

PhiloNews

ΦΙΛΟΝΟΥΣ

Philosophy Department Newsletter, October 2007



From the Chair

by Andrew Bailey

The Department has been full of change this Fall. We welcome two new faculty members: Dr. Maya Goldenberg comes to us fresh from a post-doc position at the University of Toronto and works in the philosophy of medicine. She is cross-appointed with the Bachelor of Arts and Sciences program. Dr. John Hacker-Wright is a specialist in ethical theory and taught in the US for several years after completing his PhD at SUNY Stony Brook in 2000. We are absolutely delighted to have them both with us. We also have a new Secured Appointment, Dr. Brian Wetstein, a COA Teaching Excellence Award recipient who has taught for us since 1998; and a one-year CLA position in Ancient Philosophy which is held by Dr. Anna Greco, who did her PhD in Philosophy and Classics at Pittsburgh.

The front office has also seen major changes. This summer we hired a new Administrative Assistant, Debbie Bailey, and a new Department Secretary, Pam Speers, both of whom have turned out to be splendid additions to the Department. Stephanie Michelle, our previous Admin Assistant, has gone on to bigger and better things with a secondment to the Department of Integrative Biology, and we wish her every success.

We are also currently in the process of looking for a Graduate Secretary, to support a graduate program that—after the biggest admission year in our history—now has 21 MA students and 30 PhDs. We are very pleased with our current ‘crop’ of grad students, and are confident that they will continue the stellar placement record to which our program has become accustomed.

On other fronts, the Department now has a swanky new website (<http://www.uoguelph.ca/philosophy/>) that is not only beautiful but highly functional, thanks in large part to the hard work of web guru Don Detrick. Our undergraduate enrollments are higher than ever, and we have launched a new Minor in Ethical Issues in the Life Sciences. Both the undergraduate philosophy club and the Philosophy Graduate Students Association are especially active this year, and we can expect to see the present steady stream of social events, talks, and ‘Philosophy’ branded promotional material continuing into next semester and beyond!

Finally, we have a new Chair. Andrew Wayne has ascended to the position of Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research in the College of Arts—though he continues to teach and participate in departmental affairs—and, to keep things simple, he has been succeeded by another Andrew, Andrew Bailey.

Faculty Research

Each issue of *PhiloNews* we will feature the research activities of four of our faculty.

Don Dedrick

In the next few months two drawn-out projects will finally (thankfully) come to fruition. A book I co-edited called *Anthropology of Culture* will be in press any day, as the final proofs have been returned to the publisher (John Benjamins, November 2007). A second co-edited volume titled *Computation, Cognition, and Pylyshyn* is scheduled to go to press in the spring (MIT Press, May 2008). Really glad to get these books out of the way! In May 2007 of last year I was part of a symposium at the Association for Psychological Science (Annual Meeting), and I talked about the revitalization of “Whorf’s hypothesis” (a grand form of linguistically-driven cultural relativism) by way of some contemporary work in Psychology. A paper based on that presentation is in the works. I am also preparing an update on the innatist/culturalist debate about colour naming and categorization, a strangely compelling topic I’ve been interested in for over a decade.

John Hacker-Wright

Recently, my article “Moral Status in Virtue Ethics” appeared in *Philosophy* (July 2007). The problem of moral status is the issue of how to decide which entities must count in our moral reasoning, e.g., whether fetuses should be taken into account as possibly harmed or benefited by our actions. In the article, I argue that traditional accounts of moral status in Kantian and utilitarian ethics are for various reasons inadequate and offer an account based on an ethics of virtue (this article, by the way, was the basis of my job talk here last winter). Over the summer, I completed a project on Iris Murdoch, in which I take up her notion of absolute value. Murdoch’s defence of a unitary and absolute Good sets her apart from most of her contemporaries; yet, this aspect of Murdoch’s work hasn’t been taken seriously by her philosophical readers. I try to situate her thought about the Good in the context of an argument against Hume and Wittgenstein, and give it a naturalistic, neo-Kantian reading. The Good is an ideal of responsiveness to the world as it is, especially others as they are; Murdoch sees moral agents as acting under the idea of the Good, so defined. This article should appear in an edited volume on Murdoch, entitled *Iris Murdoch’s Scenes: An Anthology of Moral Imaginations* which is currently under editorial review at McFarland Press. Looking forward, I am beginning work on a book project with the tentative title *Ethical Naturalism and Human Vulnerability*. My central concern will be to put basic and vital human needs at the core of a neo-Aristotelian naturalism (to some extent virtue ethics has regrettably retained Aristotle’s philosophical elitism), and to develop a framework that incorporates care as a core virtue. Tying back to my moral status project, I aim to develop an overall framework that is firmly inclusive of humans with severe, permanent congenital disabilities.

