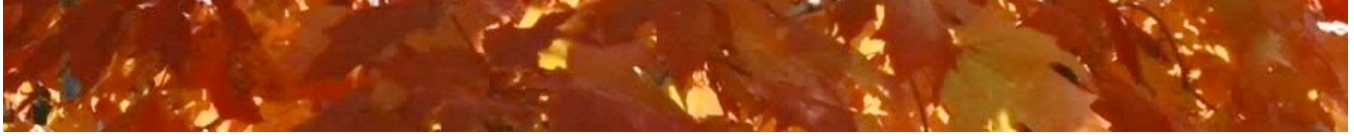


PhiloNews

Newsletter of the University of Guelph Department of Philosophy

ΦΙΛΟΝΟΥΣ



November 2008

From the Department Chair

Welcome to the new academic year. Already there are two big pieces of news to announce. The first is that Karen Houle is the recipient of the 2008 College of Arts Teaching Excellence Award. I am delighted with Karen's success—which is richly deserved—and with the growing recognition that the Philosophy Department is stuffed full of excellent teachers. I hope Karen's will be the first in a long line of teaching awards to members of the department in future years.

The second major news item is that we are beginning our search for a Tier I Canada Research Chair to be appointed to the department. This CRC is for a senior scholar, with an international reputation, appointed for a seven-year term. The chair is to be in the area of ethics and global social change. A lot of attention is presently paid to drivers of social change at a global level—climate change, globalization, the food crisis, the energy crisis, increasing multiculturalism, and so on—and to modelling the consequences for societies. The next step is to turn sustained attention on the novel ethical implications of these movements, and the appropriate normative responses to them; these will be absolutely central to policy questions in the twenty-first century, especially at the supranational level. The CRC we appoint will be taking the lead in this new frontier of research, and directing a new research centre, based in the department, for the study of the ethics of global social change.

A couple of other items for this round-up: CUPE are presently in negotiations with the University for a new Collective Agreement, and I am pleased that they are publicly citing the Philosophy Department in their bargaining newsletter as a model for good practices, particularly with respect to GTA hiring. And Professor Peter Singer, from Princeton, has agreed to give the inaugural Guelph Lecture in Philosophy next March.

Best wishes for the rest of the semester and the coming year.

Professor Andrew Bailey

Graduate Studies

We are off to a very busy and hopefully productive start to the new school year. On September 3 we had a very well-attended and successful Meet & Greet event for incoming graduate students with the faculty and with the continuing graduate students. This event gave an opportunity to the new students to put faces to the names that they knew from before and begin talking to faculty about their area of research activity that might coincide with their own research interests. Consequently many of the new grads have tentative advisors.

On September 4 we also hosted a workshop on the recently established Teaching Practicum Certificate, which was attended by all the new students (minus one) and some continuing students. The point of the Certificate is to give a competitive edge to our students when they graduate and go on the market by giving them a certificate that testifies to their teaching ability. We asked Natasha Kenny from Teaching Support Services to join us as TSS performs an important role in preparing the students to obtain the certificate. During the meeting the passports were distributed and students learned what the necessary steps to fill the passport out were.

Also, couple of our MA students at the end of August successfully passed their Final Oral Examinations. Congratulations to both, and best wishes for their future success.

Nathan Harron defended his MA thesis on August 28, entitled "Monism disguised: scientific pluralism in Philip Kitcher's modest realism." He is now in the PhD program in Philosophy at York University.

Brynna Loppe defended her MA thesis on September 12, entitled "Who gets priority? Examining the external role of wait times in accessing health care in Canada." She is now in the PhD program in Philosophy at McMaster University.

Currently the Graduate Committee is in the process of revising the PhD and MA regulations. The aim

of this endeavor is both to update the regulations and bring it more closely in line with the Graduate Studies regulations. We envision having a draft in a month or so to present to the next departmental meeting.

Professor Omid Payrow Shabani

Undergraduate Studies

The biggest news is that philosophy has become a teachable. This means that students who want to teach high school can get into teacher's college with a major or minor in philosophy. (Students need two teachables—usually a major and a minor in subjects taught in Ontario high schools—to become high school teachers.) We expect our numbers of majors to rise, which is always a good thing for the department. The Undergraduate Studies Committee is also discussing whether, and if so, how, this ought to make a difference to the way we teach some or all of our courses. For the nonce, we'll be coming up with a proposed set of courses that we recommend a student take if s/he is interested in becoming a high school teacher, along the lines of the "Ethics in the Life Sciences" theme.

During Orientation, we had a successful Meeting for Majors. Thanks to Emma Baker, Jason Ferreira, Ian Mathers, Suzanne McCullagh, Boyana Peric and Andrew Robinson for coming and letting prospective students know what it's like to study at Guelph.

Thanks also to Brian Wetstein for, once again, ably representing the Department of Philosophy at the Ontario Universities Fair in Toronto in late September.

The life of an Undergraduate Coordinator is spent in an endless social whirl of form-signing and schmoozing. Excitement abounds. But I'm always happy to share the glory, so if anyone also wants to represent the Philosophy Department at one of the University's many sales events, *please* contact me.

