

Letter from the Chair

Dear Friends,



The Philosophy Department continues to be an active place at Virginia Tech!

I am now reaching the end of my second three-year term as Department Chair, and our by-laws, as well as my personal constitution, declare a two-term limit! While the department has gone through significant challenges over those six years, I have found the position to be rewarding, and I think we are in good shape. My “reward” for this service was to be asked to give the graduation speech at our department

ceremony in May. No good deed goes unpunished! But actually I like opportunities like this, and will talk about how we can take philosophy with us into the world. Joe Pitt will be our Interim Chair next year while we take stock of the matter of leadership for our future.

As you will notice inside this newsletter, the department has gotten several recognitions this year, among the faculty, the grad students, the undergrad’s, and the staff—for research, teaching, and service. It is gratifying to have good work be recognized and even rewarded. All of this testifies to the vibrant department that we are.

We conducted a search this year for a new faculty person to teach in the core areas of metaphysics and philosophy of mind. We hired Kelly Trogdon, who got his PhD from University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 2009, and has since taught in Hong Kong. But his best qualification, in my view, is his enthusiasm for bluegrass music—which will stand him in good stead for our annual trek to Floyd! All the rest of our regular faculty will be on board for at least some of next year—and we look forward to this full staffing.

We continued our annual “Running with the Philosophers” at the university’s 3.2 Mile Run to commemorate April 16th. This year there were seven of us philosophers, along with a crowd of several thousand, who did the course on April 13th. The weather was beautiful, and the spirit of commemoration and community was heartening.



Now and then we hear from alumni. We always want to know how you are doing. This year we were blessed by a visit from Eric Hulett and his wife Elizabeth in September. Eric graduated in 1990 with a degree in Philosophy, and went on to become a lawyer. The Huletts have made a sizable bequest to the university, designating a significant portion to philosophy. This was in recognition of what an education in philosophy meant to them. Please consider what philosophy has meant to you. We are always happy to hear reports from alumni, and of course to receive donations as well. Please contact our new chair, Prof. Pitt jcpitt@vt.edu about this. It is also easy to stay in touch with us through Facebook: Virginia Tech Department of Philosophy We post interesting articles for discussion, as well as updates about the department. We have over 180 members of the page!

Hope you have a good summer. Thanks for your interest and support,

--Jim Klagge. ☎

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We want to hear from you!

Please write to us and let us know how (and what) you’re doing!

Write to: Joe Pitt (jcpitt@vt.edu)

To make sure you continue to get the Newsletter, go online to: <http://www.alumni.vt.edu/gateway/index.html> to update, view, and edit your information.

Commencement

Spring 2012 ceremony

On May 12, James Klagge, Chair, presided over the 2012 Commencement Ceremony in Torgersen Hall. Walter Ott presided over the hooding ceremony, while Joe Pitt presented the undergraduate diplomas.

Joe Pitt presented the William H. Williams Prize for undergraduate excellence to Gabi Seltzer, while Walter Ott presented the Marjorie Grene Memorial Prize for outstanding graduate student to Joey Miller and Grace McGee.

Seth Bordner was the speaker. Bordner, who earned his Master's degree from Virginia Tech, is now Assistant Professor of Philosophy at University of Alabama. His talk was titled "So, What Are You Going to *Do* With That? Or: how I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love The Question." 

Bachelor of Arts:

Ahmed, Mariam Kauthar
Balibay, Jozell Medina
Benincasa, Brigid Maureen
Bruce, Adam Alexander
Butler, Tyler Anderson
Buyrn, Susan Elizabeth
Callahan, Aimee Burton
Campbell, Cameron Vaxter
Catalfamo, Nicole Marie
Cole, Diana Chu
Cole, Kerry Anne
DeDona, Lesley Raynor
English, Matthew Allan
Eyster, Evan Matthew
Fernandez, Scott Andrew
Gardiner, Kyle Spencer Keith
Greer, Zachary Ryan
Gruschow, Clifford Gerard Jr.
House, Chauncey Claire
Hummel, Catherine Maureen
Jackson, Andrew Lee
James, Charles Thomas
Kelly, Jonathan Michael Edward
Kendrick, Todd
Lennon, Benjamin Kyle
Lewis, Samuel Michael
*Lovette, Chatham Grey
Lutz, Austin James
Mahoney, Alice Ann
Mann, Katherine Spencer
Mehfoud, Christopher Michel
Mills, Cierra Alexandra
Moore, Monica Dorothy
Mortweet, Christopher J.
O'Connell, Kevin Michael

