

PhiloNews

ΦΙΛΟΝΟΥΣ

Newsletter of the University of Guelph Department of Philosophy



November 2009

Report from the Department Chair

We're well into another busy Fall semester, following on from what was for many of us a busy summer. The summer was filled with research and conference travel, of course, for faculty and grad students alike, but also saw two major pieces of 'departmental business' move ahead. We submitted our Brief for the continuing certification of our MA and PhD programs to the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies in early July. This was a lot of work to put together, much of which fell on the shoulders of our graduate secretary Janet Thackray and then-graduate coordinator Omid Payrow Shabani, but it seems to have been outstandingly successful. We learned in September that our programs are to be approved as being of Good Quality—the highest level of OCGS certification—without even the standard requirement of having our department visited by external assessors.

The other major business of the summer was moving ahead with the search and nomination

process for our senior Canada Research Chair in social and political philosophy. An exciting political philosopher has now been selected, and we are almost ready to submit the nomination to the Government of Canada in November.

Finally, we were pleased to play host to the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy earlier this month. The conference, on the theme of *Responsiveness, Responsibility and Repair*, was very enjoyable and stimulating for all who attended, and the department owes a debt of thanks to all the local organizers who worked extremely hard to make it such a success.

Professor Andrew Bailey

Report from the Graduate Coordinator

I took over the job of Graduate Coordinator this past July and I was delighted to find that our MA and PhD Programs are thriving. We currently have a combined total of 60 graduate students, and they are an industrious and exemplary bunch, with over \$150,000 in external awards (SSHRC, CGS, OGS & NSERC) between them. We also have a large and impressive new group of students admitted this year: 6 PhD Students and 7 MA students. We all had a chance to get to know one another at the annual Meet & Greet in September, which continues to be a well-attended event to kick off the new academic year.

In other news, during the summer a number of our MA students successfully passed their Final Oral Examinations:

Ryan Krahn defended his MA thesis, “Gadamer’s Fusion of Horizons and Intercultural Interpretation,” on August 7th. He is currently enrolled in the PhD program here at Guelph.

Nolan Little defended his MA thesis, “Theories of Possible Worlds,” on August 24th. He is currently enrolled in a PhD program at Boston University.

Congratulations & best wishes to you both for future success!

In addition, several Final Oral Examinations have been scheduled: for PhD candidates Alexandra Morrison, Scott Marratto, and Jason Robinson, and for MA candidate Jeremy Hogg.

Professor Karyn Freedman

Report from the Undergraduate Coordinator

During Orientation, we held a well-attended “Meeting 4 Majors”, at which we discussed the philosophy program with entering students. Many of the students already have some background and an interest in philosophy, because it was offered in their high schools. All of the students in the “M4M” were aware, and many of them were pleased, that philosophy has become a “teachable”.

The Undergraduate Studies Committee oversees the undergraduate major. We are finalizing and polishing some documents aimed at the undergraduate major, minor and area of concentration. However, the big item on our horizon is the possibility of a curriculum review. I will be meeting shortly with Mary Wilson of Teaching Support Services to find out what materials they have that can help us through the process if we do decide to engage in a curriculum review. Stay tuned!

Professor Karen Wending

Report from the Graduate Student Association

Greetings everyone!

The Philosophy Graduate Students’ Association would like to add their warm welcome to the new school year to this issue of PhiloNews.

We recently held our annual elections and held our first meeting on October 7th. Our general agenda for this year includes: (1) hosting a bingo night to raise money to reimburse graduate students for their travel expenses and fund our graduate student conference; (2) working with undergraduate philosophy students to help them start their own

philosophy conference; and (3) raising \$1,000 for a permanent PGSA Hardship Fund.

This money will be lent to graduate students who are unable to meet their basic needs (rent, groceries, etc.) and replenished continuously throughout the year. As always, our meetings are open to all graduate students and suggestions are always welcome.

Here's to a great semester!

Your PGSA Executive Board:

Kelly Jones – President

Aaron Masseur - Vice President

Joshua Mousie - Secretary

Amy Butchart - Treasurer

Department Staff

Congratulations to Janet Thackray for her much-deserved nomination for a President's Award for Exemplary Staff Service – Hidden Hero Award!

Our Department is extremely pleased to welcome back Mary Roberts-Payne as full-time permanent Department Secretary; and Stephanie Michelle as Administrative Assistant. Our department is honoured to have such a truly excellent staff.

Books Published

John Russon published a new book, *Bearing Witness to Epiphany* (SUNY Press, 2009). The book is a study in the nature of human development, focusing on the role of artistic expression in the formation of personal identity, and on the way in which values emerge in interpersonal and political life.

John also co-edited (with Patricia Fagan) a new collection of essays on Plato's *Apology*, entitled *Reexamining Socrates in the Apology* (Northwestern University Press, 2009).

