
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 2016

Greetings from the Chair

By David C.K. Curry

The Department of Philosophy persevered through another year of providing a high quality educational program with inadequate staffing and resources. We continued to lean heavily on the services of our two adjunct instructors, Mark Munroe and Matt LaVine, who together taught six courses for us each semester, nearly 30% of the department's offerings. Drs. Curry, DiGiovanna, Murphy and Tartaglia remain as the department's full-time core. The department still lacks anyone with expertise in ethics, and social and political philosophy, not to mention in continental philosophy, non-western philosophy, feminist philosophy, experimental philosophy or philosophy of race. Unfortunately, the upper administration refuses to guarantee a full-time replacement for anyone who might retire, and so our senior faculty aren't inclined to. The college continues to struggle with budgetary issues, and with recruiting and retaining students, as is true across NY State due to changing demographics. We are hopeful that as the ship gets righted and moves forward, the department will find itself dragged along in her forward wake.

The department graduated five majors this year, after having graduated four last year, three in 2014, ten in 2013 and a record fifteen in 2012. We will begin the fall semester with 16 majors. Our graduates include Eli Auslander, Daniel Coelho, Kathryn Ebersole, Mitchell Hughes and Viviana Ruiz. Eli will return next semester to finish up his second major in Computer Science before going on the job market or applying to graduate schools; Daniel is considering going to medical school; Kathryn will do an internship in the fall through the UN and then pursue graduate study, perhaps in philosophy; Mitchell is pursuing graduate studies at SUNY Oswego before taking a commission with the Air Force and Viviana is currently applying to law schools. All will be missed.

Jim Berriman's generous scholarship (now in its third year) helped the 2016-17 recipient, Kate Nicole Hoffman, (who is working on a Presidential Scholars project on animal ethics and cognition), to complete an internship with the Kerulos Institute (Motto: "Science in the service of animals") over the summer. Kate will study abroad in Scotland in the fall and return to put the finish on her classes and project in the spring.

Jacob MacDavid was admitted to the Philosophy Honors Major Program and will write a thesis on ethical hedonism with Dr. Curry. The honors major requires more total hours and has

a tighter set of distribution requirements, as well as a thesis requirement. Successfully completing the honors major will put Jacob in an elite group, including our own Dr. Matt LaVine.

Four of our students presented papers to Forum (as dry runs) and then at the 21st Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference at SUNY Oneonta: Jacob MacDavid presented on "Hell: A Damning Absurdity"; Alex Coombs spoke on "The Thinking Animal Argument and Contingent Identity"; Katie Ebersole presented on "Pros and Cons of Lewis' Counterfactual Analysis of Causation" and Cole Heideman presented "Discursive Injustice, Depression and Social Alienation" with a commentary by Morgan Harris. All of our presenters did the department, and the college, proud. Jacob's well-argued and entertaining paper won a best of conference award.

It was another excellent year for our Philosophy Forum, sponsoring weekly activities ranging from social gatherings and movie discussions to presentations of papers by students, faculty and visiting professors and trips to undergraduate philosophy conferences. As noted above, the Forum again sponsored a trip to the undergraduate philosophy conference at SUNY Oneonta at which four of our students presented papers and one student commented on a paper. Notable guest speakers this year included co-sponsoring a visit from Dr. J.W. Wiley, Director of the Center for Diversity, Pluralism, and Inclusion, SUNY Plattsburgh, speaking on "Leadership Moments and Their Relationship to Diversity & Social Justice"; Dr. Murphy presenting on "Epistemological Problems in Mental Health Diagnosis"; Dr. Rachel Fedock, Barrett Honors College, ASU, presenting on "Toward a Feminist-focused Ideal Theory of Love"; Dr. Kristin Andrews, York University presenting on "Don't Mind Animal Minds: The Role of Methodological Anthropomorphism in Animal Cognition Research"; Kyle Parker, from the Padma Samye Ling presenting on "The Middle Way Between Relative and Absolute Truth"; Dr. Gaylynn Welch, speaking on "Deconstructing Seneca Falls and the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States"; President Kristin Esterberg speaking on "Headwinds, Tailwinds, and Hills: What Can the Homophile Movement Tell Us About Identity, Diversity, and Inclusion?"; Dr. Jeffrey Maynes, SLU presenting on "On the Stakes of Experimental Philosophy"; Prof. Devin Curry, University of Pennsylvania, speaking on "Doxastic Particularism" and Prof. Ting Yih, New Jersey City University & CUNY – "Human Action, Karma and Climate Change: The Relevancy of Asian Moral Theories in

Ecological Philosophy". In sum, Forum sponsored seven off-campus guest speakers and three on campus speakers, including President Esterberg - a very good year.

