

PhiloNews

Newsletter of the University of Guelph Department of Philosophy

ΦΙΛΟΝΟΥΣ



February 2009

Travel notes

Philosophy takes us far and wide, not only topically but spatially. Here are some reports on recent philosophical travels, mostly to conferences. The intellectual exchange that takes place at these meetings—particularly in the discussions, which are often longer than the original paper presentations—is important for helping authors to develop their papers for subsequent publication.

Faculty

Andrew Bailey travelled to Taipei, Taiwan, in June to present on embodied cognition at the Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness. The previous April he was in Tucson for another conference on consciousness, and he is planning to go to Berlin and, perhaps, Hong Kong for more conferences next summer.

Karen Houle was one of 550 participants in the “International Forum on EcoHealth” in Merida, Mexico in December, in her capacity as Co-Principal Investigator of the Community of Practitioners in Ecosystem Health: Canada.

Don Dedrick has been to the Society for Philosophy and Psychology in Philadelphia (2008); to NYC in November to visit the MOMA for a show called “Colorchart” (Don teaches the philosophy of art). In January he went to Hawaii, for a conference, and is going to Harvard in February, where their Museum of natural history has an exhibition on colour and evolution, Don’s two favorite topics rolled into one!

Omid Payrow Shabani gave a talk in August entitled “Freedom of religion, democracy and the fact of pluralism” at the XXII World Congress of Philosophy in Seoul, South Korea; “Post-secular thinking about the role of religion in democratic politics,” at the Canadian Philosophical association Annual Meet-

ing in Vancouver in June; “Freedom of religion, democracy and the fact of pluralism,” at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting in Vancouver (June).

Maya Goldenberg was at the International Network of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics in Rijeka, Croatia at the beginning of September. FAB meets under the rubric of the World Congress of Bioethics. Quite a conference and a great destination. Well worth spending the last of my start-up and 08-09 travel money on it!

Ken Dorter gave three talks last May at Brandon U, and in June gave a paper at the CPA in Vancouver.

John Hacker-Wright gave papers at the Society for Value Inquiry (College of New Jersey, Newark, NJ) and the North American Society for Social Philosophy (University of Portland, Portland, OR).

Graduate Students

Jason Robinson presented a paper entitled “The progress of natural science and the self-forgetfulness of hermeneutics” at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for Continental Philosophy in November 2008 at the University of Montreal.

Reiner Schaefer presented a paper called “A defence of AI-functionalism against Brandom’s arguments from holism and the frame problem” at the Western Canadian Philosophical Association meeting in Edmonton in October 2008.

From the Department Chair

Since the last *PhiloNews* in October, the search for a nominee for our Tier I (senior) Canada Research Chair has been continuing; the search committee are excited about the way the search is going, and we hope to bring interested senior scholars to visit the department

within the next month or two.

We are gearing up for a major event in March, when Princeton bioethicist Peter Singer visits us to give the inaugural Guelph Lecture in Philosophy. Also in March will be the second annual Guelph Philosophy Graduate Student Conference, on the topic of “Reason and Desire”; and in April the distinguished French philosopher Catherine Malabou will be giving a paper here. Planning is under way for a workshop conference on Conceptual Issues in fMRI Interpretation in May (<http://issuesinfmri.ca/>), and the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy annual conference in October (<http://cswip.ca/>). Meanwhile, department members continue to be active participants in the intellectual life of the university and the community: for example, Stefan Linquist presented a Café Scientifique at The Bookshelf café and bookstore, on “Environment and the evolution of human behaviour,” and Jean Harvey will continue our Philosophy Goes Public series at the Guelph Public Library later this month.

Professor Andrew Bailey

Graduate Studies

Last year we began admitting students into our brand new stand-alone PhD program. Then, I wrote in the *PhiloNews*, “It seems that our move toward a stand-alone PhD program, our new hires, our high and consistent placement record, plus the word of mouth from our own graduate students have made our department very attractive.” Well, this year the trend seems to be continuing and Janet is hard at work filing the incoming MA and PhD applications, which already constitute a large and strong pool.

On a different note, our graduate students have been active and productive.

- Nahum Brown presented a paper called “The Place of Possibility” at the “Psychogeographies” conference in Guelph in November 2008. He also has been coordinating the IAPL Book Exhibit (International Association for Philosophy and Literature), which will be in London, England in June 2009.
- Ryan Krahn published an article entitled “Heidegger with Dewey: *Mitsein*, solicitude, and education” in *Revista de Filosofía*, Vol. 6 (2009).
- Cherilyn Keall published a book review of *Dewey: A Beginner’s Guide*, by David L. Hildebrand, in the *Newsletter for the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy*, No. 107, (November 2008). She also organized a graduate student session for the annual meeting of the

Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, which will be taking place in College Station, Texas in March of this year.

