
PHILOSOPHY NEWSLETTER

A Newsletter Published by the Philosophy Department of the State University of New York at Potsdam

www.potsdam.edu/academics/AAS/Phil

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SUMMER 2011

Greetings from the Ex-Chair

By David C.K. Curry

2010-11 has been a tumultuous year for the department. First, the department is missing the organizational, leadership and teaching skills of Dr. Little, who has enjoyed a well-deserved year long sabbatical in Oklahoma. This explains the inefficiency of getting this latest edition of the newsletter out to you. Dr. Little will be off again this fall and then return in the spring semester before retiring permanently beginning in the fall of 2012. The department, and the College, will miss her contributions dearly.

We are also sorely missing Dr. Huss, on a Leave of Absence for this year and next, and who is, unfortunately, unlikely to return to Potsdam. Dr. Huss is teaching at York University in Toronto where he can be with his wife, Kristin Andrews, and three year old daughter, Alexandra (Poppy, to those in the know). Thankfully, Dr. Huss has made his presence felt in his absence by teaching Metaphysics and Epistemology in a hybrid online format this past year. Next year he will be teaching a hybrid Symbolic Logic course online, and we hope to have one of our majors, Michael Mishra, serve as a TA for that class, meeting with the students once a week to review and practice the material. So that has left Dr. DiGi, Dr. Tartaglia, Professor Munroe and myself to hold down the fort. Unfortunately, this looks to be the state of things in the department for a while. Due to the state budget crisis, and what some of us take to be a local inability to prioritize the academic mission of the institution, we are likely to remain a three person philosophy department for the near future. I have resigned my position as Chair of the department in protest of the lack of leadership on campus in these difficult financial times (I would be happy to share my resignation letter with anyone who might be interested). See the Call to Action box for what you can do to help the department in this time of tribulation.

Despite being seriously short-handed in terms of faculty, The Philosophy Forum has maintained its high level of activity. Will Hancock served diligently as Philosopher King, Michael Mishra as Philosopher Prince and Avatar Davis as the Minister of Finance. A listing of past and future events is to be found elsewhere in this newsletter. Most notably, Avatar Davis, Will Hancock and Michael Mishra all got papers accepted at the College of William and Mary Undergraduate Conference held at the end of March (although Will was unable to present his due to a conflict with an Anthropology conference at which he was reading another paper!). Will's paper was also accepted and presented at the New England Undergraduate Philosophy Conference. In addition, three alumnae returned to campus to present to Forum this spring. Matt LaVine '09, in his first year of graduate work at the University of Buffalo presented "Corcoran, Quine and Sorensen: Three accounts of Paradox" on March 15th; Joe Hedger, in his first year of graduate study at Syracuse

University presented "The Truth about Racial Slurs: Using Kaplan's Framework to Provide a Semantic Theory of Derogatory Epithets" on March 17th, and Dr. Anna Lannstrom, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Stonehill College talked about her recent research in the religion of Socrates on March 31st. All of these visitors kindly agreed to meet informally with our majors and field questions about their graduate school experiences.

Philosophers' Corner

By Brian Huss

Here is a puzzle known as Kavka's Toxin Puzzle:

Suppose a psychology professor at your school has both a large fortune and a perfect ability to detect intentions. In the interests of science, she makes the following offer to you:

"Here is this toxin. It is vile stuff. It will make you very sick for a day if you drink it – though it will not harm you in any lasting way. If tonight, at the stroke of midnight, you fully intend to drink it tomorrow at noon I will give you \$1 million. To get the money it is not necessary that you actually drink the toxin; it is only necessary that you really do intend to drink it. However, you may not make any bets or promises that you will drink it, or otherwise arrange for bad effects of not drinking it. To win the money what you must do is fully to intend tonight to drink the toxin tomorrow"

Suppose that you are confident that the psychologist is being truthful and that she really is a perfect intention detector. Is it possible for you to get the \$1 million without drinking the toxin?

Issues to consider:

Some have suggested that only irrational people could get the \$1 million, because only people who really will drink the toxin tomorrow will be able to really intend to do so at midnight, but it would be irrational to drink the toxin tomorrow, regardless of whether the \$1 million is won at midnight.

Others have suggested that the toxin puzzle shows that a kind of backwards causation is possible. Here's why: If you fully intend to do something in the near future, then you will do it (unless someone or something prevents you from doing it). In other words, you cannot fully intend to do something without doing it. But that looks a lot like causation according to people like Hume: if A causes B, that means that B would not have occurred without A. So, it looks like the drinking of the toxin tomorrow causes the intention to drink it at midnight. This is an example of a cause coming *after* its effect.

Let us know what you think. We will publish selected answers in the next newsletter.

Call to Action!

Many of you have benefited from your work with the department and our faculty over the years, at least spiritually, if not financially! If you are one of those who has so benefited, we would request that you please write the President, Provost, and the Dean of Arts and Sciences (copy me too) relating how your philosophy studies have benefited you in life and career and so how important it is for SUNY Potsdam to have a vibrant and healthy philosophy program.

