 20th century and beyond. We will also be looking to make connections that highlight topics from genomics to the beverage industry and yeast cultivation.

And if time is short, you'll get your fill during an intense five days with colleagues from around the world on this compact urban university campus. We are eager to welcome you.

*Chris Young and Nigel Rothfels*

*Co-Chairs of the Local Arrangements Committee*

## **ISHPSSB 2020 OFF-YEAR**

### **WORKSHOPS**

Heading into our 2021 ISHPSSB meeting in Milwaukee, the Off-Year Workshop Committee is planning to host an open brainstorming session on off-year workshops built around the following questions:

- What are we hoping to achieve with ISHPSSB off-year workshops?
- What are some creative ideas for how we might achieve these goals?
- What structures and instructions might we provide to encourage and support proposals that meet this vision?
- How might off-year workshops be used to: (a) drive ISHPSSB membership; (b) support ISHPSSB inclusivity goals; and (c) support ISHPSSB's commitment to interdisciplinary research and community building?

We enthusiastically welcome all ISHPSSB members to join us as we envision what off-year workshops could be and do for ISHPSSSB.

This cycle we saw three off-year workshop proposals, all of which were approved. Each is listed below. Of course, given the current COVID-19 pandemic, these workshops have had to adapt (or be postponed), so be sure to check the listed websites for any relevant updates. Thank you to all of the organizing committees for their hard and creative work, and to the members of the ISHPSSB Off-Year Workshop Committee for evaluating the proposals.

### **Dealing With Complexity in the Life Sciences**

The goal of this summer school is to bring together senior and junior researchers in the philosophy of life sciences to jointly reflect on and discuss: (1) epistemological and methodological issues as well as ontological and metaphysical issues in relation to complexity, (2) institutional, societal, and political dimensions of scientific work dealing with complexity, and (3) the role that historians and philosophers of the life sciences can play in critically contributing to support scientific attempts to deal with complexity in the biological, biomedical, and environmental sciences. Young scholars (PhD students and early post-doctoral researchers) in the history, philosophy and social studies of the biological, biomedical, and environmental sciences are invited to apply. The meeting will take place on September 7–11, 2020 at the Konrad Lorenz Institute for Evolution and Cognition Research in Klosterneuburg near Vienna, Austria. See more information at [https://www.kli.ac.at/en/events/kli\\_summer\\_schools/view/550](https://www.kli.ac.at/en/events/kli_summer_schools/view/550)

### **Philosophy of Biology and Cognitive Sciences X**

Since its origins in 2011, this workshop is an annual encounter that aims at bringing together researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds: philosophers, cognitive scientists, and biologists working on issues of common interest. It is addressed to graduate students and early career scholars that have obtained their PhDs within the last three years. Possible topics include (but are not limited to): consciousness and cognitive phenomenology; human cognition, nonhuman

cognition, and artificial intelligence; enactive approaches to biology and cognition; philosophy of functions; implications of transhumanism; cognition, adaptation and evolutionary theory; natural kinds in philosophy of biology and cognitive sciences; and minimal requirements for either life of cognition. Due to the COVID-19 public health crisis, the workshop (originally scheduled to be held at the Autonomous University of Madrid on May 21-22, 2020) has been postponed until further notice. Updates will be notified here: <https://pbcsworkshop.wixsite.com/pbcsworkshop>

### **Symposium on the History, Philosophy & Sociology of School Biology**

New curricular developments in biology across the educational spectrum are resulting in the re-evaluation of practical biology and the unexpected outcome of reducing practical work in biology. The mission of this symposium will be to enhance the HPS of Biology by examining the relationship between Biology per se and its educational 'version': is it a homology or analogy? The vision of the symposium will be to explore traditional historical approaches in practical workshops with historic equipment and re-evaluate them in light of new pedagogies and curricular reform, can school biology be called experimental science any longer? To ask, and answer, what the purpose of school biology is? DCU Institute of Education, Dublin City University, St. Patrick's Campus, Dublin 11th–12th December 2020.

<https://sites.google.com/dcu.ie/ishpssb2020/home>

*Matt Haber*

*Chair of the Off-Year Workshop Committee*

## **STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT**

We hope that you are all safe and well in these distressing times. For the first time, we are seeing many universities around the world completely empty and exclusively online classes. As researchers and students, most of our work is already partly solitary, but total isolation can be extremely hard. We recognize the importance of giving and receiving feedback on meetings, exciting discussions in workshops, or even a casual chat during afternoon coffee. As the student

committee, we are open to chat, share concerns, and help as much as we can. We recently got an institutional email ([students@ishpssb.org](mailto:students@ishpssb.org)) and we hope you can use it for everything you need regarding the Society, your progress as a student, for suggestions of improvements, to discuss your work environment, and whatever you think we could be of help.

