THE PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT IN THE AGE OF AQUARIUS: THE FIRST THIRTY YEARS

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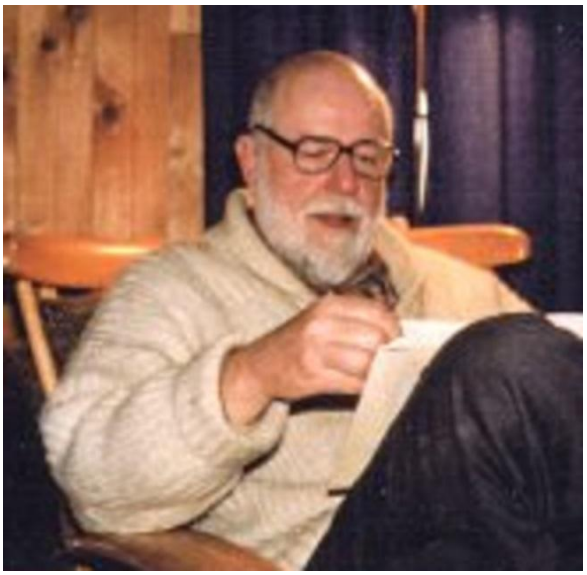
June 2015



This is John Bruce, the founding chair of the Guelph philosophy department, who I first met in December 1965 when he was thirty years younger and had a red beard and no glasses. I was at the American Philosophical Association meetings looking at the message board that showed which universities were interviewing at which tables for which jobs, when John wrote "University of Guelph" on the board. Since the university was new and I'd never heard of it I had no interest until he hesitated and then added "Ontario". Two of my Penn State classmates had jobs at the University of Toronto and liked Ontario, so I followed John back to his interview table. At one point I asked him how many students the school had. John said they were expecting 15,000 students. He hadn't mentioned that it was new so I assumed it was well established and I asked, "If you're expecting 15,000 students how many do you actually have?" and he said, "About 2,000." I was confused. If all they could attract were 2,000 students how could they be expecting 15,000? Have Canadians no sense of reality? But the mystery was soon explained, and it wasn't long before the shoe was on the other foot. While Christa and I stayed as guests at the Bruces' home about a month later for my visit to campus, their younger son shortsheeted his parents' bed for the only time in his life and suspicion naturally fell on us. So while we were lying in our bed in blissful ignorance, John and Vida were lying in theirs wondering, Have Americans no sense of

propriety? What kind of people *are* these, anyway? Fortunately their son confessed. Fortunately, too, I already had the job: hiring in those days was on the basis of one's CV and an interview with one or more faculty members who then reported to the department. The visit was more for my benefit than for theirs.

John Bruce never wanted to be chair. He was a faculty member at the University of Western Ontario when he heard about the forthcoming university in Guelph. His friend Murdo MacKinnon, after whom our building was later named, was to be dean of the University's new Wellington College of Arts and Sciences, and John asked if Murdo would appoint him to the Philosophy department. Murdo said, "I'll do better than that, I'll make you chair." "No thanks," said John, "I don't want to be chair, just a department member." A few weeks later he received confirmation of his appointment as chair of the department. I once asked Murdo why he did that. He said, "They did it to me so I did it to him. I just wanted to be chair of English, the way I was at Western, but they made me dean anyway." I took the opportunity to ask Murdo why he didn't establish Music or Religious Studies departments when the College opened, given that music and religion were two of the most important things in his life. Murdo explained that he just copied the Arts College at Western, not realizing that unlike Western, Guelph wasn't going to have separate schools for music and religious studies. When the Music department was eventually established money was scarce, which is why the department has always been small.

A graduate student from another university once told me that the difference between Guelph and his own department was that at Guelph the doors were always open, while at his department not only were the doors closed, but it felt like the filing cabinets were pushed against them on the other side. John Bruce was the reason the Guelph department has always been such a welcoming place. Partly it was because of his non-authoritarian personality – after all he never

wanted to be chair – and partly because he hired mostly young people right out of graduate school, rather than established academics with established egos. A visiting speaker in those days, Keith Gunderson, called us the world's only teenage philosophy department. We were mostly in our late twenties, and we and our spouses and children became friends. We had parties to which everyone was invited, where we danced with various spouses including our own. So despite our often very different philosophical specialties and orientations, a spirit of tolerance of other people's points of view developed that continues today.

