

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



Volume 1, Issue 7

Fall 2007

From the Department Chair, James Klagge



Dear Friends,

Elsewhere in the newsletter you will see that Joe Pitt has stepped down as Department Head after serving in that capacity for 13 of the last 16 years. Thanks, Joe.

On August 10th I became the new department chair. It is pretty overwhelming, as you might imagine, but the elected term is just for three years. I've been in the department since 1985, so at least I knew what I was getting in to! One of the things I want to do is increase the activities we do outside the offices, classrooms and hallways. The first such event was a department "outing" to the Floyd Friday-night Bluegrass Jamboree. Nineteen of us ate buffalo burgers for dinner in Riner (about 15 miles south of campus), and then about thirty (including grad. students, families and friends) turned up in Floyd for the fun. Floyd is about 35 miles south of campus. It has been hosting the Friday-night Jamboree for many years, but for most of us this was our first time attending. A good time was had by all. Supposedly there are pictures of me "flat-footing". But, so far, no videos on You-Tube!

This spring, before assuming my duties as chair, I completed a book manuscript on Wittgenstein in Exile, which is now being read by publishers. I recently was an invited lecturer at Western Carolina University where I presented some of the work from my book, and also gave a public lecture on "The Meaning of Life." That attracted quite a crowd! I continue my running, completing the Richmond Marathon for the 6th time in November, 2006, and training for the Marine Corps Marathon this October in D.C.

Now and then we hear from alumni by e-mail. We always want to know how you are doing. Please send us your e-mail

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Feature: Richard Burian

Richard Burian received his undergraduate BA (Mathematics, 1963), from Reed College and his Ph.D. (Philosophy, 1971) from the University of Pittsburgh. Although his primary interest was philosophy of science at a time when most philosophers of science considered physics to be THE model science, he became convinced eventually that physics worship had misled philosophers of science and that their models of science did not apply to many other sciences, including most of the biological sciences. Accordingly, he decided that he needed re-education. He received a Study Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, and spent the academic year 1976-77 at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard, learning enough biology to begin his main career, which has been devoted to history and philosophy of biology, especially the epistemological issues raised in the biological sciences.



Burian taught at Brandeis University (1967-1976) and Drexel University (1977-83), with visiting stints at Florida A&M, the University of Pittsburgh, and the University of California, Davis, before coming to Virginia Tech, as the first Head of the Department of Philosophy (formed after

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Commencement! page 2

Spring 2007 Commencement Ceremony



This year's commencement ceremony, coordinated by Simon May, was held on May 12 at the Atrium in Major Williams. Professor Richard Burian, who is retiring this year from the Department of Philosophy, gave the commencement address (a shortened version appears below). Joe Pitt, then Chair of the Department, presided over the ceremony, while Jim Klagge presented the Williams Prize for excellence in Philosophy in undergraduates to Garrett Flagg and Gregory Sagstetter. William Fitzpatrick, Director of the Graduate Program, presided over the hooding ceremony.

Bachelor of Arts:

Alessandro, Brent
Bass, George Randolph
Blechman, Zachariah Sams
Brawley, Edward Thomas
Busante, Paolo Traquena
Cone, Jonathan Andrew (Fall 06)
Doran, Samuel Patrick (Fall 06)
Flagg, Garrett (double major)
Ghaderi, Adel
Hall, Taylor Charles
Hoang, Grace
Jahshan, Amanda Joy
Lagesse, Jason Roger (Summer 06)
Michelotti, Robert Chase (Fall 06)
Sagstetter, Gregory Joseph
Schremp, Jonathan Douglas
Setliff, Richard Adam
Szybala, Julia (double major)
Tang, Athena (double major)
Ward, Eric
Wood, Joseph David

Master of Arts:

Antonini, Matthew Paul
Cazier, John Daniel
Hassinger, Stanley Hess
Jessee, Joanna Gayle
Klipfel, Kevin Michael
Lowe, Mark Downing
Marder, Andrew Smith
Martin, Jimmy Vance