We always welcome alumni who might want to present to the Forum. If you have something to say about how your training in philosophy has served you in your life and career, or if you are enrolled in a graduate program (philosophy or otherwise), would like to present some of your recent work, and would like to visit Potsdam, please let me know (currydc@potsdam.edu) for we would love to arrange for your return to campus.

Dr. Murphy taught multiple sections of his newly designed Philosophy of the Liberal Arts class this year, and has developed an online version which he is teaching for the first time this summer. The course has become a popular alternative to our more standard introduction to philosophy course. One of the main goals of the course is to introduce incoming students, particularly first and second year students, to the arguments for and against the value of studying the liberal arts and humanities. With the recent emphasis on STEM education, the liberal arts and humanities have been under siege nationwide, even though the data, both qualitative and quantitative, strongly suggest that studying the 'useless' liberal arts may be a wiser career and personal path. I'd be happy to share that data with anyone who might be interested. Some of the more popularized versions have been posted on the Philosophy Forum Facebook page, which we invite you all to join and contribute to (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/PhilosophyForum/>).

As noted, Prof. Munroe and newly minted Dr. LaVine (who successfully defended his Ph.D. dissertation in May) made important contributions to our course offerings this year. Both fully integrate into departmental life, regularly attending and presenting at Forum, informally advising students and interacting with the faculty. In addition to his classes, Dr. LaVine was very active with DIAC (the Diversity in Action Coalition), and his revised Introduction to Logic class, which has integrated readings on race and gender, is another popular alternative to Introduction to Philosophy. We are lucky to have two adjunct instructors who are willing to give of their time for the life of the department. Dr. LaVine was appointed Visiting Assistant Professor for the 2016-17 year, giving us a bit more flexibility in offerings.

Dr. Curry is back to teaching Human Nature after a ten year hiatus, as yet another alternative introductory class. He has revised the course significantly, focusing more on current contributions to the debate from philosophers, psychologists and scientists. Our hope is that having multiple variations of our introductory classes will draw more students into upper division classes and majors.

Dr. Curry has also been offering a very popular Honors Introduction to Philosophy class each of the last three fall semesters. This unorthodox course consists of a brief introduction to argumentation, (with a lot of hands-on practice), followed by a reading of Plato's Apology, Euthyphro, Crito, and Republic. The class then culminates in an exploration of the historical context of the Platonic dialogues by utilizing The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C. game developed at Barnard College. In the game students take the role of leaders of various factions and serve in

democratically selected positions of power, thereby recreating the political landscape of late 5th Century B.C. Athens. Students consistently report attaining a more integrated and subtle understanding of the political and philosophical issues the course raises than they believe they would from a more normal lecture class. They also come to understand that the ancients have something important to tell us in grappling with our own political and philosophical difficulties (Athenian and American demagogues have much in common, and they arise from many of the same causes).

We continue to have many excellent students in the department and the Forum, as we consistently have throughout my many years here. It is for their sake, of course, that we exist, as a faculty and as an institution. Our value should be judged by how many opportunities for intellectual and moral growth we provide our students. We have always been blessed to have more than our share of students who exploit those opportunities.

The department was once again humbled by the numerous generous contributions to the department's Foundation account, which we rely upon more and more as State dollars dry up. Foundation dollars are used to support our guest speaker program, student travel to present and attend philosophy conferences, on occasion to help fund faculty travel to present their work at conferences, to help fund student awards and generally to support the intellectual life of the department (see below).

