

LANGUAGE truth & GOSSIP

**A newsletter for alumni and friends
of the MSU Department of Philosophy**

Language, Truth & Gossip is published annually by the Department of Philosophy, Michigan State University, 503 S. Kedzie Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824

Department Chair
RICHARD PETERSON

Associate Chair
FRED GIFFORD

Director of Undergraduate Studies
DAN STEEL

Please visit the Department of Philosophy online at www.msu.edu/~phl. Send your news to Julianne Fent at fent@msu.edu.

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FACULTY NOTES
& ACTIVITIES

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE NEWS

SPRING 2007

Greetings from the Chairperson

Dear Alumni and Friends,

This has been a year of transition in the Department of Philosophy, beginning with celebrations for three faculty members who are retiring: Judy Andre, Barbara Abbott, and Win Wilkinson. Their retirements are a great loss but it is our happy fortune that they will all remain in Michigan. We also offer our best wishes to Larry Hauser. Larry, who taught many fine courses over the years, has made the move north to Leelanau with Barbara. Another loss is Howard Brody, who accepted an offer to direct the Institute for the Medical Humanities at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. Our best wishes go with Howard, who played such an important role in putting MSU on the bioethics map.

On the other side of the ledger, we welcomed the arrival of Ann Mongoven, who joined the Center for Ethics and Humanities in the Life Sciences and will have her tenure home in Philosophy. Ann, who has a religious studies and philosophy background, has written on impartiality, civic virtue, cultural differences in healthcare understanding, and much else. Though hired to join the bioethics area, her interests in feminism, public health, and ecology make her a good fit for our graduate concentration in social and political thought, as well.

We are also happy to welcome visiting faculty. David Ingram of Loyola University in Chicago will be here for the year as a distinguished visiting professor (see more below). Tracy Edwards joins us as a visiting assistant professor who is teaching philosophy of law and philosophy and the black experience. Tracy hails from Flint and has degrees from Michigan and Wisconsin. We are also very lucky to have the services of two part-time instructors who are combining their teaching with the relaxing task of finishing their dissertations (both, as fortune has had it, at the University of North Carolina): Grant Dowell and Mark Bauer. Finally, Matt Ferkany, who has just finished his doctorate at Wisconsin, will begin a two-year appointment this fall.

Other good news is that Lisa Schwartzman and Matt McKeon both received tenure this past year. For some reason, this inspired both of them to take a sabbatical: Lisa spent fall semester in Portland; Matt was off spring semester.

The generosity of our graduates has allowed us to invite some distinguished philosophers to campus. Candace Vogler of the University of Chicago presented the Martin Benjamin Distinguished Guest Lecture, “The Limits of Custom and Conscience,” in October. Lynne Rudder Baker presented the Charles McCracken Distinguished Guest Lecture in March. Another highpoint of our year was the first Workshop in Social and Political Thought, which is described in further detail elsewhere in this newsletter.

As you may know, the College of Arts and Letters has been undergoing changes, too, the most recent of which was the naming of a new dean, Karin Würst, formerly a professor of German in the Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian, and African Languages. Dr. Würst has asked Marilyn Frye to be her associate dean for graduate studies. Marilyn, who is contemplating retirement in two years, has agreed, and so will not be teaching in Philosophy this coming year.

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“Philosophy for Kids” Program Thrives

For a number of years now, some of our graduate students have been teaching philosophy to students at Chippewa Middle School in Okemos. **Alison Reiheld** reports:

“The grad students explain certain classic philosophical ideas or introduce them through thought experiments and sometimes through dramatic enactments. The material is presented in a way that encourages students to find aspects of their lives relevant to subject material. For instance, in a discussion of ethics and cheating the subject of “cheat codes” in video games is raised; discussions of appeals to authority inevitably raise issues of parental and school authority over the students’ lives and futures. By teaching basic argumentation, the means of civil discussion of controversial topics, and basic concepts in philosophy, the Philosophy for Kids program brings the skills and knowledge we all love to a new generation, a generation badly in need of them if they are to make sense of themselves and of their pluralistic society.”