Jeff Mitscherling's new book, *The Image of the Second Sun: Plato on Poetry, Rhetoric, and*

the Techne of Mimesis has been released by Prometheus Books.

Patricia Sheridan has completed a book for Continuum Press on John Locke's *Essay*. The book, entitled, *Locke: A Guide for the Perplexed* "is intended as an introduction to Locke's philosophical work, offering a thematic review of his thought, together with detailed examination of his landmark text, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Geared towards the specific requirements of students who need to reach a sound understanding of Locke's thought, the book provides a survey of his life, political context and philosophical influences, and reviews the competing interpretations of the *Essay*."

Jay Lampert and **Jason Robinson** have edited a new book: *Philosophical Apprenticeships: Contemporary Continental Philosophy in Canada* (University of Ottawa Press, 2009).

This book is a collection of essays written (in English and French) by the next generation of Canada's philosophers on the research of Canadian philosophers currently working in continental philosophy.

The authors—current or recent doctoral students at Canadian universities—offer fresh and innovative perspectives on the research of philosophers such as Jay Lampert and John Russon.

The book covers a number of topics such as time, art, politics, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. Many of the authors are members of our department, including Jill Gilbert, Scott Marranto, Alexandra Morrison, Stephanie Zubcic, and Jason Robinson.

Some Other Publications and Presentations

John Hacker-Wright published two articles over the summer:

"Human Nature, Personhood, and Ethical Naturalism", *Philosophy*, (2009), 84: 413–427.

"What is Natural about Foot's Ethical Naturalism", *Ratio*, (2009), 22(3), 308–321.

Patricia Sheridan completed a paper on Thomas's Hobbes's theory of punishment (which she presented at McMaster on October 30 and here at Guelph on November 6.

Karen Houle gave a paper at the University of Waterloo, through the Waterloo Institute for Complexity and Innovation. The paper, delivered October 26, is entitled "Is our Concept of Moral Responsibility Newtonian?"

Teaching Awards

Andrew Bailey has been selected as the recipient of the distinguished and prestigious Professorial Award for the College of Arts for 2009 by the University of Guelph Faculty Association. Congratulations Andrew! Your colleagues are very proud of you.

Michal Arciszewski, PhD candidate, won the 2008–09 College of Arts Graduate Teaching Assistant Award for Excellence in Teaching. This too is a prestigious award, and recognizes Michal's outstanding work with Philosophy students. The student testimonials (read out loud when Michal received his award) really illustrated the powerful impact Michal had made on many of his Philosophy students.

Sabbaticals Past and Present

Karyn Freedman

I was on sabbatical leave during the academic year 2008–2009, and it was both a productive and rejuvenating time. In September 2008 I participated in the University of Guelph's 'Leave for Change,' which is a short-term volunteer placement program run by an NGO called Unitera, along with the support of Canadian sponsors (like the U of G) and various partner organizations in developing countries.

I spent 3 weeks in Maun, Botswana, working at a rape crisis center—the only one in a country where sexual violence against women is of epidemic proportions. This was an

incomparably rich experience, and one that was integral to my research over the next 6 months. I spent most of the winter writing a book on rape and psychological trauma. This book is grounded in my own experience as a rape survivor, which I use as a way into understanding the respects in which psychological trauma is both *influential* and *informational*. The book weaves together my personal history with psychological and philosophical insights. It is now three-quarters written, and I'm hoping to finish it this year.

In the spring I switched gears and started to work on a paper on the epistemology of disagreement. This is a relatively new area in epistemology, and certainly new to me, so I had a lot of reading to catch up on. The main issue that dominates this literature is the question over the normative significance of disagreement, in particular, whether reasonable disagreement among epistemic peers is possible.

In my paper I suggest that a helpful way to understand this question is to view it as a question about how to fulfill our duties as responsible epistemic agents. Specifically, how can I responsibly maintain that not-P when someone who I consider to be my epistemic peer maintains that P? In my paper I argue in favour of what I call an interest-relative theory of justification. On this view, a responsibly held belief is a justified belief, and a justified belief is one that is supported by evidence in relation to epistemic risk, where epistemic risk is understood as the risk to an individual in accepting a proposition P as true; in particular, when the epistemic risk to a subject S at time t that P is true is high, the amount of evidence required in order to for S to be justified in believing P at time t goes up. What this means is that two individuals with the same evidence and identical beliefs are not necessarily identical, epistemologically. This theory of justification thus results in a permissive theory of rationality, one that allows for reasonable disagreement among peers.

I presented versions of this paper at an epistemology conference on disagreement in

Amsterdam in August as well as at the CSWIP conference in Guelph in October.

John Russon is on research leave this year working on a follow-up to *Bearing Witness to Epiphany* and on a book on Hegel and Continental Philosophy.