To sum up, the state of the department is strong, in spite of unacceptable expertise gaps in multiple sub-fields of philosophy. We remain hopeful that under the leadership of Dr. Esterberg the college will get back on a firm financial footing and we will be able to rebuild the department and the college and refocus campus priorities on the pursuit of academic excellence. Until then, as always, we will continue to provide the best possible programming for our students and to preserve the close bonds between students and faculty that have been our hallmark and our key to success over the years.

Suggestions????

Is there anything you would like to see in the next Newsletter? Send any suggestions, critiques, queries to Dr. Curry at currydc@potsdam.edu



Morgan Harris, Jacob MacDavid, Alex Coombs, Cole Heideman and Eli Auslander at 2016 Oneonta Philosophy Conference.

Philosophers' Corner

The so-called "Hardest Logic Puzzle Ever"

From a paper by American philosopher and logician George Boolos, published in *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* in 1996.

"Three gods A, B, and C are called, in no particular order, True, False, and Random. True always speaks truly, False always speaks falsely, but whether Random speaks truly or falsely is a completely random matter. Your task is to determine the identities of A, B, and C by asking three yes-no questions; each question must be put to exactly one god. The gods understand English, but will answer all questions in their own language, in which the words for yes and no are da and ja, in some order. You do not know which word means which."

Notes:

- 1) a single god may be asked more than one question,
- 2) questions are permitted to depend on the answers to earlier questions, and
- 3) the nature of Random's response should be thought of as depending on the flip of a fair coin hidden in his brain: if the coin comes down heads, he speaks truly; if tails, falsely.

Don't cheat!

E-mail your responses to currydc@potsgdam.edu and we will summarize the results and report out in the next newsletter. Have fun!

Solutions to the Monty Hall Puzzle

The Problem:

Suppose you're on a game show, and you're given the choice of three doors: Behind one door is a car; behind the others, goats. You pick a door, say No. 1, and the host, who knows what's behind the doors, opens another door, say No. 3, which has a goat. He then says to you, "Do you want to pick door No. 2?" Is it to your advantage to switch your choice?

Though the following assumptions might be implied, just to clarify, assume the following rules govern Monty's behavior:

- 1) The host must always open a door that was not picked by the contestant.
- 2) The host must always open a door to reveal a goat and never the car.
- 3) The host must always offer the chance to switch between the originally chosen door and the remaining closed door.

The Solution:

Is counterintuitive, and most people intuitively choose wrongly. It is to your advantage to switch doors given the above assumptions. Indeed, contestants who switch have a $2/3$ chance of winning the car, while contestants who stick to their choice have only a $1/3$ chance. This is basically because

Monty changes the odds by revealing a goat. By narrowing the choice to two doors he in effect brings it about that your initial choice has only one chance in three of being right, but the remaining door has two chances in three.

A clear and detailed unpacking of the solution can be found here: <http://www.montyhallproblem.com/>

Scholarship Drive in Memory of Daniel M. Gross '13

On a recent visit to Potsdam, Roland Poirier '12 expressed interest in giving to a scholarship fund in memory of Daniel Gross '13, who passed away unexpectedly last year. Roland graciously agreed to take the lead in establishing a scholarship, and the Gross family is fully supportive of the endeavor.

Dan was a very bright light – a kind soul who touched everyone he interacted with. I had the distinct pleasure of being able to watch, and, I hope, help Daniel grow intellectually and socially over his time at Potsdam. Dan's career at Potsdam traced a familiar but nonetheless remarkable path. A bright but somewhat overwhelmed freshman who matured to become a confident critical thinker committed to political and social change. I think that it is appropriate to honor Dan's memory with a scholarship devoted to offering some financial support for others following in his footsteps as Philosophy students. And we all know that every little bit helps to take away some of the financial stress associated with achieving one's educational goals

Donations of any amount to the scholarship fund can be sent here: <https://secure.potsdam.edu/giving>. Please be sure to indicate that the monies are in memory of Daniel Gross. Let's see what we can do to honor the memory of an exceptional student, friend and human being.