Bachelor of Arts Cont.:

*O'Connor, Reilly Eileen
Ott, Rachel Elisabeth
Park, Alice Joon
Pettingell, Alexander Stuart
Phannareth, Tommy
Quigley, Rebecca Jane
Rauch, Haley Marie
Reynolds, Joshua Matthew
Ripp, Roberto Ramon
Rusnak, Alexandria Rene
Sabarre, Nina Riza
*Seltzer, Gabriele Eileen
Sprinkel, Barbara Ellen
*Sutherland, Kylie Anne
Vest, Paul Dameron
Vest, Shaun Michael
*Weston, Caitlin Weber
Williard, Ben Michael
Wrenn, Kenneth Vernon Jr.
Yglesias, Samantha Cathleen
Zoretic, Kelly Maureen
* Phi SigmaTau

Master of Arts:

Crowder, Rachel
Dougherty, Matthew
McGee, Grace
Miller, Joey
Price, Amanda
Radzai, Ronald
Perich, Nicholas
Svetich, Erik
Valdespino, Andrew



Grace McGee, one of the recipients of the Marjorie Grene Memorial Prize



Gabi Seltzer, the recipient of the William H. Williams Prize

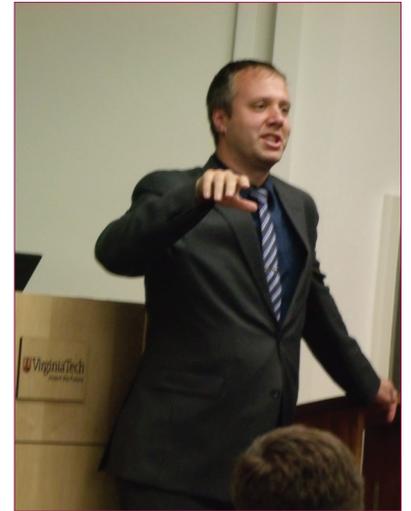
Conference

Graduate student conference

The 9th annual Virginia Tech Graduate Philosophy Conference turned out to be a wonderful success. Professor Anjan Chakravartty from the University of Notre Dame gave a talk titled “Voluntarism about Realism and Antirealism.” And our very own Assistant Professor Benjamin Jantzen gave a talk titled “Wigner’s World: Natural Kinds Reconciled.”



Professor Anjan Chakravartty



Assistant Professor Benjamin Jantzen



Lindley Slipetz, President of the VT Graduate Philosophy Club

Graduate students from around the world gave talks with titles such as “Design and Verify” and “Minimal Structural Essentialism” with comments provided by our own graduate students. Congratulations to all members of the Graduate Philosophy club, especially Lindley Slipetz, President, Chris Stiso, Treasurer, and all the other graduate students who helped for organizing and hosting such a successful event. The graduate students would also like to thank department and the university for their generous support. 



New Faculty



Kelly Trogdon received his PhD in philosophy from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. There he wrote his dissertation on phenomenal concepts – concepts we use to think about how our current experiences feel – under the direction of Joseph Levine.

In the dissertation Kelly argues that phenomenal concepts are really strange, but they ultimately can be

understood in purely physical/functional terms. Moreover, we can appeal to the strangeness of phenomenal concepts to explain why there is an explanatory gap between the experiential and the physical. This made Joe unhappy – he argues that the explanatory gap poses an unanswered challenge to physicalism – but they managed to remain on speaking terms. They even managed to write a paper together.

