

Philosophy News

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from Steve Luper, Chair. . . **Dear Alumni:**

Greetings! Another year is over and the Department of Philosophy is on summer break. But we wish to stay in touch with our former students, and so we put together another newsletter.

We had several speakers on campus this year, including two former students: Sara Brill and Chris Gaffney. Chris spoke on the topic, "Temples of the Earthbound Gods" and Sara on the topic, "Hades on Earth." Two other guests spoke on aesthetics: Anna Ribeiro, from Texas Tech, defended a "Philosophy of Poetry," and Carolyn Korsmeyer, SUNY Buffalo, was our Stieren speaker. Her talk was titled, "The Fair and the Foul: the Aesthetics of Disgust."

We would like to offer special thanks to Kathy L. Schnare and William Reid, for their yearly donations to the department. Their contributions now support our Hemlock Prize for Outstanding Philosophy Essay. The 2009 winner was Kerry Vaughan, who wrote "Spontaneous Abortion and the Harmfulness of Death."

Congratulations, Kerry! (See Page 6 for a synopsis of Kerry's essay.)

Our quest for a replacement for our wonderful colleague, John F. Heil, Jr., was no easy feat. After some searching, we located Damian Caluori, an outstanding scholar in ancient philosophy, to take the position John left. Damian will arrive here from Switzerland in August.

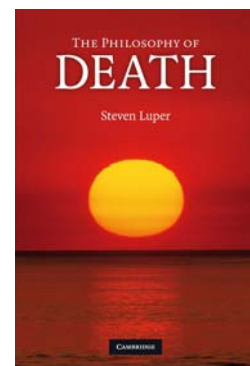
You can find out a bit more about our activities by going to the Department of Philosophy homepage. And we would like to invite you to write or email us, and let us know what you are up to, and whether there is anything you'd like to share with others in this newsletter. Also consider writing us and giving us information about yourselves that we can include in this newsletter. And please respond to our surveys, if you would.

Now here is a little about me. I will be on leave next semester, working on some projects concerning death. My book, *The Philosophy of Death* is now in print



Apprentice's Nightmare by Carol Shipman © 2008

and I just finished reviewing a book, with the (wonderful, I must say!) title *Annihilation*, by Christopher Belshaw. It is a good read, if you are the sort of person who thinks about the end of your existence. Right now I am working on a paper on Descartes and planting crinums. The weather is gorgeous and life is good. ☺



The Philosophy of Death

by Steven Luper

Cambridge University Press, 2009

www.cambridge.org

from Judith Norman . . .

Hello! I've had a quietly productive year this year, continuing my translation of Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation* (volume 1 should be out shortly!) and my research on German romanticism. I've been looking into the philosophical influence of German romanticism on English romanticism, which gives me a good excuse for reading lots of wonderful English literature and poetry. I'm trying to get beyond

the myth/idea of the romantic genius, and looking instead at the extent to which these romanticisms theorized impersonal forms of production. So, for instance, they were thinking that the locus of creativity could be in some interpersonal collective, or alternatively in some faculty like the transcendental imagination, or in fact in language itself. It's a lot of fun to read literary works in which the (supposed) author starts

to worry that he is in fact being controlled by the text. Paranoid, but fun.

Other than that, I've been busy with my kids (ages 1 and 5) as well as my political group, A Jewish Voice for Peace. I've given several talks about Gaza, and continue to edit Jewish Peace News:

www.jewishpeacenews.net.



Please help us in our assessment of the Department of Philosophy by taking the online **Alumni Survey** linked to our homepage.

Thank you!

from Andrew Kania . . .

This past year was my ‘senior year’ at Trinity. I arrived in Fall 2005, and on May 16 this year, for the first time, I watched students I’ve known during their entire career at Trinity walk across the Laurie Auditorium stage to receive their degrees.

I continue to enjoy both introducing students to philosophy in our lower-level courses, and helping them develop as philosophers in our upper-level courses. In the Fall, I taught Philosophy of Gender for the second time, incorporating the ‘cross-dressing day’ that was a suggestion of Zoë Gannon’s (’07) the first time I taught the course. (Thanks Zoë!) All the students and I cross-dressed for an entire day, drawing stares, comments, and reactions, mostly benign, but some disturbing, and leading several women in the class to rethink their wardrobes... It was good practice for me, too, since I participated in the Trinity Drag Show this year – a faculty first!