Jean Harvey

My publications are mainly in social and political philosophy and in ethics and I’m currently working on two book projects. One is to do with social justice. In most contemporary writings it is construed as having to do with the major social institutions, whereas I am arguing for a key component of a morally sound conception of social justice that is irretrievably to do with individual action (something I call “interactional justice”) and exploring its relevance to forms of non-violent oppression. Publications relevant to this project include “Justice Theory and Oppression,” (in *Civilization and Oppression*, ed. Catherine Wilson, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supp. Vol 25, 1999), “Moral Solidarity and Empathetic Understanding: The Moral Value and Scope of the Relationship,” (in *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol. 38, Special Issue: Solidarity, 2007), and “The Burden of Securing Social Justice: Institutions, Individuals, and Moral Action,” in *Social Philosophy Today*, vol. 22, 2007. The other major project (at an earlier stage) is to do with ethics and animals, an area still much under explored by philosophers. One major piece nearing completion is on ethics and companion animals.

John Russon

John Russon completed a book entitled *Bearing Witness to Epiphany* that continues the exploration of personal identity begun in *Human Experience*, addressing sexuality, ethics, property and artistic expression. He was keynote speaker at the International Merleau-Ponty Circle, for which he wrote two papers on the theme of passivity in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. Keynote addresses to two Hegel conferences also produced papers on openness in Hegel’s *Logic* and on Hegel’s political philosophy in relationship to Foucault’s analysis of discipline. He had three other papers accepted on authenticity in Heidegger and Derrida, on mood in Hegel and on temporality in Hegel’s philosophy.

Graduate Matters

by Omid Payrow Shabani

Greetings all.

My job as the new Graduate Coordinator began on July 1st. It involved a very sharp learning curve of getting to know many forms, rules and regulations. This year we had our biggest incoming graduate class consisting of 12 MA and 8 PhD students. I would like to welcome these students:

PhD

Matthew Furlong
Richard Duchalski
Nahum Brown
Joseph Arel
Daniel McDonald
Rebecca Olivier
Karen Robertson
Brian Rogers

MA

Brooke McIntosh
Nolan Little
Ryan Krahn
Maria Jiminez Diez
Jeremy Hogg
Jennifer Friis
Charlene Elsby
Mark Adams
Elisabeth Paquette
Boyana Peric
Devin Pratt
John Yolkowski

In early September we had a very successful meet and greet event, where the new students had an opportunity to get to know the faculty and put a face to some of the names that they knew before coming to Guelph. The event was an enjoyable informal occasion that was well attended by both the students and the faculty. Consequently, almost all of the new students have found a faculty member to supervise their projects.

Since my term began we also have had some of our students defend their thesis or pass their Oral Qualifying Examinations: Evan Clarke successfully defended his MA thesis entitled, "Inertia of the Negative: The Generic Set in Alain Badiou's Being and Event" on July 20th (co-advisors Lampert and Houle). Jennifer Rinaldi completed her MA Guided Research Project in the summer. More recently, Jason Robinson passed his OQE on a proposal entitled "Meeting the Hermeneutical Threats of Terror: A Postmodern Ethics of Dialogue" on June 25th. On July 17th Saša Stanković passed his OQE on a project called "From Morality to Affirmative Ethics: the Immanent Transcendental in Kant and Deleuze." Rebecca Olivier completed her MA degree with a Guided Research Project in August. Richard Duchalski also completed the MA degree in August, with a thesis entitled "Exploring Charm and Its Moral Implications for Relationship Ethics". Brad Richards passed his OQE with a proposal entitled "Philosophy of Perception" on September 27th. John Lundy successfully passed his OQE on a proposal entitled "Reconstructing Reason: Investigating the Normative Core of Critical Social Theory in the Age of Postmetaphysical thinking and Globalization" on September 30th. Finally, Matthew Martinuk successfully passed the OQE with his proposal entitled "Being Toward the Good: A Study in the Philosophical Anthropology of Charles Taylor and Iris Murdoch." Congratulations to the students and thanks to the faculty—especially to those not on the advisory committees—who served either as examiners or chairs on these examinations.

It is the time for applying for external funding. Students have been busy writing research proposals and faculty have been busy giving them feedback and writing letters of recommendation. Professor Karen Houle for the second year has taken most of the burden of guiding our student through this process and preparing them. She deserves special thanks. Let's hope that our works will bear some fruit at the end.

Student Awards

Matthew Furlong, a recent hot recruit from Wilfred Laurier, is the first ever recipient of the Bill Hughes Memorial Award. It goes to the incoming Graduate Student with the highest GPA.

