
PHILOSOPHY NEWSLETTER

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

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FALL 2008

Greetings from the Chair

By Judith A. Little

The Philosophy Department's students and faculty enjoyed a terrific Spring 2008 Semester. The department graduated seven B.A. degrees in Philosophy, along with three philosophy minors, and awarded honors to several exceptional students in May 2008. Philosophy Forum students, guided by Professor **Brian Huss** this semester, offered provocative presentations nearly every week, attended and participated in the Oneonta Undergraduate Philosophy Conference. For details on the activities of our students, be sure to read page 3.

While on sabbatical, Dr. **David Curry** remained active in department affairs by studying Hellenist Philosophy with the NEH Distinguished Visiting Professor in Philosophy **Mark McPherran**, joining Classical Studies students on a trip to Greece, and teaching philosophy in Lima, Peru. To hear more about Curry's activities, including his research, and Dr. McPherran's semester in our department, see page 2.

We are very pleased to announce two late-breaking pieces of departmental news.

Φ Congratulations to Dr. David C.K. Curry, who received the SUNY Potsdam 2008 President's Award for Excellence in Teaching! The department will host an informal celebration in September.

Φ Dr. Brian Huss and Dr. Kristen Andrews proudly announce the arrival of their daughter, Alexandra Huss, born August 13th. Congratulations to the new parents, and welcome to Alexandra!

The coveted prize of a Philosophy Forum t-shirt is on its way to **Charles Rocca** who correctly answered the Philosopher's Corner puzzle from last issue. The contest runner up was none other than Mark McPherran. See Chuck's solution and the latest puzzle on the right.

Don't forget to tell us all of your news by submitting the **Report of Alumni Form** information found on page 3, and catch up on Alumni News on page 4.

Best Wishes for a great autumn and a wonderful holiday season!

Philosophers' Corner

By Brian D. Huss

Who's Your Baby?

In an old song, Doris Day sang: "Everybody loves my baby, but my baby don't love nobody but me." The famous logician Benson Mates claimed he could determine the identity of Doris Day's baby, *using only the information provided in this one line of song.*

The Question: Assuming that the lyric is true, who is Doris Day's baby? And how did Mates figure out this person's identity? Send your answers to hussbd@potsdam.edu.

The Previous Puzzle presented a seemingly invalid form of Modus Ponens:

P1 If a Republican will win the election, then, if Reagan does not win the election, then Anderson will. (This is because Reagan and Anderson are the only two Republicans running for president.)

P2 A Republican will win the election. (This is true because Reagan will win the election.)

C If Reagan does not win the election, then Anderson will. (This is false because if Reagan doesn't win, Carter will.)

Symbolized: P1 $R \rightarrow (\sim G \rightarrow A)$
P2 R
C $\sim G \rightarrow A$

Charles Rocca (1995) wrote, "You implicitly assume that G is true [in the second premise] and hence that $\sim G$ is false. So, $\sim G \rightarrow A$ is automatically true regardless of the truth-value of A . Thus we get that the conclusion is in fact true and not false."

That's right. A conditional statement is true when its antecedent (the 'if' part) is false. Here the conclusion is a conditional. The second premise is said to be true because Reagan will win. But if Reagan will win, then the antecedent of the conclusion ($\sim G$, Reagan does not win) is false. Hence the entire conclusion ($\sim G \rightarrow A$) is true. So we do not have an invalid form of Modus Ponens; this is not a case of a Modus Ponens argument with all true premises and a false conclusion. Well done, Chuck.

Faculty News

Dr. David C. K. Curry



Dr. Curry was on sabbatical in the Spring of 2008, working on a manuscript, sitting in on Dr. McPherran's Hellenistic Philosophy class, traveling in Greece, and teaching in Lima, Peru.

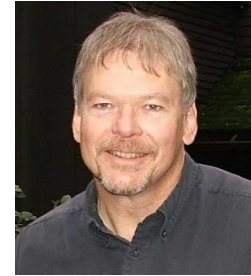
Dr. Curry spent most of January, February and March catching up on his reading on Plato and the pre-Socratics and attending bi-weekly class meetings of NEH Visiting Distinguished Professor Mark McPherran's class on Hellenistic Philosophy. Some substantial progress was made during this time in writing and retooling material for a manuscript introducing Plato's middle period metaphysics and epistemology to an undergraduate audience.

In April Dr. Curry joined Dr. Downing of the Art department in leading a group of students to Greece for 10 days. Most notably they visited Athens, Mycenae, Olympia and Delphi. It was a great thrill to stand where Socrates may have stood during his trial, and to see the site of the prison where he drank the hemlock, among other wonders. Two philosophy students, Scott Murzsewski and Sarah Haze, participated in this trip.