The middle school participants are enthusiastic and our students learn new things about teaching and maybe about philosophy itself. We may have the kernel of a larger program here, if current discussions with other local schools lead to new programs. Alison and co-leader **Rory Kraft** are building scholarly reflection into their experience and have become co-editors of the annual peer-reviewed journal *Questions: Philosophy for Young People*, which is published through the Philosophy Documentation Center. **Meredith Verrochi** and **Mark Balawender** led the program this spring under the guidance of **Steve Esquith**.

Ingram Joins Department as Distinguished Visiting Professor

David Ingram has joined us this year as Distinguished Visiting Professor. Author of many books (*Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*; *Critical Theory and Philosophy*; *Reason, History, and Politics*; *Group Rights*; and *Rights, Democracy, and Fulfillment in the Era of Identity Politics*), David is on the faculty of Loyola University in Chicago. Besides offering a course on human rights and the politics of globalization and social justice and a seminar on Habermas’ epistemology, he has held brown-bag discussions on same-sex marriage, immigration, and disability. He has also lectured on immigration and discourse ethics. David has been a wonderful addition to the intellectual and conversational life of the Department.

Department Hosts National Conference on Intersubjectivity

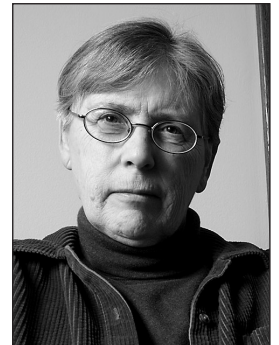
A major event in the fall was “Intersubjectivity, Recognition, Otherness: Rethinking Sociality,” a two-day international conference sponsored by the Department of Philosophy in November. Billed as “the first workshop in social and political thought at Michigan State University,” it addressed concepts of “the other” and “otherness” in social and political thought. Participants discussed what is arguably one of the most fundamental concepts of human life and its social organization, according to workshop organizer **Christian Lotz**, assistant professor of philosophy. Visiting scholars Bettina Bergo (University of Montreal), Hans Joas (University of Chicago, Max-Weber Kolleg Erfurt), and Robert E. Williams (University of Illinois, Chicago) presented papers to which Professors Frye, Ingram, and Peterson responded. This was an exciting series of discussions and was very well attended, with colleagues from several programs in the region coming to town to participate.



Lotz

Frye, Pennock Honored by Peers

Two faculty received signal forms of recognition this year. **Marilyn Frye** was awarded the Romanell-Phi Beta Kappa Professorship, which is presented to a philosophy scholar each year in recognition of distinguished achievement and the scholar’s past or potential contribution to public understanding of philosophy. As part



Frye



Pennock

of the award, Marilyn will give three public lectures next year. **Rob Pennock** was named a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science for distinguished service in voicing the philosophical deficits in the pro-intelligent design argument and defending against its inclusion in science teaching. Both awards reflect the national preeminence of these two colleagues. For more information, visit the College of Arts and Letters website at www.cal.msu.edu/departments/philosophy.php.

Philosophers Abroad

Several MSU philosophers have worked and/or lectured this past year in other parts of the world.

- **STEVE ESQUITH** spent most of last year in Mali, teaching at the University of Bamako as a Fulbright Senior Scholar and running a study abroad program in the summer. Steve established what we hope will be an ongoing study abroad opportunity in Ethics and Development and also had an eventful experience teaching political theory to groups of talented students who must work in the most difficult of circumstances. In an effort to expand the resources available to the students, Steve and his wife, Chris Worland, transported hundreds of pounds of books to Mali. They made some lasting friends in Mali and have paved the way for further connections between the Department and colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic.
- **HILDE LINDEMANN** taught during the summer at the University of Vienna.
- **CHRISTIAN LOTZ** gave a paper on Heidegger and Fichte at a Fichte conference held at the University of Vienna.
- **DICK PETERSON** was a visiting scholar at the John F. Kennedy Institute in the Free University in Berlin. Besides working on his human rights and social violence project, he lectured at the Institute.
- **FRED RAUSCHER** presented papers in Brazil and spent time in the summer in Marburg, Germany, at the Kant Archives. He also presented a paper at the International Hume Conference held in Koblenz.
- **PAUL THOMPSON** continues to explore the globe with visits to Hungary and Turkey, not to mention many appearances in North America.