Dan Gross (center) and fellow graduates, May 2013

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 \$3000 over the past years to the SUNY Potsdam Philosophy Department Foundation Account. In particular, we want to acknowledge the generous gifts of Molly Clough, Esq., Mr. Timothy Eckle, Mr. Ben Guthrie, Mr. Andrew Marder, The Gross family, in memory of their son Daniel, and, of course, the very generous scholarship endowment by James Berriman, Esq. Your support overwhelms us and greatly contributes to our efforts. Thank you.

This past year your generous gifts were used to support student travel to conferences, student participation in intimate dinners with guest speakers, bringing those guest speakers to campus to interact with our students, some faculty travel to present work at professional conferences as well as cakes and candles for our departmental awards ceremony. These are all things which help build the departmental community and which could not be supported without your help.

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.

Philosophy Forum Activities 2015-16

Fall 2015:

- September 3 - Planning meeting
- September 10 – Movie viewing and discussion: *Ex Machina*
- September 17 – Mixer
- September 21 – Co-Sponsor Dr. J.W. Wiley, Director of the Center for Diversity, Pluralism, and Inclusion, SUNY Plattsburgh, "Leadership Moments and Their Relationship to Diversity & Social Justice"
- October 1 – Informal Discussion: Why Value Diversity?
- October 8 – Guest Speaker - Dr. Murphy, "Epistemological Problems in Mental Health Diagnosis"
- October 15 – Guest Speaker - Dr. Rachel Fedock, Barrett Honors College, ASU - "Toward a Feminist-focused, Ideal Theory of Love"
- October 22 – Informal Discussion – Milgram Revisited
- October 28 – A Major Affair – Four Forum members helped to represent the department
- November 5 – Informal Discussion - The Ethics of Genetic Engineering
- November 12 – Guest Speaker - Dr. Kristin Andrews, York University - "Don't Mind Animal Minds: The role of methodological anthropomorphism in animal cognition research"
- November 19 – Guest Speaker - Kyle Parker, Padma Samye Ling - "The Middle Way Between Relative and Absolute Truth"
- December 3 – Guest Speaker – Dr. Gaylynn Welch - "Deconstructing Seneca Falls and the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States"
- December 13 – Departmental Holiday Gathering

Spring 2016:

- February 4 – Planning Meeting
- February 11 - Movie viewing and discussion: *The Seventh Seal*
- February 18 – Mixer
- February 25 – Guest Speaker – President Kristin Esterberg - "Headwinds, Tailwinds, and Hills: What Can the Homophile Movement Tell Us About Identity, Diversity, and Inclusion?"
- March 3 – Informal Discussion - Fate
- March 17 – Guest Speaker – Dr. Jeffrey Maynes, SLU - "On the Stakes of Experimental Philosophy"
- March 30 – Student Presentations - Jacob MacDavid - "Hell: A Damning Absurdity"; Alex Coombs - "The Thinking Animal Argument and Contingent Identity"
- March 31 - Student Presentations - Katie Ebersole - "Pros and Cons of Lewis' Counterfactual Analysis of Causation"; Cole Heideman - "Discursive Injustice, Depression and Social Alienation" w/ commentary by Morgan Harris.
- April 7-10 - Oneonta Undergraduate Philosophy Conference – 7 students attended, 2 faculty. Jacob MacDavid presented on "Hell: A Damning Absurdity"; Alex Coombs spoke on "The Thinking Animal Argument and Contingent Identity"; Katie Ebersole presented on "Pros and Cons of Lewis' Counterfactual Analysis of Causation" and Cole Heideman presented "Discursive Injustice, Depression and Social Alienation" with a commentary by Morgan Harris
- April 21 – Guest Speaker – Prof. Devin Curry, University of Pennsylvania, "Doxastic Particularism"
- April 28 – Guest Speaker – Prof. Ting Yih, New Jersey City University & CUNY – "Human Action, Karma and Climate Change: The Relevancy of Asian Moral Theories in Ecological Philosophy"
- May 12 – Departmental Awards Ceremony and Phi Sigma Tau (International Philosophy Honor Society) Induction Ceremony. Four inductees
- May 14 – Counterinsurgency Dodgeball – Lehman Park
- May 20 - Annual Departmental Spring Picnic