After traveling to hear his son, Galen's, Senior Voice Recital, and attending his graduation, Dr. Curry traveled with his other son, Devin, to Lima, Peru for six weeks to teach two courses for the University of Virginia's Study Abroad Program in Peru.

Since his return to the States in July Dr. Curry has been editing, house cleaning and repairing and traveling to Virginia to settle his two sons in Williamsburg and Charlottesville. But he was back the evening of August 24th, and in the classroom again first thing Monday morning on August 25th. All in all, it was a fairly productive but unquestionably educational and wondrous sabbatical leave.

Dr. Mark McPherran



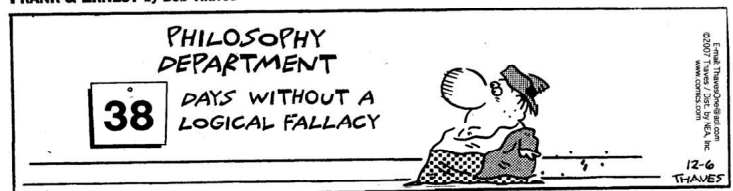
Students and faculty enjoyed and benefited from Dr. Mark McPherran's contributions to the department last spring. As the 2008 SUNY Potsdam Distinguished NEH Visiting Professor of Philosophy, he taught a course on Socrates, a seminar in Post-Aristotelian Philosophy, and gave three public lectures.

One of the highlights of the Socrates course was a performance of Act One of *The Clouds* written by Aristophanes. Dr. **Joseph J. Di Giovanna** played the role of Strepsiades, which was perfect casting. Student actors included **Vita Ayala** as Socrates, **Matt La Vine** as Pheidippides, **Rob Scott** as Stronger Argument, **Jeffrey McDonald** as Weaker Argument, **Kaitlyn Stone** and **Christopher Preston** as Students of Socrates' School of Thinkology, and **Lyon Kressner** as Leader of the Chorus. Professors McPherran, **Caroline Downing** (Art History), **Judith Little**, and students in the audience read the parts of The Chorus. The acting demonstrated the spirit of Aristophanes in that it was most lively and hilarious.

Plato's Socrates on the Voyage of Life was the theme of McPherran's three public lectures—"Plato's Socrates on Love", "Plato's Socrates on Death", and "Plato's Socrates on the Afterlife"—which drew record audiences.

We wish Mark McPherran well in his return to chairing the Philosophy Department of Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C., Canada.

FRANK & ERNEST by Bob Thaves



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.

2007-2008 Philosophy Forum Activities

The Philosophy Forum continues building its reputation for excellence by providing increased opportunities for student research and scholarship. Student presentations for the Forum included **Vita Ayala's** "The Impossibility of Malevolent Evil", **Matt La Vine's** "Cantor and the Philosophy of Infinity" and "Acting and Saying: A Resuscitation of the Performative Constatative Distinction", **Andrew Brink's** "Watching without Seeing", **Carrie Bates'** "Augustine and Plato via the Neoplatonists", **Jesse Will Hancock's** "Negligence of Belief: Clifford and James on the Ethics of Belief", and **Rob Scott's** "Quine on Analyticity: A Pragmatic Interpretation." Dr.

Michael Tissaw's (Psychology/Philosophy) students, **Matt La Vine, William Albrecht, Jacob Bockus, and Scott Murszewski,** also offered topics for discussion in a two-part Wittgenstein Symposium. In April, Dr. Huss escorted nine students to the Thirteenth Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference at SUNY Oneonta, where two of our students read papers and one student commented.

2007-08 Graduates

Philosophy Majors

- Albrecht, William J. (and Art Studio Major)
- Bedore, Jesse M. (Politics Minor)
- Kressner, Lyon A. (and English Literature Major)
- Murszewski, Scott P. (and Psychology Major)
- Scott, Rob M. (and History Major, Geology Minor)
- Selvey, Tristan J.
- Sparks, Chad G.