LOOKING FOR AN INTERESTING READ?

SOME SUGGESTIONS FROM PHILOSOPHY FACULTY (OR: THE LTG REVIEW OF BOOKS)

Jim Nelson cites a pair of recent books that offer contrasting takes on practical reason and practical (ir)rationality: Candace Vogler's *Reasonably Vicious* and Jeanette Kennett's *Agency and Responsibility*. "I've been interested recently in how to make sense of elements of the moral psychologies of agents who are alienated by, distanced from, or otherwise not fully identified with, broad evaluative outlooks that have particular clout in their cultural settings, and I've found that both these authors' reflections on whether one can reasonably choose to do what one allows to be wrong to be pertinent and interesting. Too, both are clearly and engagingly written." Jim also recommends "for folks with an interest in bioethics generally, and in particular, reproductive ethics, Ray De Vries's *A Pleasing Birth*," which he calls "a first-rate description of the highly distinctive set of choices that Dutch women have when they're pregnant, and at the same time ... a case for the importance of cultural and social structural analysis as a central part of bioethical reflection and health care reform."

Christian Lotz suggests Chantal Mouffe's *On the Political (Thinking in Action)* as an argument for "antagonistic democracy," which breaks with liberal theory and "can be taken as a non-rationalistic version of political theory."

Those ready to switch from theory to fiction might consider *Intuition* by Allegra Goodman. **Judy Andre** describes it as a "novel set in a biology lab where fraud may or may not have taken place. (The plot closely follows the David Baltimore case, but characters, motivation, etc., are original.) Richly detailed picture of a scientist's life, many fully developed characters, suspenseful until the end."

For those with a taste for antagonisms in history, **Fred Rauscher** points to *Rousseau's Dog: Two Great Thinkers at War in the Age of Enlightenment* by David Edmonds and John Eidinow. "Rousseau's actual dog Sultan plays a bit part, but the real dog of the title is David Hume, who felt completely mistreated by Rousseau after agreeing to help him settle in England to avoid troubles with the authorities on the continent." An even higher drama unfolds in Frederick Beiser's *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801*. "Beiser argues that Kant, Hegel, and their ... ilk are best understood as realists and naturalists rather than idealists in any metaphysical sense. Unfortunately the book is only in hardback, so persuade your local library to buy a copy (or donate yours after you read it)."

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

Heartily congratulations to the following students who received their PhDs in the past year: **Jennifer Benson** ("Toward a New Radical Feminist Vision: Navigating the Passage from Oppression to Freedom"), **Barry Decoster** ("Toward a Pragmatic Theory of Medical Explanations of

Disease"), **John Mariana** ("The Indispensability of Metaphysical Realism"), **Rory Kraft** ("Virtuous Particularism"), **Zahra Meghani** ("Are Medical Theories Objective?"), and **Sonya Charles** ("The Limits of 'Autonomy' for Feminist Theory").

Upcoming Events

■ Several events are in the works for the coming academic year, including a **Philosophy and Film series** of film showings and discussions capped by a lecture or two. The theme is now projected to be Cosmopolitan Hospitality, and will focus on the experience of outsiders, strangers, and immigrants as depicted in films from different societies. We are developing this series in collaboration with the Film Studies section of the English Department.

We will be making good use of our endowment funds for distinguished speakers:

■ On Friday, November 9, Professor Grant Gillett will deliver the **Martin Benjamin Distinguished Guest Lecture**. Gillett is a neurosurgeon and professor of medical ethics as well as a member of the philosophy department at the University of Otago in New Zealand. He is the co-author of *Bioethics in the Clinic: Hippocratic Reflections; Representation, Meaning, and Thought; The Discursive Mind; Medical Ethics*; and *The Mind and its Discontents*. He is also the editor of *Medicine and Moral Reasoning*.