Learning Enhancement Fund (LEF) Workshop on Large First Year classes and Teaching Pedagogy

by Karen Houle

On the 29th of September, David Kahane, (3M Teaching Fellow and Vargas Teaching Chair in Political Science at the University of Alberta) led a one-day teaching workshop on the subject of large first-year Philosophy classes. This workshop was funded by the Learning Enhancement Fund. Kahane was pivotal in designing and then teaching a

highly successful model at the U of A (called the “Supersection”), which has been adapted across the country for different sizes of classes, and even different disciplines. What we were interested in hearing from David was: what that model looks like, what the resource requirements are, what the benefits and risks are, and why such a model seems to deliver excellent undergraduate education and graduate student training. During the morning session, which was spectacularly well attended, the graduate students initially heard from Kahane but then quickly moved into a dialogue with him, and with each other, about the particular configuration of challenges and assets here at the University of Guelph. Having 40+ of the grads together in one room, talking about teaching philosophy, was a thing of wonder. Several students wrote in afterwards that his insights, particularly about how to think of tutorials as interactive sessions in which first year students come to understand, by doing it, what philosophy is rather than graduate students having to be ‘absolute experts’ on the subject matter, was immensely helpful: the “culture of curiosity” vs. “culture of mastery” distinction. Over lunch, teaching faculty joined in, more than a few having driven in from Toronto for the afternoon session! In the afternoon, the discussion focused in a bit more on the costs of offering the Supersection model, the distribution of work in a department, how trade-offs would look, and what else might be workable as a model for large first year classes. This was the first step in a series for the LEF committee (Suzanne McCullagh, Emma Baker, Jason Ferreira and Karen Houle).

Jay Newman: In Memoriam

by Peter Loptson

On June 17 of this year Jay Newman, who had been a member of the Department since 1971, died of cancer after several months of illness. This was a major loss to the Department, and a great sorrow for the many colleagues and students who had worked or studied with Jay over a great many years, as well as for many friends outside the university. Jay was an eloquent and committed spokesperson, within our Department, and beyond it in the wider university, and in the public forum, for the values of liberal humane scholarship, and the role of the professor in the contemporary world. He was principled, and forthright—both to the point, some of the time, of being shrill, sometimes caustic. He could be combative, but was unwaveringly and energetically prepared to take stands on issues and concerns which he regarded as important, above all when they involved academic rights and freedom of thought.

Jay was in many respects one of nature’s pessimists. Conversations with him led not uncommonly to the view that he saw the world—in its successively larger contexts, from his own personal life, to the Department, the University, and the world beyond—as going to hell in a hand basket. Yet he brought humour, and strong commitment, ethical and professional, to the several domains in which he was, invariably, a very active participant: the classroom, Departmental life, faculty activities, above all in the work of the university’s faculty association, and the wider territory of public debates on issues of tolerance and the roles of religion in modern life.

Jay Newman was born in 1948, in New York City. Jay received his BA from Brooklyn College, City University of New York, his MA from Brown University, and his PhD from York University. He came to Guelph directly from graduate school, in 1971. He had visiting appointments, chiefly during sabbatical or research leaves, at the Universities of Calgary and Victoria, and Polytechnic (NY) and Ryerson Universities. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1995, an honour of which he was immensely proud. During his academic career Jay published 11 books, 7 book chapters, 54 refereed journal articles, 3 other articles, and 80 book reviews. The majority of Jay’s publications may be said to be writings which address public issues of the day, which can usefully be explored with a philosopher’s well-honed critical skills; particularly moral issues, and religious ones. The titles of the last four of Jay’s books may convey the issues which engaged him, and to which he brought his exceptional analytical and argumentative skills: *Pious Pro-Family Rhetoric: Postures and Paradoxes in Philosophical Perspective* (2007); *Biblical Religion and Family Values: A Problem in the Philosophy of Culture* (2001); *Inauthentic Culture and Its Philosophical Critics* (1997); and *Religion and Technology: A Study in the Philosophy of Culture* (1997). Quite a few of his publications address topics of interface between the modern world—above all, the nineteenth- and twentieth century western world—and the continued roles of received religion, and of theology, within that world. Interestingly, a sizeable number of these involve Jay’s namesake, the English philosopher and educator John Henry, Cardinal Newman. One of Jay’s books is a study of Cardinal Newman, and no fewer than nine additional articles or book chapters are on one aspect or other of Newman’s thought. Two others of Jay’s published articles are on Spinoza; there is one each also on Vaihinger, Collingwood, Maritain, and Bouwsma. A number of the articles explore topics in the philosophy of history. Three of his articles, likewise one of his books, are on philosophical challenges posed by advanced modern technology. Other work is on journalism, and the philosophy of the media. All of Jay’s writings are characterized by a very impressive clarity and accessibility; he was very good at distilling the point or central idea of complex philosophical positions or arguments in a balanced and approachable way. His writings also display an extraordinary breadth of reading, and scholarship, including a special interest in conveying valuable insights or ideas of thinkers less studied, or less frequently placed on canonical pedestals, than others. Still further publications are on Gilbert and

Sullivan. Jay was a passionate fan of G & S, frequently attended performances of one or other of the operettas, and had considerable expertise on the works and how they ought to be performed.