The Languages department wasn't as fortunate. At one point president Winegard summoned the chair of Languages, Rex Barrell, to his office and asked, "How many of your faculty would you personally be willing to certify as sane?" I'm not sure what Rex answered, but when his term was over he was replaced as chair by someone from outside the university. Her arrival however didn't improve the ratio of sanity in the department. When the building first opened people asked why the women's washrooms had only a single toilet, and the architects replied, "How many secretaries do you have?" Well, when the new chair of Languages saw the women's washroom she was shocked. She even made me go inside to see how small it was. Her solution? She switched the signs on the men's and women's rooms. You can imagine the awkward moments this produced, since people often came from other floors to use the facilities, and moreover we now had a situation where the women had a urinal and the men didn't. This provoked a rebellion and the signs were soon restored to the way nature intended.

The Philosophy department, despite being then as now a beacon of sanity in an insane world, had its moments nevertheless. I was told by a student that one colleague who was about forty when he came to Guelph, used to read his lecture notes verbatim until the end of the class, at which point he would stop. If a student asked a question during class he would say, "You must

have missed that" and would go back to the first page and start reading all over again from the beginning. Another early colleague who realized he wasn't going to finish his dissertation and therefore wouldn't get tenure, preemptively resigned and – at a time before the internet when many more faculty worked in their offices – he commemorated his resignation by bringing in a pea shooter and a bag of dried peas, taking the elevator up to the seventh floor and working his way down, stinging with peas the back of the head of anyone who happened to be in their office.

Zavitz Hall is the red brick building between the cannon and the Physical Sciences building. The entrance is a portico across from the University Centre. In those days there was no portico, just a brick wall with wooden double doors that were permanently bolted and formed one wall of my office. Starting in 1965 and for the next two years until the opening of MacKinnon Building, then called Arts 1, the Philosophy department was housed in three well populated rooms in the basement of Zavitz. My office was also home to George Todd, Alex Michalos, and our first graduate student, Ken Montague. In the room next door were Bill Hughes, Brian Calvert, Don Stewart, Michael Ruse, Carole Boroski, Toby Chapman, Helier Robinson, and a few months later John Hems. Adjoining their office was that of the chair, John Bruce. The secretaries for the college, one per department, were together in two other rooms.

After Michael Ruse got married, Don Stewart and Carole Boroski were the only remaining single members of the department and, in this best of all possible worlds, they fell in love and married each other. For about the next twenty-four years Carole was the only female member of the philosophy faculty. We made offers to other women during that time, including Alison Jaggar who went on to have a very successful career, but they all accepted other positions.

My starting salary was a generous $7,500 for teaching six thirteen-week courses a year –

generous because I had originally agreed to accept $7,000. A year later I was making $8,300 and we bought our first house for $20,200. The population of Guelph was 48,000, all the major stores were downtown, you could buy T-bone steaks on sale for 89¢ a pound, and tuition at Guelph was $230 a semester – the current rate is $3,444. In other words, you could get a four year degree in 1966 for $1,840, whereas it would now cost you 15 times as much @ $27,552. Very little time seems to have passed since I was young, but when I see how much has changed I begin to think that time may be something real after all, and that I must really be as old as I look. I mentioned that the semesters were originally thirteen weeks long. That lasted for decades, maybe as long as thirty years, until the administrators suddenly realized that all this time they could have accommodated their meetings between semesters more comfortably simply by shortening the semesters to twelve weeks. They seemed to feel that the university would be a great place to work if only it weren't for the classes.

The times after I arrived were very exciting, full of optimism and lots of money for education in anticipation of the influx of baby boomers. We were hiring every year, buildings were going up, and we got generous yearly raises. Eventually we were up to 23 faculty – 22 men and Carole Stewart – and then the cash cow died. There was an economic downturn and president Winegard announced that no one would be granted tenure until further notice, including some untenured members of the Philosophy department. Buildings stopped going up and neither Arts 2, which was to be built where Rozanski Hall now stands and house the Social Sciences college, nor phase 2 of the library were ever built. Phase 2 of the library at the University of Waterloo was never built either, but for a different reason: when the architects calculated the strength of the foundation they forgot to allow for the weight of the books, and phase 1 was as high as they could go.

For Christa and me, coming to Guelph from the United States was a bit of a culture shock. The first time we went downtown we were treated to a bagpipe parade. So this is what it's going to be like, we thought. In March there was another parade, this time for College Royale, including floats from the original three colleges. The Vietnam War was going strong, and Americans were chanting "Make Love Not War". The banner on the Agricultural College float said "Make Food Not Love".