■ Professor Linda Martín Alcoff will present the **Charles J. McCracken Distinguished Guest Lecture** on Friday, February 22. Alcoff is a professor of philosophy, women's studies, and political science and currently the director of Women's Studies at Syracuse University. She is the author of *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory* and *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. She has written more than 50 articles on topics concerning Foucault, sexual violence, the politics of knowledge, Latino/a identity, and gender and race identity.

■ We have combined funding for two years of the **Ronald Suter Distinguished Guest Lecture** with further generous support from alumnus Steven Holtzman to organize a workshop called "A Quarter Century of Rule Following." Jim Nelson, who is organizing this event, explains: "Roughly 25 years ago, department alumnus Steven Holtzman co-edited with his fellow Rhodes Scholar, Christopher Leich, a path-breaking collection of essays, *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*. The proceedings of a conference held at Oxford, the volume included papers that played a major role in opening up a new, rich area, not merely of Wittgenstein exegesis, but of philosophical inquiry into the relationship among objectivity, rationality, communal practices, and individual sensibilities. Several of the contributions to the collection continue to be cited and discussed today as philosophers continue to consider the implications of Wittgenstein's work on "rule following" for issues in the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, action theory and social explanation, and ethics." The workshop, which takes place October 5 and 6, brings to campus three of the contributors to the original volume—Crispin Wright of New York University and the University of St. Andrew's, Scotland; Christopher Peacocke of Columbia University, and Philip Pettit of Princeton University. Joining them will be Naomi Scheman of the University of Minnesota and Alice Cary of New School University. This distinguished group of scholars will present papers assessing, criticizing, and building on Wittgenstein's insights and the ideas that they've prompted among contemporary philosophers.

MSU Philosophy Goes to Washington



Thompson

Paul Thompson helped organize a symposium on ethics and animal biotechnology at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. in October. Sponsored by MSU and the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology, the symposium brought together representatives from government, advocacy groups, and industry to discuss ethical issues about genetically engineered food animals and the use of cloning in

livestock production. Paul provided a critical assessment of the current debates in animal ethics before participants broke into discussion groups that were moderated by Philosophy graduate students **Elizabeth Mauritz**, **Bill Hannah**, **Erin Schwiderson**, and **Brian Depew**. Erin observed that it "was encouraging to see how philosophy can contribute to the world outside of academia." And in fact much is at stake in promoting more reflective discussion, as Brian remarks: "By engaging decision makers and the public early during the development of new technologies, philosophers can help ensure that future decisions about technology are more democratic."

Greetings from the Chairperson

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This is both a great loss to us and a gain for the college and the university. We congratulate her and wish her well in what will be a demanding job.

These transitions are only a few of the interesting developments in the Department this year, as this issue of LTG is meant to show. The "front office" has not been static, either. Linda Hansen, who excelled as our office supervisor, has retired, and Julianne Fent has moved into this position. This spring Jill Perez joined us and will take over Julianne's old job. Everyone is most impressed with our new front office line-up. And finally, I have moved into the office Jim Nelson occupied last year as the temporary replacement of Steve Esquith. My appreciation for their work grows as I learn the various aspects of this job. I invite you to keep in touch as we move forward into what promises to be an exciting time for us.

Best regards from all of us in the Department of Philosophy,

Dick Peterson
Chairperson

The Graduate Report

Elizabeth Mauritz summarizes what the grad students have been up to:

“This year the graduate students were active even before the first day of class. We welcomed a new class of 15, a wonderful group that has quickly become engaged in their academic work and in joining us veterans in Department work as well as in social activities. In addition to the Department party, graciously hosted by Paul and Diane Thompson, Shannon Proctor hosted a Welcome Back party exclusively for graduate students, a



nice opportunity to catch up with each other and to get to know the new faces. More recently we had our second annual hayride and pumpkin picking at Andy T’s in St. Johns. The weather

was chilly and wet, but more than 20 enthusiastic grads, partners, and children came out for the event. Following the pumpkin picking we met at Dominic Sisti’s home for a delicious Italian dinner, apple cider, and sweets.

