

# PHILONEWS

October 2005

---

## From the chair

I am delighted to announce that Andrew Bailey and Mark McCullagh have belatedly won SSHRC research grants in last year's competition. Look for a description of their research projects in the next issue of PhiloNews. Congratulations Andrew and Mark! - *Andrew Wayne*

---

## Rereading Plato's *Republic*

The conference Rereading Plato's *Republic* took place on September 15-17. Organized by Professor John Russon, this excellent conference gathered scholars from across North America (including a lively contingent of students from Bishop's University led by James Crooks and Bruce Gilbert) to discuss and celebrate each of the ten books of the ever-puzzling and thought-provoking *Republic*. This conference was about much more than a single text, or a single period in the history of philosophy (though the text be one of the greatest works in philosophy and the historical period be that in which the discipline of philosophy was inaugurated). Rather, the conference could as well be described as an exploration of the philosophical life and of its place within the political community. The University of Guelph's Professor Ken Dorter was the opening speaker. After his introductory address, 10 other speakers spoke

successively on the 10 books of Plato's *Republic*. The speakers were James Crooks, Eric Sanday, Patricia Fagan, Kevin Corrigan, Bernard Freyberg, John Russon, John Sallis, Robert Metcalf, Gregory Recco, and Emily Jaklic.

Ken Dorter (University of Guelph), discussed the *Republic's* treatment of art and, in particular, its apparent condemnation of the arts in Book X. However, Prof. Dorter read the arguments of Book X not so much as a condemnation of the arts as a warning concerning its dangers—much as the dangers of philosophy are highlighted elsewhere in the *Republic*. Art is a “bridge” between the sensuous and the intelligible, it has the potential to open us to truth, and to promote harmony in the soul (i.e., justice); but, misused, it also has the capacity to limit our horizons, to preoccupy us with the enjoyment of the sensuous and occlude our rational nature. It is only in this later sense that art is open to Socrates' criticisms. Socrates points to real dangers that exist in art but, said Dorter, nothing valuable is without danger, and philosophy itself falls in the category of these valuable things.

James Crooks (Bishop's University) examined the opening passages of Book I in terms of his notion of “literary beginnings.” The beginning of, for example, a novel does not merely commence with the telling of the story, rather it intimates a background of significance and thereby

MacKinnon 348  
Tel: 824-4120 x56388  
Fax: 837-8634  
phil-chr@uoguelph.ca

[www.uoguelph.ca/philosophy](http://www.uoguelph.ca/philosophy)

sets up the terms in which the story can develop and in which the characters can become themselves. The two themes set up at the outset of the *Republic* are that of inheritance and of character as a *tropos*, or 'turning.' Prof. Crooks reads these two themes together; the *Republic's* account of the philosophical life (and indeed of the life of the citizen) will involve a "reciprocative rejoinder," a "turning back to our inheritance" which will not be merely a conservative holding on to an initial position but a creative affirmation of our own constitution.

Eric Sanday (Marquette University), in his discussion of Book II, emphasized not so much a recapitulation of beginnings but a necessary break with them as a condition of the possibility of philosophy. In other words, it is only by way of an interruption of received identity that one is able to be a philosopher or a citizen of a *polis*. In this way, justice and injustice are fundamentally joined at their core: establishing an identity in the world of justice involves a violence against oneself. Justice ultimately demands that this violent interruption to one's identity be given its due, which is the mandate of philosophy. Rational discourse lays on a ground of habituation and narrative through which this return to one's violent origin as a citizen can be addressed. The role played by musical training in the formation of citizens is

justified by its capacity to set up such a ground. After the loosening of the hold of custom and tribe, it re-forms an identity upon a new ground of habit and narrative (an instituted historicity). Musical training thus enables individuals to become citizens and to practice philosophy.

Patricia Fagan (University of Windsor) discussed Socrates' warnings concerning poetry in Book III. She pointed out the parallels and terminological cross-references between this passage in the *Republic* (411a-b) and the account of Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens at *Odyssey* 12.39-54. Prof. Fagan argued (not unlike Prof. Dorter) that the warnings about poetry are to be read as a condemnation of possible abuses of art by certain artists. This becomes clear if we compare the "art" of the Homeric sirens (as ersatz poets) with that of the muses (as legitimate sources of artistic inspiration and authority). Plato's subtle references to the Homeric text, which would not have been lost on his Greek readers, serves to aid the reader in distinguishing between good and bad forms of poetic art.

Kevin Corrigan (Emory University) discussed the doctrine of the tripartite souls in Book IV. It seems that the division of the soul in Book IV is at odds with the *Phaedo* and with *Republic X*, where the soul appears to be a simple unity. Prof.

### Philosophy calendar

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

**Oct. 21, 3:30 p.m.** Paul Thompson (Toronto), "Genetically Modified Crops and the Relief of Extreme Poverty", MacKinnon 228.

**Oct. 28, 3:30 p.m.** Departmental meeting, room TBA.

**Nov. 4, 3:30 p.m.** Peter Loftson (Guelph), title TBA.

**Nov. 12.** *From the Academy to the Lyceum: A conference in honour of Kenneth Dorter.* Speakers include Cristina Ionescu, Jonathan Lavery, Steven Robinson, Jiyuan Yu and Doug Al-Maini.