CSWIP Conference at Guelph

On October 2nd to 4th, the Department hosted the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy's Annual Conference. The theme for this year's conference was "Responsiveness, Responsibility, Repair", a subject getting much covered in current political and ethical philosophy from the interpersonal to the global.

There were just shy of 30 refereed papers (over 60 submitted), on topics ranging from: forgiveness as distinct from apology and atonement; disagreement among conscientious (responsible) epistemic agents; a critique of the "Pink Ribbon" breast cancer campaign; the impact of feminist gains in the global North on care workers coming from the global South; Polyamory and significant (responsible) relationships.

The keynote address, which was on Saturday night in the lovely MacDonald Stewart Art Gallery, was delivered by Lincoln Professor of Ethics at Arizona State University, Dr. Margaret Urban Walker.

The talk focused in on the nature of moral vulnerability within the interpersonal relation—vulnerability to another in one's status as a morally accountable being and one to whom account is owed—and the kinds of repair work required when those relations are breached.

It was well attended (about 80 folks) followed by a reception. The conference was closed with apt, poignant and always intellectually-challenging remarks on feminist community and responsibility from the (current) President of

CSWIP, Distinguished Research Professor and APA 2008–9 Distinguished Woman Philosopher, Lorraine Code.

Summer Seminar at Guelph

This summer, July 2nd to 13th, the Canadian Community of Practitioners in Ecosystem Approaches to Health (CoPeh-Canada) delivered an intensive graduate-level seminar course at the University of Guelph. There were 25 people in the course, mostly MA and PhD students studying in Canada (though many of the students themselves Guyana, Ghana, Mexico, Columbia and Vietnam...) and included two professionals working in the field (International Development/IDRC and WHO). The course was designed from the ground up by Guelph faculty (Karen Houle, Bruce Hunter and David Waltner-Toews (OVC), working closely with Cheryl Massey and Suzanne McCullagh).

The course revolved around a real, complex environmental/social/economic situation: "Hamilton Harbour". It unfolded via an involved multi-dimensional investigation of the situation (historical— including First Nations history— archeological, botanical, chemical, environmental assessments, recreational, health-outcomes, etc.), a stakeholder meeting planned and run by the students with representatives of many constituencies in and around Hamilton, and then a working-through of a challenge: what to do with the 400+ hectares of highly contaminated land that United Steel (temporarily closed due to steel/manufacturing downturn) presently sits on.

The framework of the course is an "ecosystem approach", which means that the environment, the animals and the people, all count and any "solutions" to the crisis need to work with all three.

At the end of the two weeks, students

presented their proposal. All of these students have research projects around the world with levels of complexity not unlike that of Hamilton.

Beyond the Borders

Karen Houle was featured on the CBC Radio One program *The Current* on October 20th, as part of a documentary called *The Philosophy of Pig*, speaking about the extinction of domestic breeds of animal. The documentary is available as a podcast at www.cbc.ca/thecurrent.

Undergraduate Philosophy Journal Expanding

Agora, Guelph's first undergraduate academic philosophy journal, is now entering its second year of production. It is being run by Hannah Peck, Editor-in-Chief, and Alexandra Mogyoros, Managing Editor, who are very excited for this year's upcoming issue. They will be inviting all undergraduate students, from both the University of Guelph, and for the first time, other universities, to submit academic philosophical papers for review. A call for papers will be made mid-November and the journal will be released in March.
gupjournal@gmail.com

New Jobs for our Graduate(d) Students

Jason Robinson will take up a one-year position at the Brantford Campus of Wilfred Laurier University.

Philosophy Speaker Series 2009–2010

October 9 - Margrit Shildrick
November 6 - Patricia Sheridan
November 27 - Francisco Gonzalez
January 29 - Colin Allen
February 26 - Andrew Wayne
March 26 - Kieran Setiya

Philo Challenge of the Month

As you know, our Department now has a third year undergraduate course called "21st Century Philosophy", which was taught for the first time last year. Of course, each instructor assigned to this course will choose different texts, not only because we are all oddly different, but because 21st Century philosophy is still in a fluid state of primordial ooze.

The challenge for this month is to suggest a text that would make a good central reading for this course. Bear in mind that the challenge is not to name the best philosophical work of the 21st Century, but the best piece of 21st philosophy to teach in a 3rd year undergraduate course. As an example which your humble PhiloNews Editor, who is teaching the course this semester, has chosen is *Guerrilla Metaphysics* by Graham Harman (Open Court, 2005) as the central (but not the only) text.

Please submit your answer to this Challenge by late-November. All reasonable responses will be printed in the next issue of PhiloNews, and a prize appropriate to philosophers (i.e. those who practice death) will be offered to (and no doubt turned down by) the winner.

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

www.uoguelph.ca/philosophy