Garrett Flagg and Jim Klagge



Grace Hoang, Jonathan Schremp, Paul Koshetar, Paolo Busante



Rosa Mayorga and Taylor Hall



Jimmy Martin and Matt Antonini



Mark Lowe and Dick Burian



Bill Fitzpatrick and Joanna Jessee



Philosophy Department Outing to Floyd

Conferences

The Philosophy Department Spring Conference this year was a Regional Working Conference on Wittgenstein, organized by Jim Klagge. The 9 outside participants came from Virginia as well as the adjacent states of Maryland, West Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina. The conference--held April 12-15--was a great success, though the last day's session had to be moved because of a bomb scare. Then, of course, April 16th happened right after everyone had returned home. So it was a very poignant event. Klagge shared a chapter from his book manuscript. Other speakers connected Wittgenstein with such topics as Heidegger, Kant, Moral Particularism, and Aeronautics.

The Graduate Philosophy Conference at Virginia Tech was held November 3-4, 2006. The keynote speaker, Brian Leiter (University of Texas at Austin), spoke on "Why Tolerate Religion?" The next conference will take place Nov.2-3. The keynote talk is "What We See: The Texture of Conscious Experience" by Fred Dretske (Duke University).



Ashley Shew, Joanna Jessee, Ashley Inglehart

Department Chair from page 1

addresses so we can more easily keep up with you <jklagge@vt.edu>. (And keep us up-dated on your physical address.)

I was very pleased to hear about the sizeable Tilman endowment that the department will be receiving. When interest from this endowment eventually becomes available, it will allow us to brainstorm about things like endowed chairs and research budgets to support students and faculty. In the meantime, you should know that we depend on gifts like these for special events such as conferences and colloquia, and for hosting job candidates. In these times of on-going budget cuts, we appreciate the help that our alumni offer. Please consider making a donation to the Virginia Tech Foundation--Philosophy Fund. Every little bit helps!

Thanks for your interest and support

Jim Klagge



the former Department of Philosophy and Religion was divided into two units) in 1983. He served in that role until 1992, when he became director of Virginia Tech's Science and Technology Studies Graduate Program for five years before returning to Philosophy. He served as President of the International Society for History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology 1999-2001 and had resident fellowships at the National Humanities Center (1991-92) and the Center for the History of Recent Science (1999-2000). Burian's publications have focused mainly on conceptual change in science and on the historical and philosophical problems involved in integrating knowledge about organismal development, evolution, and genetics.

Burian was honored by two special symposia sessions at this summer's meeting of ISHPSSB (International Society of the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology) in Exeter, England. Burian was instrumental in the founding of the Society in the 1980's. The special sessions were devoted to the topic: "The Epistemology of Development, Evolution and Genetics (Essays in Honour of Richard Burian)". The title of the sessions was taken from the book collection of Burian's essays, which was published by Cambridge University Press in 2005.

Although Burian retired from the Philosophy Department in May of this year, he will remain active in the profession. He is currently working on projects on the history of gene concepts and on attempts to use the new tools of genomics and developmental biology to achieve an integrated understanding of development, evolution, and genetics.

Here's an excerpt of the Commencement Address delivered by Dick Burian during the commencement ceremony this year:

...One of the greatest joys of being a member of the faculty in a university is to watch what happens to students as they dig in to strange and difficult material – and to see them turn around and teach us by their probing questions, their adaptation of what they learned in other courses to new purposes, and their absorption, with fresh eyes, of what we think we know, transforming it into something new.... Perhaps this is especially so in Philosophy, for we not only require students to use sharp analytical tools, but also to attempt to integrate the knowledge they have gained in their very diverse coursework and in (as we sometimes say) real life into a coherent whole.... But this year, real life was particularly salient, and it seems especially appropriate to talk just a bit about how much we have learned and will learn from the collective response of Virginia Tech's students to the searing tragedy that struck us on April 16.... Dear students, you have taught us a great deal, about the good in people, about what is good in this institution, and about how to make the university and the world around us better. I want to speak briefly about one of the things I have been learning and then just a bit more about what it may mean for you as you enter into the next phase of your lives.