In the Fall I also supervised my first Senior Thesis, and ‘taught’ the Thesis class – mainly a matter of trying to keep our three candidates on track – a bit like herding cats! Austin Johnston drew parallels between, and raised telling objections against, several theories of literary interpretation; Kerry Vaughan adjudicated between two theories of harm in an attempt to make some headway on the ethical issue of abortion; and JT Fant grappled with a contemporary foundationalist theory of knowledge. All three defended their theses eloquently against the slings and arrows the faculty hurled at them; all three graduated with philosophy degrees this May. (See Kerry’s summary of his Hemlock Award-winning thesis on Page 6.)

On the research side, I began the year with a couple of very enjoyable trips

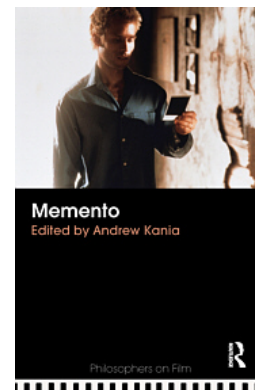
to the UK. I participated in a summer school on philosophical methodology at Arché, a philosophical research center at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. Though the school was challenging, somehow I found the time to visit a few Scotch distilleries... I mentioned in last year’s newsletter that an essay I wrote on musical ontology won the inaugural Essay Prize of the British Society for Aesthetics. As part of the prize, I was invited to deliver the paper at their annual conference in Oxford in August. While in that neck of the woods, I also gave an invited talk on narrative in film and literature at the University of Kent.

My major research project this year has been assembling a volume of new philosophical essays on the neo-noir film *Memento* (2000) directed by Christopher Nolan – most recently of Batman fame, but also director of *The Prestige* (2006), another very philosophical film. The book, simply titled *Memento*, is in a new series called “Philosophers on Film” published by Routledge. It includes essays on philosophical issues such as the nature of memory, personal identity, the meaning of life, and aesthetics. It should be available in the US by the end of the summer, but you can already pre-order it on Amazon! (Just search for “memento Kania”.)

We’ve had a lot of visitors to the department this past year, and I was closely involved with two. As part of the Stieren Arts Enrichment Series, Dr. Carolyn Korsmeyer (SUNY Buffalo) visited campus in the Fall. She gave a colloquium on ‘post-feminist’ art as part of my Philosophy of Gender course and delivered a public lecture on ‘aesthetic disgust’ replete with suitably gross PowerPoint! In the spring, Dr. Anna Christina Ribeiro (Texas Tech)

delivered a paper on the aesthetics of poetry to the members of this year’s Lennox Seminar – The Poetry Conversations – and other interested faculty and students.

I’m looking forward to next spring, when Dr. George Wilson (University of Southern California) will be delivering three talks: one on philosophy of film, one on the aesthetics of *Memento*, and a public lecture on the Coen Brothers’ film *The Man Who Wasn’t There*, entitled “Love and Bullshit in Santa Rosa”! I hope some of you can make it. If so, please come and say hi at the reception following the talk. ☺



Memento

Edited by Andrew Kania

Routledge Press, 2009

www.routledge.com

from Curtis Brown . . .

I've had a pleasant year since the last newsletter. This semester I'm teaching Early Modern Philosophy for the first time in a couple of years, and remembering how much I enjoy rereading and thinking about all of the early modern philosophers. I don't think I really even have favorites; they're all impressive and interesting in their very distinctive ways. Symbolic Logic I and Nonclassical Logics round out my semester and I'm enjoying both.

I'm looking forward to teaching Philosophy of Mind next fall; this time around I will use mainly books by single authors instead of an anthology of articles. I wonder whether anthologies will become less common now that online access to journal archives is becoming more and more common – the classic articles I'd like students to read are now mostly available to them online via the Trinity library.

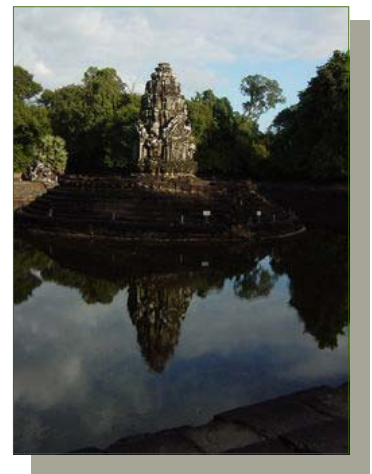
As I was revising the entry on Naturalized Epistemology for the online version of the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (the original version of the entry was written by Steven Luper, and the revision is coauthored with him), I

read some material on “experimental philosophy.” This is a small but active recent movement in philosophy; its practitioners are trying to use empirical methods, mainly surveys, to gain insight into how people understand philosophically interesting terms, especially in ethics and epistemology. It makes for a sharp contrast with the “armchair” methods mostly employed by philosophers.

I haven't tried my hand at doing philosophical surveys, but I think the experimental philosophers are raising some interesting issues about philosophy's traditional reliance on “intuitions” as a source of philosophical knowledge.

