

PHILONEWS

December 2004

Conference in social and political philosophy a huge success

The International Conference in Social and Political Philosophy set forth on November 12th, 2004, with a formal reception to welcome distinguished keynote speakers, discussants, and participants alike.

The international and interdisciplinary event (November 12-14) was organized by University of Guelph's very own Professor Omid Payrow Shabani to facilitate critical engagement associated with social, political and legal theory concerning the issue of law-making in diverse societies. The well-attended event had 214 registered participants and brought together over a dozen world-renowned learned scholars and discussants, including notables: Jeremy Waldron, Wil Kymlicka, James Tully, Jeremy Webber, Melissa Williams, Michel Rosenfeld and Charles Taylor. Overall the speakers and discussants addressed (1) the practice of law-making and the problem of difference and (2) the relation between law and morality. However, it was neither law, nor state politics that would become the main issue over all; rather, discussions quickly turned to that most awesome political power of all: the human voice. So, while much analysis and argumentation concerned the law as a functioning agent of governance to include both theoretical and practical concerns relating to issues of

security, stability, and making policy, the most prevalent question left remaining was whether legal structures (constitutions, statutes, and legal policy) prove capable of voicing solidarity. The nature of status, equality, and representation figured prominently to be sure; but even these concerned how to best capture the voice of minorities. Thus, while the lively sessions offered much by way of disagreement, all appeared to agree that "the problem of difference" revealed at least this much: the salience of human lives and moral texturing of multicultural communities requires a place -- a political platform, if you will -- for members voices to be heard. That platform, it wound up, is law.

So the debates began. We grappled alongside Kymlicka over whether minority cultures are best protected through state legislative self-determination or statutory rights to enjoy their own culture in concert with others (Article 27) and we followed the force of Melissa Williams' argument, that neither justice nor fair treatment of minorities (Rawls, Kymlicka, et al.) is at stake but rather their security, that compelled more than a few of us. We were torn between the healthy scepticism of Waldron, that (minority) rights ought to be argued for in terms of content if accommodation of difference is to be legislated, despite ultimately finding agreement with Rosenfeld, that charged liberal theories with problematically treating difference as non-

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inclusive of equality, ahistorical, non-dialectical, and abstract, to therefore show, for example, how questions of religious difference or faith get cast aside from the outset. Through it all, the nature of political voice remained a central issue; it emerged in Kymlicka's call for dialogical, "effective representation" that actually has an "effect"; it arose with Williams' insistence for minority "empowerment"; and, again, amidst the Hart-Devlin debate a "greater voice and sensitivity to human frailties and differences" had been called for (Waldron) and social "acceptance" shown to be necessary (Webber). Even from the political scientist, Courtney Jung, appreciation for the power of political voice shone through. However, in the case of Jung voice was used to empirically show that it is not a concern of minorities but rather the care of the philosopher to, time after time, reiterate its political, social and cultural significance! Still, when all had been said and done it was perhaps the remarks of Charles Taylor that truly said it best, whose voice resonated with us all: "Politics is not a neat set of prescriptions. When identities are on the table, temptation to polarize and marginalize is at its worst...In these times, that are not new in history as our reflections on history clearly show, the greatest struggle is not us versus them but rather the greater struggle is over our own hearts, over our own minds..." - *Stephanie Zubcic*

MacKinnon extension update

The Mackinnon extension is a swooshy six-storey addition to the south side of the Mackinnon Building. The upper five levels will have connecting corridors with MacKinnon. The first-floor corridor will be where Macks is currently located, and Macks will relocate to the old Dean's offices.



Construction will start in early January, with occupancy optimistically scheduled for December 2005. The history department will be moving into the extension, and this will free up many offices for philosophy.



The biggest annoyance during construction will probably be construction traffic along Trent Lane. At some point early in

Philosophy calendar

Contact the Philosophy office at 824-4120, ext. 53272 for more information.

Dec. 9, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. Reception in honour of Judy Martin, MacKinnon 132.

the construction there will be a few weeks of noise and vibration as the soil under the new building is compacted. After that, we can expect the usual hammering and other construction noise.

The new building will be connected to MacKinnon during summer, 2005. At that time we will lose offices 364 and 365 permanently to make way for the corridor. We will lose offices 363 and 366 during the summer because the windows will be temporarily boarded up as a safety precaution. We should expect some planned interruptions of electricity, water etc. over the summer, and it would probably be prudent to expect some unplanned interruptions as well.

You can't tell from the drawings, but the back of Day Hall will be cleaned up, including removing the old loading docks. The whole area will be nicely landscaped with trees and grass terraces. More information is available on the physical resources web site: <http://www.pr.uoguelph.ca/pr/projectupdates>.

- *Andrew Wayne*