A more academic culture shock was the Canadian grading system. Instead of the symmetrical percentage system used in the US, where A=90–100, B=80–89, etc., when I arrived here A=76–100, B=66–75, C=60–65, and D=50–59 – in other words, the twenty-four-mark A range was four times the size of the six-mark C range. Later it was changed to the present system where A=80–100, B=70–79, and so on, but I never understood why A had a twenty point range while B, C, and D had ten point ranges, which tends to skew the average upwards. Whenever I asked about it I was told that "God gets 100, the instructor gets 90, and the students get up to 89." That convention gradually disappeared, partly because it meant that Arts students with their ten mark handicap were always at a competitive disadvantage with science students, whose grades were true numerical averages up to 100. And partly because God never enrolled in any of our courses.

It was the Sixties and the Philosophy department was imbued with the spirit of idealism. We tried to abolish ranks, which we considered more divisive than useful and came with an enormous cost in emotional energy and rancorous meetings. But the university wouldn't permit it. However we did abolish merit increases on the grounds that we were motivated by philosophy, not money. For a few years we evenly divided the pot of merit increase money among all faculty members. When the administration noticed that everyone was getting the same

merit increase every year, they assumed that the less productive faculty were forcing their self-interest onto the more productive ones, but in fact it was the other way around. The initiatives came from the most successful members of the department, like Michael Ruse and others. The provost, Howard Clark, insisted that money was a motivator but we didn't believe it was true in our case. He also said that if we continued to divide the money equally the administration would stop funding merit increases in the Philosophy department altogether. We knew that argument was a logical fallacy, *Argumentum ad Baculum*, Appeal to Force. But it worked anyway.

Of course there was more to the Sixties than idealism, there were also sex and drugs. Periodically a student would tell me that he cut off his shoulder-length hair because he had to go to court on a drugs charge. I only knew two people in our faculty who took drugs, but a lot more had sex, in some cases with other people's spouses – after all, we were mostly around the same age, young and beautiful, "free love" was in the air, and it was the Age of Aquarius. Some wives openly approached other husbands and some husbands openly approached other wives, but as far as I know these experiments didn't continue for more than a couple of years.

Besides idealism, sex, and drugs, the Sixties was also home to anti-intellectualism and rebellion. When Pink Floyd sang at the end of the seventies, "We don't need no education, We don't need no thought control", they were expressing a sentiment prominent throughout the Sixties. In the high schools it manifested itself in the veneration of self-expression. Rules, like the rules of grammar, stifled self-expression and were a form of thought control, so they weren't enforced and maybe not even taught. As a result many students came to university who couldn't make themselves understood in writing. The English department grudgingly offered well-subscribed courses in remedial writing that taught students what their predecessors had learned in high school. A great many of my students preferred to give oral seminars instead of written

essays, they loved to talk much more than they liked to write, and I scheduled seminar groups within lecture courses. Then one year somewhere in the seventies, suddenly no one wanted to give seminars anymore. It was as if someone had thrown a switch and the Sixties were over. I never realized how abruptly the zeitgeist could change.

Offsetting the functionally illiterate students was another group of intelligent, enthusiastic, rigorously educated students who were immediately recognizable by their dark suits and ties. They were Jesuit seminarians from what is now called Loyola House, just north of Guelph, which in those days housed Ignatius of Loyola Seminary. The seminary had reached an agreement with the new university that rather than hiring its own faculty it would have its students taught by us, the first such arrangement with a secular university in North America, I was told. As part of the agreement the Philosophy department hired a Jesuit priest to teach appropriate courses and serve as a mentor for the seminarians. Father Terry Walsh was a full member of our department and fit in very easily with the rest of us. However, after about eight years the seminary was dissolved, Terry Walsh was reassigned, and the initiates were transferred to seminaries in the United States. The reason, I was told, was that the Vatican hadn't been consulted about our arrangement and when they inexorably found out they shut it down.

Not everything about that time was liberal. Every year the president would invite each of the departments for food, drinks, and conversation at his house on campus, where the presidents actually lived in those days. Everyone in our department was always invited except Carole Stewart. Why should Carole be invited when her husband's invitation always said "Don Stewart and Guest"? Once when Carole protested, the president wrote back that he would quite understand if she decided not to attend. That's exactly what she decided and so did her husband. The Philosophy department, at least, treated her with such respect that it immediately made her

the permanent secretary so she could take minutes at all our meetings. Eventually it dawned on us – probably with Carole's help – that a man could perform those duties too, and we began rotating the job among the whole department.

I always thought my colleagues were as happy as I've been in our department, but when in the mid-nineties the university proposed a generous early retirement package to entice the top earners to leave, I was shocked when six of my seventeen colleagues accepted the offer. When another member of the department was forced to retire at 65, and Carole Stewart moved up to the position of dean, we were left with ten faculty and had to make wholesale cuts to our offerings. But eventually cash started to flow into the system again and we once again began to hire. Soon talented new faculty sprang up like mushrooms on the ashes of the old, and here we are.