On to books! I finally got around to reading *Kristin Lavransdatter* by Sigrid Undset. It took me quite a while to get through the three volumes, but it's a very impressive work, if unrelentingly bleak. As for philosophy books, I've now gotten a good start on Robert Stalnaker's *Our Knowledge of the Internal World*. I'm enjoying it greatly, though it's very much an insider's book. (Even the title is a kind of insider's joke, alluding to Bertrand Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World*.) An interesting and more accessible book, one I plan to use in

Philosophy of Mind in the fall, is John R. Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction*. I think Searle's view is very strange, but he writes clearly and engagingly. ↗



Many people would sooner die than think. In fact they do.

- Bertrand Russell

new alumni WELCOME...

Congratulations to our most recent Philosophy graduates!

MAJORS

ALVARO BRITTO NICHOLAS BURR JOHN FANT BRIAN FEARN BENJAMIN HALL
AUSTIN JOHNSTON NICHOLAS SHOCKEY KERRY VAUGHAN

MINORS

AMANDA COMLY AMY HIRSHKOWITZ AMY RIZKALLAH
MEGAN SICKING ERIC WASHBURN

PHOTO GALLERY



Philosophy faculty pose for *Mirage* yearbook photo. Pictured l-r: Brown, Norman, Kania, Luper, and Combs. (Kimmel not pictured)



Andrew Kania (gesticulating) dines with faculty from the University of Kent, after giving a talk there. (Fall 2008)

A question may be easy to ask but hard to answer. ...
Serious philosophy is always likely to bore those
with short attention spans.

- Timothy Williamson

The 2009 Hemlock Award for Outstanding Philosophical Essay

KERRY VAUGHAN '09, Recipient

In recognition of outstanding philosophical achievement, and in honor of our former colleague John Murphy, each year the Department of Philosophy hosts the Hemlock Award competition. At our request, this year's winner, Kerry Vaughan '09, shares the high points of his compelling, award-winning essay.

In my paper, "Spontaneous Abortion and the Harmfulness of Death", I investigate two views on how to measure the harm of a death: the Life Comparative Account and the Time-Relative Interests Account. The Life Comparative Account holds that the harmfulness of a death for a person is determined by the sum total of all goods (and harms) that person would have received had they not died. The Time-Relative Interests Account holds that the harmfulness of a death for a person is determined by the sum total of all goods (and harms) that person would have received had they not died mediated by the *prudential unity relation*, which is the degree to which the person in question is psychologically connected to the self that would have received the good (harm).

One implication of the Life Comparative Account is that, in general, the earlier a death occurs, the more harmful it will be. This leads to an objection: if the Life Comparative Account is true, the most harmful kind of death involving the most significant harm would be a death immediately after coming into existence, i.e., a spontaneous abortion. This would suggest the counterintuitive position that it is profoundly important to prevent the existence of entities that would die seconds after coming into existence.

Author Ben Bradley's rebuttal to this objection is to argue that it is not always important to prevent great harms; in particular, in the case of spontaneous abortion, the great harm that will befall the fetus is only *extrinsically* harmful and extrinsic harms do not matter. I argue that *prima facie* Bradley's argument is not successful but it can be reinterpreted in a cogent way. Despite this reinterpretation, I argue that the Life Comparative Account still produces unreasonable intuitions, *vis-à-vis* the importance of preventing the death of entities like fetuses, and so should be rejected in favor of the Time-Relative Interests Account.

In Fall 2009, Kerry will attend the University of Houston's M.A. program in philosophy. Upon completion of the program, he plans to pursue a doctorate in philosophy.



The Hemlock Award is made possible by a generous donation
from Kathy L. Schnare and William Reid.

ALUMNI SURVEY

Please help us in our assessment of the Department of Philosophy
by taking the online **Alumni Survey**
linked to the Department homepage at:

www.trinity.edu/departments/philosophy/

Your responses will contribute greatly to
the future direction of the Department.

Thank you!



Spinoza...says that if a stone projected through the air had consciousness, it would imagine it was flying of its own will. I add merely that the stone would be right.

- Arthur Schopenhauer

Trinity University

*Department of Philosophy
One Trinity Place
San Antonio, TX 78212*

Phone: 210-999-8305

Fax: 210-999-8353

Email: sdurst@trinity.edu

<http://www.trinity.edu/departments/philosophy/>

Trinity University
Department of Philosophy
Philosophy News

June 2009 Volume 5



Apprentice's Nightmare by Carol Shipman © 2008

Death is nothing to us, since when we are,
death has not come, and when death has come, we are not.

-Epicurus

carolshipman.artspan.com/