After finishing up at UMass, Kelly accepted a position at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. He and his wife Ellen moved there in the summer of 2009 not really knowing what to expect. Kelly of course immediately came down with the swine flu, but Ellen nursed him back to health. After

“Kelly argues that phenomenal concepts are really strange, but they ultimately can be understood in purely physical/functional terms.”

some additional bumps in the road, they both grew to like Hong Kong quite a bit. They learned a little Cantonese (to be honest, Ellen learned some Cantonese – all Kelly knows is how to ask for beer) and enjoyed travelling around

China, especially small towns and villages.

While Kelly continues to develop the ideas in his dissertation, at Lingnan he focused mainly on issues in metaphysics, including grounding, intrinsicity, and monism. (Joe always suspected that Kelly is really a metaphysician at heart.)

Apart from his interest in philosophy, Kelly enjoys music and literature. He plays various instruments (thought pretty badly) and looks forward to spending some time in Floyd. As for literature, he has recently discovered and is now obsessively reading the deadpan Magnus Mills. ☺

Faculty and Staff Awards

Matthew Dougherty was a winner of the Teacher of the Week Award

Eric Hodges was a winner of the Teacher of the Week Award

Joey Miller and Marc Lucht were named “Favorite Faculty” members in March by the Housing & Residence Life program in the Division of Student Affairs. Congratulations!!



Leisa Osborne a Philosophy support staff member since 2003, was recognized as an “Extraordinary Employee” on the Department of Human Resources’ website. President Steger announced on March 27 that Leisa had also been selected to receive one of five 2013 President’s Awards for Excellence and will be Virginia Tech’s nominee for the Governor’s Award for Community Service and Volunteerism.

Joe Pitt is the 2012-13 winner of the Alumni Award for Excellence in Research

Sarah Pelman, one of our undergraduates, won the 2013 Outstanding Senior in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.

Faculty News

Assistant Professor Benjamin Jantzen

Over the past year, Benjamin Jantzen has launched a major project in automated scientific discovery. This research program is based on a philosophically novel account of natural kinds that has suggested a variety of methodological innovations for particular scientific applications, notably evolutionary biology and the study of complex systems. Early portions of the project were funded by a CLAHS Summer Humanities Stipend and presented at a number of conferences, including a workshop at the Minnesota Center for Philosophy of Science and the Philosophy & Theory in Biology Young Investigator's Symposium. Dr. Jantzen is working to expand the project over the next few years to include research opportunities for graduate students. He also published an unrelated paper, entitled "Peirce on Miracles: The Failure of Bayesian Analysis," as a chapter in the book, *Probability in the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Jake Chandler, Victoria S. Harrison (Oxford University Press).

Professor and Chair James Klagge

In November Jim travelled to the library at Cornell University to study a collection of letters that was left to them recently. The letters were solicited in 1966 by a would-be biographer of Wittgenstein from dozens of people who knew Wittgenstein. He was the first person to look at most of

"[Jim] was the first person to look at most of these [documents] in 45 years..."

these in 45 years, and their contents, while not earth-shaking, were very interesting. This research will help with his on-going work on Wittgenstein's lectures, and also work on his background influences. This fall Jim will have relief from his teaching in recognition of his service as chair and he will focus on this. Jim's book *Wittgenstein in Exile* went into a second printing by MIT Press, so someone seems to be buying it! Later last November Jim ran

the Richmond Marathon. It was his 15th marathon, and he finished in 4:32:48, which was better than he had hoped! Jim also says that his heart goes out not only to the runners, but more importantly the family and supporters, at the Boston Marathon. What a sad shock!

Visiting Assistant Professor Wesley Van Camp

Wesley Van Camp joined the Philosophy Department at Virginia Tech as a Visiting Assistant Professor in Fall 2012. He co-authored the paper, "Using Content Reading Assignments in a Psychology Course to Teach Critical Reading Skills", which was published in the *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* in February 2013. He is currently working on issues in scientific understanding and explanation.