I need a label for what I want to celebrate and honor in your response. I don't have a good one, but as a temporary marker, let me describe it as the way you have hit the reset button and asked us to reshape our institutional culture to improve the learning environment, to improve the ways we deal with one other, and to take pride in making the institution better without

going through the usual cycle of blame – especially of blaming others – after a tragedy.

One way to see the point is to consider the way the media have helped and hurt us during this last month... At their worst, they invaded people's privacy (thus adding to their pain), sought scapegoats, and generally tried to start the blame game. At their best, the media simply showed people doing what they actually did in a terrible tragedy – and by and large, what people did was heroic and humane. Uniformly, the students whose comments were broadcast on television and radio and all the others I know about resisted the blame game, resisted criticisms of the university while it was in crisis, stepped in to help where there was a need and helped others to deal with whatever had to be dealt with in a remarkably constructive way. Then, as both the facts and the enormity of what had happened became clearer, the collective reactions of the students made it plain that they badly wanted to reestablish and return to a learning environment in which all voices would be heard, in which we, professors and students alike, would learn from each other with respect, in which the isolation of individuals and groups would be avoided and counteracted if at all possible. We can make things better – and you, dear students have been teaching us part of how to do so ... Among the many of the problems you will face in your new lives, there will be issues about the inclusion of the voices of others, of discrimination and injustice, of alienation of co-workers and institutional callousness, of class and ethnic divisions. It is at the juncture of such general problems, whatever their specific form, with your careers and your real lives, that I hope you will be able to employ some of the tools that you have learned here, where some of the experiences and lessons you have had at Virginia Tech and in Philosophy may prove of use.... Wherever you go, you will have the opportunity to apply what you have learned here, often in quite unexpected ways, often after some years have passed... You have been tested in all kinds of ways – and you have passed with flying colors. It is time, to celebrate what you have accomplished and then it will be time to test your wings...



Richard Burian and his wife Anne McNabb

Letter from Joe Pitt

Dear Friends,
This was a year of major changes.

To begin with, Jim Klage took over as Department Chair on August 10, 2007. I wish him the best of luck and I am confident the department will continue to thrive under his leadership.

I first became acting department head in 1991 and then went on to serve two consecutive three-year terms. I returned to serve two more terms in 2001. These have been wonderful years and I have greatly enjoyed the opportunity to serve the department in this position.

Richard Burian retired this May. Dick was the founding head of the department, coming to Virginia Tech in 1983. Under his guidance we developed into the department we are today. He has been such a force that it is hard to imagine the department without him. Fortunately, Dick will still maintain an office in the department and he will continue to advise students and occasionally teach.

Another loss is Laura Perini. Laura will be leaving us to join the faculty of Ponomo College in her home state of California.

Finally, on the loss side, Valerie Hardcastle has accepted the position of Dean of the McMicken College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Cincinnati. While we wish her every success, it is still a major blow to the department and we will miss her greatly.

On the plus side, we are pleased to announce that Lydia Patton has joined us as Assistant Professor of Philosophy. Lydia specializes in 19th century continental philosophy, with an emphasis on post-Kantianism. Welcome Lydia!

We are also pleased to announce the appointment of Chris Haufe as Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy for 2007-8. Chris specializes in the philosophy of biology. Welcome Chris!

As part of the good news announcements, I am positively delighted to tell you of a major gift to the department. Gil and Pegge Tilman '67 of Seattle, Washington, have established a \$250,000 endowment for the department in the Virginia Tech Educational Foundation that will be accruing interest that they will split with the endowment until they no longer need the funds. It is expected that the value of the endowment will increase substantially in that time. The income from this endowment will significantly enhance our future ability to provide our students and faculty with the extras that make a difference between an average educational experience and the quality we seek to maintain. The department and I, personally, thank the Tilman's for their incredible generosity.