Jay did a full share of graduate supervisions and teaching, in a very committed and dedicated way which was much appreciated by the students concerned. Originally from New York, Jay was an ardent fosterer of many aspects of Canadian life and culture. One form this took, with academic relevance, was his consistent and spirited advocacy of Canadian doctoral programs and their graduates. No doubt this partly reflected the fact that his own PhD was from a Canadian Philosophy program. But he had undoubtedly thought the matter through in a deeper and highly principled way. If we—his colleagues—were not going to take seriously and to honour the backgrounds of job candidates, for example, whose graduate studies had been in Canada, then who would; and how would those programs achieve the place in the international sun to which they aspired, and which they deserved? Interestingly, Jay was an internationalist in job searches, and strongly merit-focused; but would argue that, other things being equal, a Canadian PhD in Philosophy should trump a non-Canadian one. Jay's work, and life, as a scholar also involved very extensive public activity, including participation in numerous radio and television programs as a cultural commentator or discussant of issues extending from the role and significance of political leaders' debates to tolerance and the media and other topics. He talked to seniors' groups about the nature of philosophy, and to a Masonic temple about freemasonry and the rise of liberalism.

Jay was an active participant in the life of his synagogue, and a practicing Jew; indeed, he was a Judaic scholar, and a significant part of his professional and personal life involved him in theological research and theological organizations, Christian as well as Jewish. Jay was President of the Canadian Theological Society for 1990–91.

In more recent years Jay was extensively involved with the politics of campus life, and with the health challenges that increasingly presented themselves; yet he continued writing and publishing books—and continued as well with the immense body of reviewing he did. Indeed, the massive volume of reviewing which Jay did, throughout his career, is by no means the least of his services to scholarship. This is generally very thankless work; yet essential for the role it plays in acquainting the academic community in a summary way with the content and perceived merits of new monographs, many of which may easily be missed, even by the specialist. Jay reviewed prominent books in ethics and social philosophy, introductory texts, work on geopolitical issues and international relations, aesthetics, contemporary religious issues and communities, philosophy of social science, four books on Cardinal Newman, and books on major philosophers, including James, Bayle, Descartes, and Collingwood; Jay made a special point, and did particular service, in reviewing books by Canadian academics. There is clearly an additional special focus, in his reviewing, on work with a religious or theological theme or dimension, theoretical or concerned with addressing current-day religious issues, among them interfaith topics; some 40 of his 80 reviews are of books about religion or theology in one way or other. Jay placed great value on the life of the mind—the vocation, the *métier*, of the scholar, professor, and teacher. He thought that academics should know languages additional to their native tongue; he himself read or worked, with one degree or level of facility, in German, French, Hebrew, and some Latin, and Greek, as well as English.

A memorial event to celebrate Jay's life took place at the Cutten Club on September 7. It was extremely well-attended. A number of Jay's colleagues, former colleagues, students, and friends gave reminiscences of Jay, personal and professional, as well as readings from his books.

Jay Newman left funds in his will for setting up three scholarships within the Philosophy Department. The Jay Newman Memorial Scholarship in Philosophy is to be an undergraduate in-course scholarship for the purpose of recognizing and encouraging commitment to philosophical studies to be awarded annually to a student with an excellent academic record who is enrolled in a program in Philosophy and has completed 8 courses in Philosophy. The Kitty Newman Memorial Entrance Scholarship will be an undergraduate entrance scholarship for the purpose of recognizing and encouraging a promising scholar in the humanities; each scholarship is to be awarded to a student entering semester one of a B.A. program who has an excellent academic record and a commitment to the study of humanities, preferably studies in philosophy. The Kitty and Lou Newman Memorial Ontario Graduate Student Scholarship will be awarded annually for the purpose of recognizing and encouraging a promising scholar in the humanities. In addition, Jay left funds for an award which is to be given to faculty members from any part of Canada (though stipulated to go to a Guelph faculty member on a regular basis), for academic integrity or achievement in defence of academic freedom.