Professor Deborah Mayo

As a visitor of the Centre for Philosophy of Natural and Social Science (CPNSS) at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Mayo, during her leave in 2012-13 has led a series of 6 Ph.D. research seminars in the department of Philosophy, Logic, and Scientific Method during the summer and fall of 2012, on Contemporary Philosophy of Statistics. The series is based on a book that she has been writing, *How to Tell What's True About Statistical Inference: A Philosophical Approach*, for which she has a contract with Cambridge University Press. She has co-organized, with Ben Jantzen and Lydia Patton, a conference, *Ontology and Methodology*, May 4-6, 2013 for the Dept of Philosophy, for which the E.R.R.O.R. Fund is also part sponsor. For more information on her activities, please see her blog, errorstatistics.com

Assistant Professor Tristram McPherson

Tristram McPherson has been on leave from Virginia Tech this year, as a fellow with the Many Moral Rationalisms project at the University of Melbourne. Three of his papers – on the metaphysics of ethics, moral semantics, and moral methodology – were published this year

in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, and *Philosophy Compass*. He also published entries this year in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Ethics*, and the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The fellowship has freed him to travel an unusual amount this year; while based in Melbourne, he has visited Princeton University and Dartmouth College for research collaboration, and will have given ten talks at conferences and philosophy departments in the US, Australia, and Hong Kong. When not at work, Tristram has been very much enjoying living in Melbourne, and reading his son Finn many, many books.

Visiting Assistant Professor Joanne Lau

Joanne had one paper, "Two Arguments for Child Enfranchisement", published in *Political Studies* in December. Her paper "Voting in Bad Faith", was a finalist for the Graduate essay prize at *Res Publica*. It is currently under review for publication there. Joanne had her contract renewed for a visiting position next year. Outside of the department, she joined the NRV Roller girls (which is the local roller derby league) and has been on their bouting roster, since the beginning of this year.

Assistant Professor Michael Moehler

works in moral and political philosophy, with a focus on some of the key figures of the two disciplines, such as Hobbes, Hume, Kant, and Rawls. This academic year, his article "Contractarian Ethics and Harsanyi's Two Justifications of Utilitarianism" was published in *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* and his article "The Scope of Instrumental Morality" is forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*. He presented papers at the ISUS 2012 Conference at New York University and the Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in New Orleans. In addition, he gave talks to the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Regensburg (Germany) and the Institute of Political Science at the Technical University of Darmstadt (Germany). On World Philosophy Day, he presented a lecture on the "Significance of Philosophy

Faculty News Continued

for the Public” at the Public Library in Christiansburg and he gave a guest lecture on “Justice as a Virtue” at the Language and Culture Institute at Virginia Tech. In March, he received a Humanities Summer Stipend from the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences and a Pre-Tenure Faculty Mentoring Grant from the Office of the Provost at Virginia Tech.

Visiting Assistant Professor Ted Parent In November, he presented his paper “In the Mental Fiction, Mental Fictionalism is Fictitious” to the 64th annual Northwest Philosophy Conference. The paper was also accepted for publication in the October 2013 issue of *The Monist*. In January, his paper “Note on Induction” appeared in the journal *Think*, issued by Cambridge University Press. And in April, He commented on a paper on Frege’s Puzzle at the Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association. These days, he is working on an invited paper for *Philosophy Compass*, tentatively titled “Knowing What ‘Knowing What’ Is: Four Contemporary Debates on ‘Knowing-Wh’.” This too should appear in print in the latter half of 2013. Also, his entry for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on “Externalism and Self-Knowledge” should be appearing online any day now!

