

Department of Philosophy, University of Guelph

# PHILONEWS

February 2005

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## From the Chair

Philosophy faculty have been honoured in various ways over the past month. Peter Loptson has been appointed co-editor of Hume Studies (see below). President Alastair Summerlee has appointed Jeff Mitscherling "Presidential Distinguished Professor" for the period 2004-2006. This appointment recognizes Jeff's outstanding teaching, research and service contributions to this university. Congratulations, Presidential Distinguished Professor Mitscherling! Congratulations are also due to Don Dedrick for having won a major SSHRC Grant in support of the conference he is co-organizing on Zenon Pylyshyn (see below).

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## Zenon Pylyshyn Conference

The Departments of Philosophy and Computing and Information Science, and the Graduate Program in Applied Cognitive Science (Psychology) at the University of Guelph are sponsoring an international, interdisciplinary conference to honour the 20th Anniversary of the publication of Zenon Pylyshyn's classic work in the foundations of cognitive science, Computation and Cognition. Professor Pylyshyn will give the keynote address. Confirmed speakers: Austen Clark, Melvyn Goodale, Paul Churchland, Susan Carey, Brian Cantwell-Smith, Michael Dawson, Stevan Harnad, Charles Reiss, Brian Scholl, Claudia Uller. Registration is 40 dollars (CAN), no fee for students. Poster presentations are invited and we especially encourage

graduate students to submit proposals. The conference will be held April 29 to May 1, 2005.

For more information, contact the organizers, Don Dedrick and Lana Trick at : [zencon@uoguelph.ca](mailto:zencon@uoguelph.ca)

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## Peter Loptson to edit Hume Studies

Peter Loptson has been appointed co-editor of Hume Studies, along with Professor Peter Millican of the University of Leeds. Hume Studies is published under the auspices of the Hume Society, which was founded in 1974, and has become the preeminent journal for the study of David Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment, and one of the leading journals in philosophy worldwide. It is a recognition of Peter's standing in the field of Hume scholarship that he has been appointed co-editor of this journal. During the term of Peter's five-year tenure as co-editor, the editorial offices will be housed in the University of Guelph Philosophy Department. Peter is grateful for the support of the Dean of Arts and the Department of Philosophy.

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## Philosophy–Theology conference

Philosophy MA student David Peck and MA graduate Jason Robinson on February 4 organized and ran the conference: "Irreconcilable Differences? Fostering a Dialogue between Philosophy and Theology" at the McMaster Divinity College. The conference was attended by about 45 people, including students from the Tri-University Ph.D. programme and

MacKinnon 348  
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the Guelph MA programme, the McMaster Divinity College, and the Redeemer University College, and a number of non-academic community members. The objective of the conference was to foster a discussion between these philosophical and theological communities. The organizers were very pleased with the event which was characterized by lively discussion. Speakers at the conference were Gary Madison (Emeritus, McMaster, Philosophy), John Russon (Guelph, Philosophy), John Robertson (McMaster, Divinity) and Theodore Plantinga (Redeemer, Philosophy).

The organizers hope this will develop into an annual event.

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### **What's the Big Idea?**

By David Peck

Voltaire said that "...we use ideas merely to justify our evil, and speech merely to conceal our ideas...". It seems like a good thing to say. Techniques of persuasion, and beautiful metaphors become the tools of modern-day sophists as they tweak and twist hearts, minds and imaginations. Political figures, writers, entertainers, ministers, artists, the media and the like offer up ideas about life and how to see the world as if we were all eating at some kind of disinterested, all you can eat philosophical buffet of detached thoughts and ideas. Today's main course is rhetoric. In the same way, lifestyle advertising spouts its own mediated ilk and should, at best, be seen as a muddied myriad of conflicting messages, assumed premises and shoddy conclusions. Global village? Indeed.

I recently returned from a four-week trip to South East Asia. I spent much of that time in Cambodia. A country that is beautiful, mysterious and tragic. Often referred to as the "sideshow" of the Vietnam War, this is a country that has been largely forgotten by the International community. Thousands dead from mindless, disinterested, video game like bombing, seven to ten million land mines still lying active and dormant like a raw, lethal tumor. Genocide. Thirty years of civil war, a war crimes trial still pending and one in three dead as a result of an idea. Some sideshow.

It is precisely for this reason that I chose to study philosophy. I wanted to be able to stand on the other side of an idea and say with a great deal of historical and philosophical confidence that the idea must be examined and that it may be wrong.

Fifty years ago Saloth Sar and a few Cambodian academics, many of them former schoolteachers, went to France on scholarships to study. They were a small group of thinkers with extreme, desperate ideas about their country. They attended lectures, wrote papers and smoked French cigarettes. Twenty-five years after graduation, Pol Pot and his fellow students were responsible for the deaths of millions of Cambodians. Disturbing numbers and frightening statistics merely approximate the violence and pain these sovereign tyrants rained down on their country. The Khmer Rouge were fascinated with power, infused with racism and bankrupt of any moral restraint.

Ideas must be examined. They must be challenged and sometimes they must be subverted. At the risk of sounding trite, it is with this in mind that I accept my launch into my first term as president of the PGSA. I will assume the role with a passion and commitment to the department, to my fellow students, and to the big idea.

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### **Philosophy Calendar**

#### Upcoming Talks:

Friday March 4, Dan Garber, "Ghosts: Philosophical Reflections on Things that Go Bump in the Night." 2:30 - 4:30 MacKinnon 121 Dan Garber is a distinguished philosopher from Princeton University, who works in the History of Philosophy of Science

Friday March 18, Lorraine Code Title: TBA 3:30 - 5:30, MacKinnon 117 Lorraine Code, who is an alumnus of the our own philosophy department, is currently a professor at York University, and is one of the world's foremost thinkers in feminist philosophy. There will be a reception with Women's Studies following Lorraine Code's talk, which everyone is encouraged to attend.

Lorraine Code will also be giving a general lecture oriented more towards a Women's Studies audience Friday March 18, 1:30 - 2:20 THRN 1307. Please talk to Karen Wendling if you wish to attend this talk.

Jill Rusin's talk has been cancelled.