Professor Karen Wendling

Undergraduate Students Philosophy Club

The Undergraduate Students Philosophy Club began the semester with only three members, but immediately gained a new batch of (mostly) young philosophizers (from various programs), with the first meeting in the grad lounge. We discussed what each person wanted from the club, and then collectively created a list of norms for having a productive philosophical dialogue. We also hosted our first pub night at the Bullring on Oct 2, where around a dozen philosophizers let loose on some of the most difficult philosophical problems of our time...or our age...era? Anyway, it was a really good time. And it was then we learned that two of our upper-year philosophy majors are planning to start an undergrad journal here, which is currently in the works!

We now host weekly philosophical dialogues on topics chosen approximately by popular demand. So far, these have included "What sort of society should we transition towards?," Mill's epistemology in *On Liberty*," and, "Do we have moral duties?," and we've seen about 8–12 people pitching in their two cents worth. Thanks to Prof. McCullagh's generosity with his time, we happily had our first professor-powered dialogue on October 15th, where we drilled him on what philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and epistemology are all about. Prof. Wendling was to be our next visiting professor, but she became violently ill when she realized she'd have to hang out with us, so we're currently hoping to rebook her. We're also planning on contacting more professors, to satisfy the content demands of our demanding members. Other planned events include an "ask a philosophical question" couch at the Bullring on Arts Day, Nov 6, 10–noon, and a New York trip during the winter break.

James Heumann

Faculty Research Reports

As is usual in PhiloNews, we present reports on faculty research; this issue features Professors Omid Payrow Shabani and Mark McCullagh.

Omid Payrow Shabani

During the past couple of years my research interest has come to focus on the relation between religion and democracy. The ascendance of religious voices in different forms over the past two decades has challenged liberal secularism and its idea of what ought to count as acceptable reason in political discourse. Confronting this challenge, many political philosophers are rethinking some of the basic principles of liberal democracy, such as separation of church and state and the idea of public reason.

My first thoughts on this topic were submitted to the 4th International Conference on Human Rights at Mofid University (Iran) entitled, "Religion, secularism and democracy." The paper reconsidered the basic principle of liberal democracy concerning the separation of church and state in order to see if there is a way to open up space in politics for religious voices. In the following year (winter 2008) I had the opportunity to teach a graduate course on this topic and further explore the relation of democracy and religion with some of our graduate students at the University of Guelph. The course enabled me to refine my thinking about the topic in different directions, resulting in the following conference presentations: "Freedom of religion, democracy and the fact of pluralism," presented at Canadian Political Science Association (June 4, 2008, UBC, Vancouver); "Post-secular thinking about the

role of religion in democratic politics” at the Canadian Philosophical Association (June 5, 2008, UBC, Vancouver); I gave a revised and expanded version of the papers presented at the CPA and CPSA at the World Congress of Philosophy (July 31–August 5, Seoul, South Korea).

Mark McCullagh

It’s natural to think that using a word is a very different thing from talking about it (which we typically do using quotation marks). It’s equally natural to think that employing a concept in one’s own thoughts is a very different thing from thinking about someone else employing it in theirs. Yet in each case there are puzzling borderline phenomena, which challenge our notions of what it is to use a word or possess a concept. My current research project is to investigate these borderline phenomena and their implications.

The point of my recent paper on mixed quotation (“Understanding mixed quotation,” *Mind* 116) is that it’s possible for one person literally to *use another’s words*—even if she doesn’t understand them—in making a statement. In doing this she is neither doing what she typically does with a word she uses—since in order to make that sort of use, sufficient understanding *is* required—nor is she merely quoting the word. For example, I can say of my British slang-using friend, “He told me he was out ‘dogging’ last night”; here I am not simply quoting the word “dogging,” since it occurs syntactically otherwise than as a singular term; yet I’m not using it in the ordinary fashion either, since it is not a word I need understand well enough to use on my own. (Not that I would ever need to, of

course.) Other attempts to account for mixed quotation have erred in trying to liken it to one of those uses. Understanding mixed quotation helps us understand the traditionally-distinguished categories of “use” and “mention” better.

While on my sabbatical last academic year I worked mostly on a paper about what I call “partial” concept possession, the idea being that one can grasp a concept well enough to use it in forming some thoughts but not well enough to use it in forming others. Making a claim of this sort requires engaging with a daunting literature on compositionality, reverse compositionality, attitude ascription and quotation, and a good part of my time was spent catching up on this quickly-moving literature. It also requires defending the claim against some long-held views on the nature of concept possession, and explaining what sort of picture should replace the one that makes those views seem compulsory.

One part of that paper became a paper in its own right, on “rejected” concepts; this was the subject of the talk I gave in October as part of our department’s speaker series. I’m grateful for the very useful feedback I got on that occasion!

The next projects are papers on so-called “scare quotation,” and on the two non-equivalent ways in which one might try to distinguish between direct and indirect quotation—their non-equivalence showing the possibility of *four* categories rather than those two. I’d originally thought that mixed quotation was one of them, but realized it isn’t. Our discourse about each other’s discourse is rich in ways I’m just getting a grip on.

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

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