Associate Professor Lydia Patton Professor Patton received a grant to pursue a project on the history and philosophy of nineteenth century optics. Archival research for this project took her to Florence, Italy to the Museo Galileo and to Paris, France to visit the Musée des Arts et Métiers in summer 2012. Recently, she submitted an application for a grant that would support follow-up research in the Dibner Archive of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. She has traveled to present a paper, “Sympathetic Resonance: The Influence of Hermann von Helmholtz’s Theory of Acoustics,” at the Boston Colloquium for Philosophy of Science in March 2013. At Virginia Tech, she presented a paper, “The Human Sciences and the Science of the Human,” at

the Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought, in October 2012. Finally, Dr. Patton was the director of the Masters program in Philosophy in 2012-2013, and would like to thank the M.A. students for their contributions to such an enjoyable and productive year in the program.

Associate Professor Walter Ott spent this academic year teaching at the University of Virginia. His paper ‘What is Locke’s Theory of Representation?’ appeared in the December issue of the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, while ‘Malebranche and the Riddle of Sensation’ is forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. In May, he’ll give a paper at the ‘Occasionalism: East and West’ conference at Harvard University.

Visiting Assistant Professor Marc Lucht This past year he had two articles appear in print. One is entitled “Nietzsche and Tolstoy on Authentic Christianity.” The other, “Animal Rights in a Democratic Context,” appears in a volume of the journal *Skepsis: A Journal for Philosophy and Inter-Disciplinary Research*, which is dedicated to him. The latter paper he also presented at the Ninth World Congress of the International Society for Universal Dialogue, which was held in the town of Olympia, Greece. (While there he was elected to a third and final term on the ISUD’s Board of Directors.) The paperback edition of his co-edited book, *Kafka’s Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, appeared last Spring. He also published “The Irony of Animal Cruelty Legislation,” an invited book review of Piers Beirne’s *Confronting Animal Abuse: Law, Criminology, and Human-Animal Relationships*. It appeared in the journal *Society and Animals*. And he prepared for publication a third article, “Towards a Phenomenology of Intercultural Dialogue,” which is due to appear soon. This past year he gave several talks and other presentations, including the inaugural address for the new Global Studies Program at North Cross School,

a private school in Roanoke. He also put together a panel of scholars for the 23rd World Congress of Philosophy, which will take place this summer in Athens, Greece. The panel, which is entitled, “The Human-Animal Relationship: Theory and Practice,” was accepted by the organizing committee, and will include Gary Francione, Valery Giroux, Gary Steiner, Nicole Broadbent, and me. (While in Greece, he will deliver a second paper at the 11th Annual International Conference on History: From Ancient to Modern, entitled, “Kant, Schopenhauer, and the Implications of Human Exceptionalism.”) In April, he delivered the keynote address at a conference hosted by the Department of Philosophy at the Kazan State Power Engineering University in Kazan, Russia. Connected with his continuing work at the Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention, this past year the university approved our new undergraduate minor in Peace Studies, which he helped design, as well as two new courses that the Center will offer. He organized a second Student Research Symposium entitled “Cultivating Peace,” which was held in November. Our keynote speaker for the Student Symposium was Johan Galtung, the founder of Peace Studies; while Dr. Galtung was here, he interviewed him, and that interview should appear in print soon. Currently he is working with the Director of the Center and the Dean of CLAHS to organize our second International Summit on Transdisciplinary Approaches to Violence Prevention. The second summit will take place in Rabat, Morocco. The event will occur in September, and he will take seven Virginia Tech students to the meeting, where they will participate. Currently he is co-teaching a research seminar to prepare those students for the Summit and for their scholarly contributions to the publication that will emerge from the Summit.