This semester is the one for PhD students in their 5th semester to take their Oral Qualifying Exam. This will mean that before the end of semester we’ll be seeing quite a few OQEs, which incidentally are open to the public. I wish those students successful defence of their projects.

Professor Omid Payrow Shabani

Undergraduate Studies

Winter term has begun with a flurry of form-signing (I now have a dent on my desk in the shape of my signature, and Louise tells me my right hand waves vaguely in a writing motion in my sleep) and question-answering (yes, I can get a copy of your course outline from 1997, even though you can’t remember your professor’s name; no, I’m not your TA—see, it says “Undergraduate Coordinator” under “Prof. Wendling”).

The Undergraduate Studies Committee has many items on its horizon, ranging in likelihood of passing from “coming soon” (a new 400-level course and making prerequisites for 3000-level courses rational rather than random) to “don’t hold your breath” (the possibility of dropping the logic requirement for philosophy majors and having a curriculum review). In fact, the latter two may take several Undergraduate Coordinator’s terms to decide; I fully expect to retire before they’re settled.

Soon I’ll be looking for volunteers to staff booths at fairs for prospective students. You should come—it’s amusing to watch high school students making their ways vaguely to our table, as their parents determinedly try to steer them towards engineering and management economics. I’m always more than happy to share the fun.

Professor Karen Wendling

Undergraduate Students Philosophy Club

The Undergrad Students Philosophy Club (USPC) is continuing its weekly dialogue meetings, now on Tuesday evenings at 5:30pm, with hopes to set up many more professor-led sessions on fundamental issues in philosophy. Scheduled so far are a dialogue in February with Peter Loftson on metaphysics and one in March with Ken Dorter on “East-West Comparative Philosophy.” Also in the works are some dialogues on pop culture topics, such as Facebook. For late in the semester, we are planning a philosophy Meet-’n-Greet pub night for philosophy undergrads, grads and instructors.

We are excited to report that, under the auspices of the USPC, members Emma Baker and Alex Mogyoros

are heading up the creation of an online undergraduate philosophy journal for Guelph. Tentatively titled “Agora,” the first issue is hoped to be completed this semester. Finally, the Fine Arts Network club was planning a trip to New York for this winter break; if these plans go ahead, USPC will be publicizing this opportunity to philosophy students.

James Heumann

Faculty Research Report

Kenneth Dorter

My interests have formed around two questions, the metaphysical question of (in Leibniz’ words) why there is something rather than nothing, and the ethical question (in Aristotle’s sense) of how to fulfill our human potential. The two questions are related like the alpha and omega, the origin and the goal. If we imagine them as two lines of inquiry that meet at right angles, I would regard the other kinds of philosophy—political, aesthetic, psychological, empirical, epistemic, etc.—as existing in the space opened up between them.

All the philosophers that I’ve studied, especially in the Greek, German, and Asian traditions, have clarified these areas and relationships for me considerably, but I keep coming back to Plato. More than anyone else his works illuminate for me the relation between the ontological and the moral, and the relation

of these two to all the others. Beyond the study of individual philosophers, I’ve found comparative studies of the way two or more philosophers address particular issues to be highly rewarding. Where such comparisons lead to contrasts, they function like the contrast theory of meaning writ large: the contrast throws into relief the meaning of a philosophy—its aspects and implications—that isn’t always noticeable in the original formulation. And where the comparisons reveal similarities rather than differences, the common ground highlights where philosophy is not simply reducible to its texts. More recently I’ve extended the comparisons to joint studies of Eastern and Western philosophers which, in addition to displaying how philosophy is more than its texts, displays as well where it can transcend its culture despite being shaped by it.

My current long-range project is a book tentatively titled “Philosophers East and West: Studies in Cross-Cultural Correspondence”. Chapters that have been or are about to be published in their preliminary versions are “The Concept of the Mean in Confucius and Plato,” “Metaphysics and Morality in Neoconfucianism and Greece: Zhu Xi, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus,” and “The Problem of Evil in Heraclitus” (which will eventually be combined with a paper on Lao Tzu). Other chapters in various stages of completion compare Spinoza and Shankara, Marcus Aurelius and the Bhagavad Gita, and Leibniz and Yogachara Buddhism (Asanga and Vasubandhu).

For the latest information on upcoming talks and other departmental events, please visit our website:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/philosophy>