When our program was reduced to three full-time faculty way back in 1991 we struggled to survive and continue to offer excellent programming. We got some relief in 1994 when we were allowed to hire Dr. Little. In 2008 Dr. Little managed to convince the administration to restore us to five full time lines, and with the brilliant addition of Dr. Huss the department once again began to thrive. This renaissance has been opportunistically cut short due to Dr. Little's retirement and Dr. Huss's difficult decision to return to Toronto to be with his family. As of this writing, we have no permission to hire replacements for either of them, and given the budget situation of the State and the campus, we are not optimistic. Please help us convince the administration of the importance of philosophy to the College and hence of the importance of making the department whole again. An e-mail will do – a formal letter is even better. Send letters to the following:

Dr. Fritz Schwaller, President of the College
Dr. Margaret Madden, Provost & VP for Academic Affairs
Dr. Steve Marqusee, Dean of Arts and Sciences
Dr. David Curry, Associate Professor of Philosophy

Thanks in advance for your support.

Why Study Philosophy?

Check out Will Hancock's very nicely done brochure on why one should study philosophy as an undergrad on our website: www.potsdam.edu/academics/AAS/Phil

Some more recent data to support Will's claims is to be found there as well, along with some other interesting links.

Last, but not least, here is some testimony from a very promising student who transferred out last year after I gave him my standard speech for those contemplating Graduate work in Philosophy (many of you will remember that spiel):

Hello Dr. Curry,

I'm at Warren-Wilson, learning interesting and useful things, one of which is the ability to gauge where my skills (writing, as opposed to chemistry, for example) would be most effective professionally. I came here intending to study Sustainable Agriculture, but after a somewhat recent epiphany, and some subsequent realizations, I am planning on pursuing the Environmental Policy major in addition to the Philosophy major.

Throughout the semester I have been, and will be working

on a group project for an Environmental and Ecological Economics class. It just so happens that the topic I wanted to investigate (resource efficiency of industrial beef production facilities) also interested two other people who are Sustainable Ag. majors. After reading over the first 5 or 6 pages of part of our first draft, I noticed a real divide in the writing styles and organizations of our various portions of the essay. This made me think about writing for philosophy, and how writing for an economics class is a piece of cake compared to writing those damn philosophy papers. (I actually really like them, they're just time consuming and usually make my brain hurt - I'm reminded of all the times I've walked passed Huss' office and seen him with his head in his hands). Anyway, the obvious difference in writing styles and ability (I'm not exaggerating when I say I literally couldn't understand a number of my peer's sentences) made me rethink the Sustainable Ag. major, not because I took my two group members to represent all sustainable agriculture majors (they're actually both really bright guys) but because it made me think about how someone without writing or critical thinking skills can definitely excel at and use the sustainable ag major fully, but someone without those skills could probably not do something like environmental policy work. Essentially, I could do something like build farms, and so could my peers, and they could do it very effectively, but I could also do policy work, because of some of the skills I think studying philosophy has afforded me, whereas someone without those skills might have a difficult time with rigid argumentation of the sort that policy work, based on the small amount I know about it, often seems to entail.

Johnny Slaff

Thanks to All Alumni Contributors!

Philosophy faculty would like to publicly express our sincere gratitude to the many former students who have so generously donated amounts ranging from \$20 to \$300 over the past six years to the SUNY Potsdam Philosophy Department Foundation Account. Your support overwhelms us and greatly contributes to our efforts. Thank you.

Don't forget to tell us all of your news by submitting the Report of Alumni Form information on page 3 to currydc@potsdam.edu. Let us know where you are, what you are doing, and anything particularly memorable about your time here at Potsdam with the department and its faculty.

Eidoscope

By Michael Mishra

Horoscopes for the Philosopher who wishes to know EXACTLY what's in store for him or her in the following year. Find your "sign", and see what the stars say about YOU!

*Nietzschean- It will be a fantastic year for you, as you will endure tremendous pain and suffering.

*Utilitarian- You will do a large amount of good this year by deriving much pleasure from playing unappreciated yet ultimately harmless practical jokes.

*Heideggerian- Your Da-sein will find nothing thought provoking, causing you to think, and so you will not have anything to be silent about, but much to say.

*Logician- You will seriously consider the arguments for Possible World Realism this year, while still maintaining that everyone around you has no common sense.

*Berkeleyan- Sadly, you will die this year, due to divine neglect.

*Hegelian- You will feel farther from the Absolute Spirit this year as you notice your Art, Religion, and Philosophy inexplicably clashing yet again.

*Humean- You will frustrate yourself trying to paint your house with a missing shade of blue, until you realize that you didn't have a self to begin with.

*Quinean- You will once again convince yourself that, even though truth is relative, everyone else is definitely wrong.

*Kantian- While pondering whether or not you can wish watching porn to be a universal law, you'll be distracted by wondering what the world is like outside of your home town.

*Wittgensteinian- You will be evicted when your landlord finally figures out that it's you who has been using a ladder to enter your third-story apartment, only to throw it back down each time.