The Department continues to have excellent undergraduate majors and a first rate M.A. program. This year the MA program received over 90 applications for admission. These programs remain continuing sources of pride for all of us. Following the tragic events of April 16, we saw our students demonstrate to the world their maturity and pride. I have never been so overwhelmed as I was by their dedication to each other and to this institution.

Thank all of you who sent expressions of concern and grief over the April events. You have no idea how much they meant to all of us. Our graduates have also been a source of strength for this department and you have continued to demonstrate that strength through your thoughtful support. We thank you.

In closing I want you to know that I am really enjoying having returned to teaching and writing and having the time to work more closely with my students. It has been a privilege to serve.

joe

Alumni News

Thank you all for your emails and letters of condolence regarding the 4/16 tragedy, which, directly or indirectly, took a toll on all of us. One of our own minors, Alexis Bozzo, now at Clemson University, lost her boyfriend Jeremy Herbstritt. Along with his family, Alexis organized a bike race in his memory which took place on August 18th in Bellefonte, Philadelphia, near the Herbstritt family farm.

We were saddened with the loss of one of our majors this semester, Cadet **Lauren Paige Smith**. A scholarship fund is being established by the Virginia Tech Foundation; please contact them if you wish to contribute. If you would like to leave a note in Lauren's registry, you can log on to the funeral home website and leave a note in Lauren's Registry. Her registry will remain open for one year and your notes will be provided to her family. The website is: www.blileys.com. Go to the "Funeral Information and Guest Books" link and select Lauren's name.

Sophie Bous, one of our two Williams Prize winners last year, is one of four winners of the 2007 Bioethics Essay Contest sponsored by the Academy of Medicine in Washington, D.C.! (There is one winner from each D.C. area medical school; she is at GWU.) It's nice to see her continuing to put her philosophical skills to work, and so successfully, even in the midst of a hectic med school schedule. Here is a snippet from her email:

The ceremony was last night and it was fantastic! I met the surgeon general, who seemed very appreciative of the paper topic! He was unbelievably genuine - it was such an honor. There was a big dinner with nearly 100 distinguished physicians, in all areas of medicine! It was surreal. They gave me a plaque, which I was extremely excited about as well....



Faculty NEWS!

Steve Daskal (Assistant Professor)

specializes in moral and political philosophy, combining an interest in metaethics with work that addresses concrete political issues such as welfare policy. This past summer he attended an NEH Summer Seminar in Atlanta on Democracy and Human Rights, which connected with his growing interest in global justice.

William FitzPatrick (Associate Professor)

works in ethics and serves as Director of Graduate Studies. His research and teaching range over the three major branches of ethics: metaethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. He has recently published articles on topics ranging from the foundations of ethics and the nature of normativity (e.g., "The Practical Turn in Ethical Theory: Korsgaard's Constructivism, Realism, and the Nature of Normativity," *Ethics*, Vol. 115, No. 4; and "Reasons, Value, and Particular Agents: Normative Relevance without Motivational Internalism," *Mind*, Vol. 113, Issue 450), to issues in normative ethical theory (e.g., "The Intend/Foresee Distinction and the Problem of Closeness," *Philosophical Studies* 128), to ethical issues surrounding human embryonic stem cell research (e.g., "Surplus Embryos, Non-reproductive Cloning and the Intend/Foresee Distinction," reprinted in *Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine*, 7th edition, ed. by Bonnie Steinbock, Alex John London and John D. Arras) and global climate change ("Climate Change and the Rights of Future Generations," forthcoming in *Environmental Ethics*). Other current work develops and defends non-naturalist ethical realism, and defends claims of moral responsibility against recent skeptical arguments. He also chairs the New River Valley Local Human Rights Committee.

Deborah Mayo (Professor)

has been on leave pursuing her work on statistical inference.