Professor Joe Pitt Joe Pitt is completing his second term as Director of Undergraduate Studies and will be succeeded by Dr. Klagge. Joe has had a busy year hammering out the details of a contract with

Congratulations and Thanks

Routledge to develop a Companion to the Philosophy of Technology. He has asked Ashley Shew Helfin to be his co-editor. We expect to submit the volume to the publisher in 2015 – so it is a big project. Joe is also completing his term as President of the Virginia Tech chapter of Sigma Xi, the Scientific Research Society. Joe is also the 2012-13 winner of the Alumni Award for Excellence in Research., and while flattered, teaching remains his passion. And his other passion, Irish Wolfhounds continues to be a large part of his and Donna's lives. They had another litter last summer and the two puppies they kept, Mischief and Mayhem, are thriving. ☺

Congratulations to our Undergrads

Jonathan Lutton, Philosophy and English (professional writing option) major, and **Amber Wiley-Vawter** were presented with the English department's professional writing award for best presentation in their field at the Department of English Annual Undergraduate Conference on April 5. Jonathan and Amber presented a website created for the Coalition for Refugee Resettlement (CRR). The website, begun as part of a class project, was completed external to the course's requirements. Jonathan, who plans to graduate in December, was recently inducted into Sigma Tau Delta (International English Honor Society), Phi Kappa Phi (International All-Discipline Honor Society), and Phi Sigma Tau (International Philosophy Honor Society).

In March 2013, International Studies major and Philosophy minor **Tea Ivanovic** presented at the Virginia Tech Human Rights Conference, "Human Rights Locally and Globally." On April 19, he presented "External Pressures and Domestic Changes: The Council of Europe, The European Union, and the National Minorities in Vojvodina" at the Virginia Tech Undergraduate Research Conference and will also make a presentation at the CLAHS Diversity Conference on May 3. Tea completed a study abroad at the London School of Economics (LSE)

during Summer of 2012 in International Relations.

After a very competitive selection process, **Peter Johnston** has been awarded a \$1000 College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Education Abroad Scholarship for the Summer I 2013 term.

Sarah Pelham, a senior graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy on the pre-law track, was selected as the 2013 Outstanding Senior for the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. She was chosen on the basis of outstanding performance in the following areas: academic achievement, extracurricular activities, leadership positions, and contributions of service to the university and community. As a senior, Sarah was also awarded the Hokie Memorial Marathon Scholarship on the basis of outstanding academic merit, and the Moody, Pratt, Minor Scholarship on the basis of academic achievement and professional accomplishment as well as an interest in international issues. Sarah will graduate in Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society, as well as an Honors Scholar in Philosophy. Sarah applied to several law schools in the fall of her senior year and was admitted to her top choice.

During her time as an undergraduate, Sarah served as an ambassador for her college. She volunteered for the Philosophy Department, assisting faculty and staff with various projects. Sarah also enjoyed mentoring elementary school girls at Gilbert Linkous Elementary School. She did this as part of a community service outreach effort through her sorority, Delta Delta Delta. She also was a mentor for Conversation Partners, assisting foreign students with learning English. ☺

Congratulations to the Graduate Class of 2013 for their PhD Acceptances

- Boston University
- City University of New York Graduate Center
- Fordham University
- Georgetown University
- Ohio State University
- Purdue University (x2)
- University of California (Irvine)
- University of California at San Diego
- University of Notre Dame (x2)
- University of Oklahoma (x2)
- Virginia Tech Center for Public Administration and Policy



Saying Thanks for the Support!

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. We'd like to acknowledge our most recent donors:

- Justin Chiarodo (2000)
- Regina DePalma (1975)
- Dale Jones (1981)
- George Adams III (1978)
- Shannon Love (MA 2001)
- Eric and Elizabeth Hulett (1990)
- Richard Burian (Emeritus Professor)
- Ronald Laymon

To make a donation, please contact our Chair, Professor Joe Pitt (jcpitt@vt.edu). If you are interested in making bequests or other special gifts, please contact Jocelyn Sanders (jocelyn1@vt.edu, or 540-231-2893). ☺

Philosophy at Tech on Facebook

Want to meet up with other philosophers, VT philosophy alumni, and people with an interest in philosophy at VT, plus see pics of what is going on in the department?

The VT Department of Philosophy Facebook group is up and running:

<http://www.facebook.com/groups.php#/group.php?gid=78145381226>

Department of Philosophy
229 Major Williams Hall
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Address correction requested



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