*Spinozist- You will finally finish crafting the lenses for your sub specie aeternitatis telescope so as to get a better look at God.

*Kuhnian- You will recognize the ultimate incommensurability of the classic Horoscope paradigm and the new Eidoscope paradigm

Philosophy Forum Activities 2010-11

Fall 2010

September 16 – Movie & Discussion: *Thank You for Smoking*
23 – Mixer

30 – Thought Experiments

October 7 – Vita Ayala paper presentation: "The Problem of Underdetermination in Science."

14 – Movie & discussion - *The Prestige*

21 – Michael Mishra paper presentation on "The Pinocchio Paradox"

27 – A Major Affair

28 – Halloween Gaming Night

November 4 – Thought Experiments w/ Avatar

11 – Hilary Putnam and Brian McGee on the Philosophy of Science

18 – Presentation by Office of Undergraduate Research

December 2 – Prisoner's Dilemmas

December 11 or 12 – Xmas Party

Spring 2011

Feb 3 – Movie & discussion - Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*

Feb 10 – Mixer

Feb 16 – w/ Classical Studies Minor Program - Dr. Stannish on "Vampires and Philosophers in an Age of Anxiety: Hedonism and the Occult in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*"

Feb 23 – Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument w/ Dr. Michael Tissaw, Psychology

March 15 – Alumni Speaker Series – Matt LaVine (09'), University of Buffalo, "Corcoran, Quine and Sorensen: Three Accounts of Paradox". w/ Michael Mishra commentary

March 17 – Alumni Speaker Series - Joseph Hedger, Syracuse University, "The Truth about Racial Slurs: Using Kaplan's Framework to Provide a Semantic Theory of Derogatory Epithets"

March 24 – Avatar Davis paper presentation, "The Second Law of Thermodynamics and its Metaphysical Implications"

March 26-28 – College of William & Mary Undergraduate Philosophy Conference (2 papers presented, 2 commentators, 6 students and 2 alumni and Dr. Curry attending)

March 30 – Alumni Speaker Series w/ Classical Studies Minor Program – Dr. Anna Lannstrom (94'), Associate Professor of Philosophy, Stonehill College, "The Religion of Socrates"

April 2 – New England Undergraduate Philosophy Conference (1 paper presented, 4 students attending)

April 7 – More on Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument w/ Dr. Michael Tissaw, Psychology

April 14 – Movie & discussion - Monty Python's *Life of Brian*

April 25th - Cultural Relativism Panel discussion organized by Will Hancock w/ Dr. Caroline Schwartz, Dr. Curry, Will Hancock and Katie Seeber

April 26-30 – Post-production discussion leaders for One Act Play Festival, in conjunction w/ Prof. Bouchard (5 students led discussions)

April 29-30 – Oneonta Undergraduate Philosophy Conference (5 students attending)

May 5th - Phi Sigma Tau Induction ceremony (2 inductees)

May 21st - Annual Picnic at Curry's House.

Philosophy Students Need Your Help!

Please consider supporting our students' philosophical activities by making a contribution to the SUNY Philosophy Department Foundation Account. You can send a check with a note stating that your donation is for the Philosophy Department to SUNY Potsdam College Foundation, Attn: Lisa A. Murphy, 44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY 13676-2294, or complete the College Foundation's **Online Giving Form** on the SUNY Potsdam website at <https://secure.potsdam.edu/giving>. You may even indicate the specific purpose your gift is to serve; for example, students' undergraduate conference trip expenses, book purchases, or small scholarships. No amount is too small and all contributions will be greatly appreciated by our students and professors.

Philosophy Graduates May, 2011

Philosophy Majors

Niles Brown

Jesse (Will) Hancock (and Anthropology major)

Tyler Sliker (and Psychology major)

Philosophy Minors

Sam Egan (and BA in Music)

Philosophy Department Student Awards for the Academic Year 2010-2011

School of Arts & Sciences Honors Convocation: May 11, 2011

Canfield Scholarship:

Avatar Davis

Departmental Scholars:

Tim Clark

Geoffrey Vander Woude

Outstanding Freshmen in Philosophy:

Mark Lyon

Kathryn Stack

Michael Talbot

Juliana Christina Brush

Taylor Caswell

Phi Sigma Tau, National Honor Society for Philosophy:

Tim Clark

Maike Fredricksen

College Wide Honors Convocation: May 21, 2011

Distinguished Service Award:

Jesse (Will) Hancock

Excellence in Philosophy Award:

Jesse (Will) Hancock

Congratulations to all award recipients!

Philosophy Department Faculty

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Brian D. Huss (On Leave of Absence, 2010-2012)

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Judith A. Little (On leave Fall 2011)

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REPORT OF ALUMNI

NAME _____	
MAILING ADDRESS _____	

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____	YEAR GRADUATED _____
DEGREE(S) EARNED _____	
EMPLOYMENT _____	
COMMENTS _____	

Please complete this form and return to Dr. David C. K. Curry, SUNY Potsdam, 44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY 13676; or fax to 315/267-2656; or e-mail to currydc@potdam.edu Thanks!



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