In order to improve the communication and connection between students that are part of the Society, we are in the process of creating a student mailing list, where we can share job opportunities, workshops, meetings, study tips, new publications, books and other things that we deem important to our education and research. We will be managing the list, so you don't receive a huge amount of e-mails. The link will be sent to your e-mails once the mailing list is created. But if you don't want to miss this, send us an e-mail to be sure you are included. Everyone will have the option of declining the invitation and opt-out of the mailing list at any moment.

We hope this situation ends soon and we can go back to our new normal lives. In the meantime, the ISH community remains as strong and friendly as ever. Feel free to get in touch with us at [students@ishpssb.org](mailto:students@ishpssb.org)

*Lúcia C. Neco*

*Chair of the Student Advisory Committee*

## EDUCATION COMMITTEE

### REPORT

Prompted by the current COVID-19 pandemic, ISHPSSB Education Committee has committed itself to helping people who want to put what's happening now both scientifically and socio-environmentally within wider perspectives—historical, philosophical, and sociological—either for self-enrichment and/or for teaching others. To this end [online teaching material and virtual resources](#) have become increasingly important, not least because of an equal accessibility for students all over the world.

The ISHPSSB Education Committee pays due regard to this development and aims at assembling a comprehensive new *resources list*, to supplement the one we now have on our "Resources" page: <https://www.ishpssb.org/resources>

To populate this resource set, we [invite ISHPSSB members](#) to bring forward recommendations for the

Resources page: *articles, books, videos, etc.* (especially welcome are resources on COVID-19 and on a number of other subjects for which publishers have [at least temporarily] provided open-access).

In addition, we highly welcome recommendations for [non-English resources](#) as we feel responsible as an international Society to also convey important, high-quality information to non-English-speaking students.

Please contact one of the committee members if you have suggestions for this initiative.

<https://www.ishpssb.org/about/present-committees>

Thanks for your help!

*Charbel El-Hani and Isabella Sarton-Jackson*

*Co-Chairs of the Education Committee*

## CALL FOR PSA SYMPOSIA PROPOSALS

For the upcoming [Philosophy of Science Association \(PSA\)](#) biennial meeting in Baltimore (19–22 November 2020), ISHPSSB has been invited to submit a symposium proposal for the Cognate Society sessions. The idea is to promote broader representation of work in philosophy of science than has traditionally been represented on the regular program of the PSA conference. The Cognate Society sessions will take place on Thursday morning, 19 November. Each Cognate Society whose proposal is approved will be allotted 90 minutes. PSA will provide meeting rooms and AV equipment. Sessions and participants will be listed on the official conference program and on-line schedules, and all session participants must register for the conference.

If you would like to submit a proposal for consideration, please note:

- 1) No previously published paper may be presented at the PSA meeting.
- 2) No one will be permitted to present more than once at PSA2020. A scholar may appear as co-author on more than one paper or symposium talk but may present at PSA2020 only once (excluding presentations at the poster forum).
- 3) Any individual can be part of only one Cognate Society symposium proposal for submission to the PSA in which he or she is a presenting author.

Proposals must include:

- 1) The title of the proposed session
- 2) A short descriptive summary of the proposal (100–200 words)
- 3) A description of the topic and a justification of its current importance to the discipline (up to 1000 words)
- 4) Titles and abstracts of all papers, with up to 500 words for the title and abstract of each paper. For a 90 minute session, we would expect 3–5 papers.
- 5) A list of participants and either an abbreviated curriculum vitae (1 page maximum) or short biographical description (1 page maximum) for each participant, including any non-presenting co-authors.
- 6) Institutional affiliation and e-mail addresses for all participants, including any non-presenting co-authors.

Please send complete session proposals by email to ISHPSSB Secretary, Sarah Roe ([secretary@ishpssb.org](mailto:secretary@ishpssb.org)) by 1 June 2020. A decision will be made by the ISHPSSB Executive Committee and forwarded to PSA by July 1st.

*Sarah Roe*  
Secretary

## RAFI FALK (1929-2019)



Indifferent to their wishes, fate often plays with men, commanding twists and turns and new beginnings, some rather hard. Others laugh at fate, determined to strike an independent path by the force of their own will. The life of Raphael Falk, known to all as Rafi, exemplifies both, a kind of paradox. At the age of five, as the Nazi grip over Germany

strengthened, Rafi left his home in Frankfurt am Main for Palestine. His father, a doctor, settled the family in the north of Eretz Israel, and while Rafi's Hebrew suffered from a strong German (known as Yekke) accent, he loved his new home and determined to fit in. Still, Palestine was no Europe. To some, Rafi's classical training and confident philosophical outlook seemed obtuse. Ultimately drawn to genetics, he travelled to Stockholm to complete a masters degree; one could not then study genetics in the Promised Land. But with

increasingly more Jewish refugee scientists arriving on the shores of the young Israel and the state investing in science and technology, horizons broadened. Returning to his adopted land, Rafi would be one of the first students in the country to complete a doctorate in the field.