Patrick Cerio, Alex Coombs, Machella Raymond and Joseph Carlisile, 2016 Phi Sigma Tau inductees

Philosophy Graduates May 2015

Philosophy Majors

Eli Auslander (and Computer Science major)

Daniel Coelho (and Biology and Chemistry minors)

Kathryn Ebersole (and Music major and History, Pre-Law and Classical Studies minors)

Mitchell Hughes (and Criminal Justice Studies major)

Viviana Ruiz

Philosophy Minors

Patrick Cerio (and Politics major and History minor)

2016 Distinguished Leadership Award

Kathryn Ebersole

2016 Philosophy Distinguished Achievement Award

Kathryn Ebersole

2016 Excellence in Philosophy Award

Eli Auslander

Classical Studies Signum Laudis Award for Excellence in Classical Studies

Kathryn Ebersole
Joanna Holden



Katie, Eli, Viviana, Daniel and Patrick – Only missing Mitchell

Departmental Awards:

Departmental Scholar

Jacob MacDavid

Phi Sigma Tau Initiates

Alexander Coombs
Patrick Cerio
Joseph Carlisle
Machella Raymond

Philosophy Department Student Awards for the Academic Year 2015-2016

School of Arts & Sciences Honors

James Berriman Scholarship in Philosophy

Kate-Nicole Hoffman

Canfield Scholarship

Alexander Coombs



Jacob MacDavid, Katie Ebersole, Kate Nicole Hoffman, David Curry and Eli Auslander at the 2015-16 Arts and Sciences Honor Convocation

Alumni Reports

We heard from Geoff Mackey, class of 2000, who seems to be flourishing. He writes:

"I continue to work at Trinity School for Ministry (an Episcopal seminary) as the Director of Distance Learning in an expanding and growing online program. In addition, I've been named Interim Dean of Students for the 15/16 academic year. The more exciting news, though, is that in August I received my STM degree (Master of Sacred Theology; a second theological master's degree that is generally used as PhD prep), focusing on liturgical and ecumenical studies. And I was recently named Associate Professor at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary (bcs.edu) where I'll be teaching Church History, Ecumenism, and Vatican II."

I believe that the 'Interim' may by now be removed from Geoff's title. I also believe that Geoff's picture is still hanging in the Philosophy Common Room. His hair and beard are a bit shorter now.

We also heard from Sean Kenny, class of 2013. He says,

"I recently got my first full time job as a Behavioral Specialist at a clinic that does applied behavioral analysis for people with autism and other intellectual disabilities. I even have my own office, which is a pretty sweet deal for a person who only has a Psychology BA. The main goal of our therapies is to either reduce problem behaviors (such as tantrums and self injury) or teach and encourage new behaviors (functional communication, reading, work skills). My job is to record the frequencies/duration of behaviors within sessions while introducing treatments in order to see how effective the treatments are in changing behavior over time. We use a lot of control in our research in order to ensure the greatest amount of reliability. Is it perfect science always? No, but it takes scientific concerns into much higher consideration than most other psychological fields seem to, and our psychologists have a strong commitment to using well-researched psychological and educational theories.

It's been a great job so far that has now lead me to begin considering grad school options (GREs first, though). I doubt that I would have landed in this field had I not taken my philosophy education into consideration. I'm also certain that my philosophy education will help guide me through my next big decisions as well."

Although Sean only minored in philosophy, it clearly had an influence on his path. He says "...I'm grateful for my philosophy education. It was a great experience for me in college and it's something I plan to continue educating myself on (just bought a copy of Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, woo!)"

We enjoy hearing from all our graduates as they move through their lives, particularly about how their time in the department has helped them navigate those lives, both professionally and personally. Send your own story to currydc@potsdam.edu and we will include it in the next newsletter (with your permission, of course). You can use the handy form below, or just drop us an e-mail, free-style.



Phi Sigma Tau Initiation Ceremony, May 2016
Kate-Nicole Hoffman, Jacob MacDavid, Katie Ebersole, Patrick Cerio,
Machella Raymond and Joseph Carlisle.

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 faculty.

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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@potsdam.edu
Thanks!



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