**Nov. 25, 3:30 p.m.** Joseph Heath (Toronto), title TBA.

**Dec. 2, 3:30 p.m.** Departmental meeting, room TBA.

Corrigan argued that these passages can be held together only if we understand the soul as non-substantial, as a layered but unified agency whose structure is determined in relation to the objects of its desires. The different interpretations of the soul that are offered in the various different Platonic texts are not, Corrigan argued, to be viewed as a series of (changing) Platonic doctrines, but are, rather, different ways that the soul shows itself in different contexts.

Bernard Freyberg (Slippery Rock University) investigated the arguments regarding the dissolution of the family and the installation of philosophers as kings in *Rep. V*. Freyberg demonstrated that there is a tight connection between the argument made here and that made in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*. Freyberg used this parallel to argue that Plato's text in Book V has the literary form of a comedy, and should not be mistaken for a straightforward presentation of Platonic doctrine. We should approach the read-

### From the Academy to the Lyceum: A Conference in Honour of Kenneth Dorter

Saturday 12 November 2005, 9 am - 7 pm

This conference will feature papers on a number of topics in Ancient Greek philosophy and will reflect some of the more recent trends in this field.

Conference registration is free, and includes lunch and a reception. There will also be a conference dinner, which will cost \$20 for faculty and \$10 for students.

We hope you will be able to join us in celebrating the career of our esteemed colleague. Please RSVP to Karyn Freedman karynf@uoguelph.ca if you plan to attend the conference, and let us know if you will be joining us for dinner.

ing of this book as we would approach the reading of a work by Aristophanes.

John Russon (University of Guelph) explored the philosophical life in Book VI. The real philosopher is the lover of learning and, *qua* lover, is insatiable and delighted in the object of love. It is one particular and finite soul that loves and learns, and the learning is also finite. The philosopher therefore belongs to the realm of the becoming rather than that of Being. We are not born philosophers, but we become them, and we do so taking inspiration from particular philosophers that have lived before us and have been our examples. Russon then argued that the method of the philosopher is to turn around all ambiguous things towards the Good. Russon concluded that we cannot say (with Socrates) that the philosopher does not love falsehood but only loves wisdom. Inasmuch as wisdom comes (necessarily) from falsehood by a turning of it, the philosopher also loves the latter as well as the former. Indeed, Plato shows this himself when, in his dialogues, he preserves the errors of the interlocutors in order to extract from them the truth.

John Sallis (Boston College) carefully explored *Rep.* VII, 516B: “And so, finally, I suppose, he would be able to look upon the sun itself and see its true nature, not by reflections in water or phantasms of it in an alien setting, but in and by itself in its own place (*en te autou chora*).” What is the proper place (*chora*) of the Good that is mentioned in the final words of the above-mentioned phrase? Is it beyond Being? The reply to the questions, said Sallis, may not be found in *Rep.* VII or even in the whole of the *Republic*; the only thing that is confirmed is that no consummating or sustaining vision of the Good can occur. The proper character or goodness of the

Good is its generosity: it gives things their being. What Sallis envisages as the *chora* of the Good, then, is the self-image-making generosity where the Good appears in its very self. Prof. Sallis argued that the Good is, like the *chora*, in the *Timaeus*, the “spacing” of the giving of being, a generosity conferring on beings their capacity to be what they are, while withdrawing itself from view—again, like the sun which always deflects our direct gaze.

Robert Metcalf (University of Colorado at Denver) studied the account of the decline of states in *Republic* VIII. That book focuses on the way sons learn from their fathers, and Metcalf used this analysis as a way to study the “learning” characteristics of Plato’s interlocutors. He argued that Glaucon and Adeimantus, while good interlocutors for political discussions, are not good students when it comes to metaphysics. He concluded that we, as readers, must also answer to the demands of learning as laid out throughout the *Republic*, and that this demands not least that we be careful in how we handle the textual character of Plato’s dialogues.

Gregory Recco (Skidmore College) discussed “tyranny, desire, and art” in Book IX. Prof. Recco drew out two central themes: 1) the contingency of human development, and; 2) the ambivalence of desire. In the *Republic*’s account of the becoming of the democratic man and of the tyrant there is an acknowledgement that outside influences (themselves contingent factors) enter the soul and largely determine the shape of things to come. Here we see how the forcefulness of desire introduces an element of contingency or luck into the Platonic account of human development. Desire itself, which on the one hand is the principle of the right ordering of the soul, is, on the

other hand, a principle of insatiability—an emptiness that cannot but intensify itself. Such tyrannical desire takes the form of unquenchable longing or regret; but is any desire free of this ambivalence?

Emily Jaklic (University of Guelph) returned us to the problem of Socrates’ apparent condemnation of the poets in Book X. She argued that the character of Glaucon was conspicuously wrong to have accepted Socrates’ arguments against the poets. The so-called imitative (there was some discussion throughout the conference as to whether “imitation” is a suitable translation for the Greek word *mimesis*) poets are said, in Socrates’ account, to be, by nature, of a more irritated and multi-colored disposition and thus less related to that part of the soul that is “rational.” Jaklic considered the weakness of this argument and showed that the Socratic philosopher and the poet must be much closer in nature than Socrates’ argument in Book X would seem to suggest.

The problem of the arts within the constitution of the polis was a theme that came up repeatedly in the conference (as it does within the *Republic*). This problem cuts to the heart of the philosophical problem of the relation of particulars and universals, and thus, perhaps, to the problem of justice as ‘giving to each their due,’ of identity and plurality, of meaning and the Good—indeed, Plato has shown perhaps more clearly than any other philosopher, that the engagement with the meaning of art forces us to constantly rethink the very definition of the philosophical enterprise. - *Ileana Szymanski and Scott Marratto*