“This year the graduate spokespersons, Lisa Campo Engelstein and Elizabeth Mauritz, streamlined meetings for the graduate students. Instead of several meetings each month for different topics, we are meeting once a month and combining committee reports, discussion, and announcements. More gets done in less time and we get a bigger turnout. The Graduate Conference Planning Committee, representatives from the Graduate

Employees Union, Academic Environment Committee, Academic Policy Committee, Council of Graduate Students, and Grad Committee have brought business to these meetings. We have also shown a philosophically interesting film and plan on making the next meeting a student speaker session.

“Several of us have attended and participated in conferences and national meetings. Some have been working on a new column for the *State News* in an effort to encourage students throughout campus to consider issues from a philosophical perspective. Interest and support for the Philosophy for Kids program is increasing, and there have been suggestions to expand it to the high school level and to offer it to a school that serves an urban population.

“Conference co-chairs Karen Meagher and Aaron Arndt and the conference committee did a wonderful job with planning our Eighth Annual Graduate Conference on Social-Political Thought and Value Theory, which was held in March. David Ingram generously stepped in as keynote speaker when weather on the East Coast kept Jay M. Bernstein of the New School from giving his scheduled address. Christian Lotz was the featured faculty speaker.”

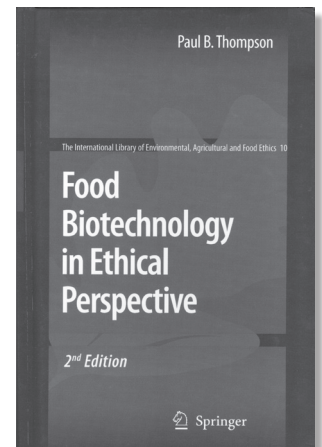
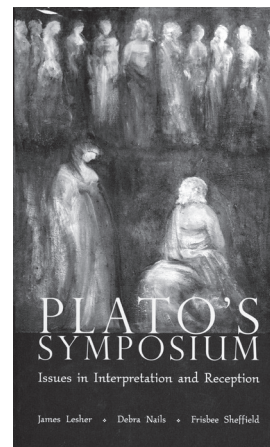
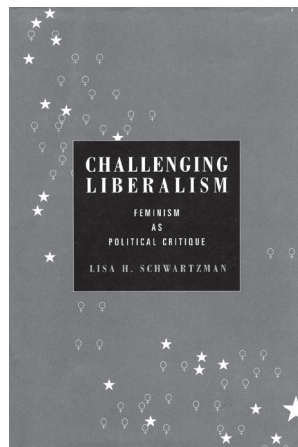


New Books

Feminism as Political Critique, Plato’s Symposium, and the Ethics of Food Biotechnology

This was another active year of faculty scholarship, resulting in numerous papers at conferences and campus visits and in print.

Three books appeared: Lisa Scharzman’s *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique* (Penn State), Debra Nails’ co-edited *Plato’s Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception* (Harvard), and the extensively revised second edition of Paul Thompson’s *Food Biotechnology in Ethical Perspective* (Springer), which was the focus of a session at the American Philosophical Association meetings in Chicago.



The Hall-Hanna Young Scholars Fund in Philosophy

When Rich Hall and Joe Hanna retired, a fund was established in their honor to provide undergraduate and graduate students planning a career in philosophy with support in the form of scholarships, travel grants, teaching awards, and special project grants. Our target is a \$30,000 endowment, and although we are considerably nearer our goal than last year, we still need your help. If you are interested in supporting this fund, please send a check payable to Michigan State University with “Hall-Hanna Young Scholars Fund” on the memo line. Mail it to Office of Development, College of Arts and Letters, 100 Linton Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1044. Or, if you would like additional information on other ways to support the department (for example, establishing a named endowed fund or remembering us in your estate plans), please contact Kristin Peterson, director of development, at (517) 353-4725 or peters30@msu.edu.

The Department is deeply grateful to all who have shown their support through financial gifts, large and small. Our hope is that these expressions of support will help us raise the level of active alumni involvement in the Department, and we invite your ongoing participation in the life of Philosophy at MSU.