Mark Gifford (Associate Professor)

continues teaching courses in Ancient Greek Philosophy.

Jim Garrison (Adjunct Professor)

specializes in the philosophy of education. Last year he was awarded the John Dewey Society Lifetime Achievement Award. Past winners include Richard Bernstein, Louise Rosenblatt, Thomas Alexander, Charlene Haddock Seigfried, and John McDermott. He was scholar of the week at Virginia Tech. Jim was also elected to a two-year term as president of the John Dewey Society. He presented several papers including ones at the annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy (yep, SAAP), the Philosophy of Education Society, and gave an invited talk at Teachers College, Columbia. Besides publishing several papers in the course of the year in refereed journals, including one that argues that Dewey was a philosopher in the German Bildung tradition, he had an edited Book accepted in the State University of New York Press Series on American Philosophy. Contributors include the noted pragmatist feminist, Charlene Haddock Seigfried, James Campbell (current president of SAAP), Larry Hickman (Director of the Center for Dewey Studies) as well as two contributions by proponents of the pragmatist inspired Cologne school of social constructivism, Kirsten Reich and Stefan Neubert.

Clark Glymour (Visiting Professor)

is a visiting professor for Fall'07. He is Alumni University Professor of Philosophy at Carnegie Mellon University, Senior Research Scientist at the Florida Institute for Human and Machine Cognition, and John Pace Professor at the University of West Florida. He holds bachelor's degrees in chemistry and philosophy, did graduate work in chemical physics, and got his Ph.D. in History and Philosophy of Science from Indiana University in 1969. Dr. Glymour has worked on formal accounts of the confirmation of scientific theories, models of general relativity, and historical topics in psychiatry and physics. He is a main founder of the TETRAD computer program for formal causal inference and learning. He currently works on applications of causal probability nets and formal learning theory to a variety of topics including automated identification of mineral composition (with collaborators at NASA), machine learning procedures for inferring gene regulation, and mathematical aspects of the psychology of causal reasoning. Dr. Glymour, together with Dr. Spanos from Economics, is teaching the course Phil/Econ 6334: Philosophical Foundations of Statistical Modeling and Causal Inference.

Chris Haufe (Visiting Professor)

works on problems in the philosophy of science, both generally (e.g., what are laws of nature?) and as they arise in specific sciences (e.g., are there biological laws?). Chris comes to Virginia Tech from the Department of Philosophy at Duke University, where he spent a year as a postdoctoral fellow in the Center for Philosophy of Biology. His current research is structured around a large-scale project which aims to understand the ways in which the pursuit of hypotheses in a given scientific field are constrained (or otherwise affected) by principles that come from outside that particular field.

Simon May (Assistant Professor)

is currently working on norms of liberal public deliberation, in particular as they apply to conflicts of moral conviction. A paper in this project, "Principled Compromise and the Abortion Controversy," appeared in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* in Fall 2005. In Spring 2008, he will teach an online graduate seminar on contemporary political philosophy.

Rosa Mayorga (Assistant Professor)

presented a paper on Charles Peirce and pluralism at the Applying Peirce Symposium at the Ninth World Congress of Semiotics in Helsinki, Finland in June and later that same month presented a paper on Peirce's ethics at the Third Conference on American and European Values at Opole University, Poland. Her book *From Realism to Realicism: On the Metaphysics of Charles Peirce* was published in February by Rowman and Littlefield/ Lexington Books from outside that particular field.

Walter Ott (Assistant Professor)

delivered a paper, "Relations and Powers," at the Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in April. His papers "Hume on Meaning" and "Regis's Scholastic Mechanism" are forthcoming in *Hume Studies* and *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, respectively.