Philosophy Minors

- Detko, Natalia K. (Politics Major)
- Eaves, Billie L. (Performance Music & Musical Studies Majors; Anthropology Minor)
- Frazier, Ashley M. (Psychology Major)

2007-2008 Philosophy Honors

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|------------------------------------|--|
| Distinguished Achievement | Matt J. La Vine |
| Distinguished Service | Scott P. Murszewski |
| Excellence in Philosophy | Rob M. Scott Scott M. Murszewski |
| Canfield Scholarship | Patrick J. Knight |
| Department Scholars | Matthew B. Chick Matthew C. Short |
| Phi Sigma Tau Award | Matthew B. Chick Patrick J. Knight Scott P. Murszewski Matthew C. Short |
| Outstanding Freshman in Philosophy | Nick T. Ahlfeld Tara L. Atwater Samuel Egan M. Maxwell Howard Sean R. List Samantha J. McMillon-Wilkinson |

Report of Alumni

NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____ YEAR GRADUATED _____

DEGREE(S) EARNED _____

EMPLOYMENT _____

COMMENTS _____

Please complete this form and return to Dr. Judith A. Little, SUNY Potsdam, 44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY 13676; or fax to 315/267-2656; or e-mail to littleja@potdam.edu Thanks!

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| Faculty |
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David C. K. Curry

Associate Professor: History of Philosophy, Existentialism
 Office: Morey Hall 204; Office Phone: (315) 267-2021
 Email: currydc@potdam.edu

Joseph J. Di Giovanna

Distinguished Professor: Philosophy of Language, Aesthetics
 Office: Morey Hall 205; Office Phone: (315) 267-2022
 Email: digiovj@potdam.edu

Brian D. Huss

Assistant Professor: Epistemology, Philosophy of Psychology
 Office: Morey Hall 207; Office Phone: (315) 267-3342
 Email: hussbd@potdam.edu

Judith A. Little

Professor and Dept. Chair: Theoretical & Applied Ethics, Social & Political Philosophy
 Office: Morey Hall 201; Office Phone: (315) 267-2019
 Email: littleja@potdam.edu

Mark Munroe

Adjunct Instructor: Philosophy of Mind, Applied Ethics
 Office: Morey Hall 105; Office Phone: (315) 267-2462
 Email: munroem@potdam.edu

Galen K. Pletcher

Professor, Dean of Arts and Sciences: Philosophy of Religion
 Office: Dunn Hall 106; Office Phone: (315) 267-2231
 Email: pletchgk@potdam.edu

Philip Tartaglia

Professor: Logic, Philosophy of Language, Ethics
 Office: Morey Hall 203; Office Phone: (315) 267-2022
 Email: tartagpo@potdam.edu

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| Alumni News |
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It was a treat to spy **Stephanie Wackman (2007)** in the audience at the Keynote Address of the First Annual Anne Righton Malone Colloquium on April 18. She said to tell everyone "Hi!" and that she is "doing very well" in her ESL graduate program. Stephanie spent the afternoon looking up former professors.

Julia (Henery) Maum (1997) and daughter Sophia came by for a lovely visit on May 21st. Husband **Darren (1997)** was "busy farming" their recently expanded organic farming enterprise. Sophia kept us entertained in the Philosophy Common Room.

Frances Bottenberg (2002) "received her M.A. in Philosophy from Temple University, Philadelphia, in 2005. She is currently a doctoral student in the Philosophy Department at SUNY Stony Brook and is one semester away from defending her dissertation project proposal. Her areas of concentration are phenomenology and philosophy of mind, with a special interest in contemporary interdisciplinary research on the emotions, reasoning and habit." **The Philosophy Forum** plans to showcase Frances' presentation on Descartes' and/or Aristotle's theory of emotion on Thursday, October 9th. Her friend, a philosopher of science, may also give a "great presentation on Aristotle's conception of number." They also have offered to talk informally with interested students about "applying for and enduring graduate school."

Jill C. Brown (1997) just finished her junior year in the nursing program at D'Youville College in Buffalo. Her twins, Bridget and Brody, will soon be four years old! Jill currently works with older adults in an assisted living facility, and plans to eventually work with the older adult population "paying particular attention ... to cognitive issues in the ageing brain, such as Alzheimer's and dementia." Jill still loves reading and writing and likes "to keep my toes in the liberal arts."

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| Sad News |
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We were dismayed to learn that **Clayton William Schwartz (2000)** died the weekend of February 23-24. Having suffered a spinal cord injury in a 2006 motorcycle accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down, Clayton was in his second year at The Vanderbilt School of Law. According to Clayton's parents (Marylyn and Gene Schwartz, 35 Fleetwood Avenue, Danbury, CT 06801), donations marked "for stem cell research" in Clayton's memory may be sent to The Christopher and Dana Reeves Foundation, 636 Morris Turnpike, Suite 3A, Short Hills, NJ 07078.



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Department of Philosophy
 SUNY College at Potsdam
 44 Pierrepont Avenue
 Potsdam, NY 13676-2294

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