It was on to America after that, to work as a post-doc with the Nobel Laureate Hermann J. Muller. He would visit Curt Stern's lab as well, another refugee who had escaped the Nazis, and, like Muller, had trained in the famous Fly Room of Thomas Hunt Morgan and his posse at Columbia. These were the greats of Genetics, and, following Watson and Crick's elucidation of the structure of DNA, Rafi and his generation would now take their ground-laying work to another level. When Muller had used X-rays in the 1920s to induce mutations in flies, he had no idea what was happening at the molecular level. When Rafi did the same in the 1950s and 60s, he already understood that the mutations were changing the code.

In time Rafi became a central pillar of the Genetics Department at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he made his home with his wife Ruma, a distinguished academic statistician in her own right. His punctuality and inability to suffer fools gladly became legion. "Aaaach!" he would grunt in a seminar room or standing somewhat bent out of shape in the cavernous halls of the department, spastically waving away some poor soul's flimsy argument. Rafi's intellectual appetite was prodigious, and before long could not be satisfied entirely by genetic analysis; beginning in the early 1980s the history and philosophy of biology increasingly preoccupied his mind. Like Ernst Mayr in America, he became one of the leading practitioners of the field now offering serious reflection on its intellectual growth and social relations. In particular, Rafi turned to the history of genetics in Palestine/Israel, showing how early attempts at studying the population genetics of Jews reflected Zionist agendas. Some early Zionist leaders and personages, such as the biologist Max Nordau and the anthropologist Arthur Ruppin, as well as the national poet Bialik, harbored racialist aspiration—they'd been trained in Europe and thought in eugenic terms about the Jews settling the land. The research project would ultimately be published in its English version as *Zionism and the Biology of the Jews*, and pulled no punches. As a young scholar just starting to walk down his own path, I felt exhilarated in his presence. I recall many Friday mornings, sitting in Rafi's cramped study, surrounded by and virtually buried in

books, many of them leather bound hardback classics in the original language, sipping tea and eating strudel and talking about biology. It felt like a time machine had kidnapped us to Germany before the war.

Rafi knew things, and his brain was his fortress. His true greatness came out later in life, to my mind, when he revisited the fundamental concepts upon which he and his generation built their careers. Most people's minds close with time; Rafi's just continued to open. In a co-edited volume, *The Concept of the Gene in Development and Evolution*, as well as a careful historical study of his own, *Genetic Analysis: A History of Genetic Thinking*, Rafi trained his penetrating gaze at the beginnings of the science of heredity, showing how dogmas that were effective for their times became ensconced over generations, reifying biological phenomena. Thus did it transpire that a man whose entire career had been built on the back of the gene came to doubt the very existence of the gene, at least in the particulate form in which it had been constructed and passed down to him. Instead, he championed

complex genetic systems at the nuclear and cellular level, showing how they played their role in heredity and evolution, and advocating for more nuanced conceptualizations. For Rafi, it wasn't just science, but rather a matter of principle: the aura with which the particulate gene had enveloped itself had served dark ideologies, from the Nazis to the early American eugenicists, all the way to nationalist radical Jews.

Rafi thought he knew the world more intimately, both biologically and politically. His world was not a deterministic one, but rather one full of choice, where human beings acting freely could use their powers of reason to fight for just causes. A man whose life was shaped by the dramatic vicissitudes of the twentieth century, he was convinced not only that this was the case, but that it ought to be.

We dearly miss him already.

*Oren Harman*  
*Bar Ilan University*

# The Backpage

## OFFICERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS 2019-2021

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## Are you subscribed to the ISHPSSB Listserv <ISHPSB-L>?

If not, you may have missed information posted for members which is not included in the newsletter, such as positions announced, grant and funding opportunities, calls for papers, etc. Subscribe online by following these instructions:

Send an email message to:

LISTSERV@lists.umn.edu

with the following in the body of the message:

SUBSCRIBE ISHPSSB-L YourFirstName YourLastName

Check for updates online: <https://www.ishpssb.org>

This listserv is maintained by Trevor Pearce. If you want to submit something, write to him under:  
[moderator@ishpssb.org](mailto:moderator@ishpssb.org)

## Have you renewed your membership?

ISHPSSB members receive lower registration rates to attend the biennial meeting. Members who renew by April 1<sup>st</sup> in odd-numbered years can also participate in the Society election held in May prior to the biennial meeting. To renew your membership, go to: <https://ishpssb.org/membership> and click on “Renew my membership.”

If your membership has expired, click on “Join or renew ISHPSSB membership.”

If you experience any difficulties, contact the Secretary at [secretary@ishpssb.org](mailto:secretary@ishpssb.org)

As a benefit, members are able to subscribe to a variety of journals at reduced rates; see the information under “Membership Benefits.”

## Credits

This newsletter was edited by David Suárez Pascal ([david.suarez@ciencias.unam.mx](mailto:david.suarez@ciencias.unam.mx)) employing LibreOffice and Scribus (both open source and freely available). I thank Greg Radick for his help, as well as all the members who kindly contributed to this issue with their texts.

The logo of the society was generously contributed by Andrew Yang.