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Daniel Parker (Assistant Professor)

begins his second year in the philosophy department. He will be teaching courses in philosophy of science and metaphysics over the coming year. Daniel's research interests focus on the philosophy of physics and philosophy of time. His current research projects involve foundational issues in statistical mechanics and attempts to ground the distinction between past and future in the 2nd law of Thermodynamics. He spent much of his Summer visiting at the University of Sydney's Centre for Time and has a paper entitled "Molecular Disorder, Probability and Time" forthcoming in a collection of essays on Ludwig Boltzmann's philosophy of science. Daniel also has interests in scientific realism and in understanding the use and role of computational methods in the physical sciences.

Joe Pitt (Professor)

This past year Dr. Pitt was invited to give a keynote "Human Beings as Technological Artifacts" to the Pupils' Attitudes Towards Technology International Design & Technology Education Conference ; served as co-organizer (with Davis Baird, Dean of the Honors College at the University of South Carolina) of the 15th bi-annual conference of the Society for Philosophy and Technology, "Globalization" in Charleston, South Carolina; gave an invited paper, "Technological/Technical Explanation", at the Workshop on the Handbook for Philosophy of Technology and Engineering Sciences" in Eindhoven, The Netherlands, and published "Seeing Nature, Origins of Scientific Observation" in *Conceptions de la Science: Hier, Aujourd'hui, Demain*.

New Faculty

Lydia Patton (Assistant Professor)

received her Ph.D. from McGill University in Montréal, Québec. The degree was awarded in October of 2004 for a dissertation entitled "Hermann Cohen's history and philosophy of science." Her work in philosophy focuses on the debate between naturalists, who hold the view that all knowledge is based on experience, and the opponents of naturalism, who believe that knowledge may have alternate sources.

Since receiving the doctoral degree, Patton has been a Harper-Schmidt Fellow of the Society of Fellows and a Collegiate Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago. While at the University, she taught in the Collegiate Common Core, teaching texts ranging from Homer's Iliad to Descartes's Meditations. In the fall of 2007, she takes up the position of Assistant Professor in the Philosophy Department at Virginia Tech.



Other Faculty News

We would like to congratulate **Nicholas D. Smith** (Professor of Philosophy at Virginia Tech from 1977-1994) for being elected 2007-2008 President of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association. Prof. Smith will give his Presidential Lecture, "Modesty: A Contextualist Approach" at the March, 2008, meeting in Pasadena, CA. Smith is now the James F. Miller Professor of Humanities at Lewis and Clark College in Oregon.

We would like to congratulate **Eleonore Stump** (Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Virginia Tech from 1978-1991) for being elected 2005-2006 President of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association. Prof. Stump gave her Presidential Lecture, "Love, By All Accounts," at the April, 2006, meeting in Chicago, IL. Stump is now the Robert J. Henle Professor of Philosophy at Saint Louis University in Missouri.

Many thanks for your contributions!!!!

The Philosophy Department is grateful for the generous donations you have made through the Virginia Tech Foundation. Your support contributes in a very direct way to both the intellectual and social life of the department. In particular, it enables us to continue our tradition of hosting regular conferences and colloquia, which is vital both to our functioning as a recognized center of active philosophical research and to the broad education of our students.

Please contact our chair, Professor Jim Klagge (jklagge@vt.edu) when you submit information about your gift. With your permission, we would like to list contributors in future newsletters, with categories as follows:

- Friends:** up to \$250
- Benefactors:** up to \$1,000
- Sponsors:** up to \$5,000
- Patrons:** over \$5,000

If you are interested in making bequests or other special gifts, please contact T. Jackson, Director of Development for the College of Liberal Arts and the Human Sciences. Contact: tysusj@vt.edu or (540) 231-8734)

We want to hear from you!!!!

Please give us your comments, suggestions on what you think of our newsletter, any special features you would want included in future editions, etc. Remember to check our website www.phil.vt.edu

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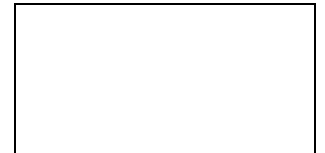


**DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY**



Fall 2007 Newsletter

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