

# DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

## ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



Volume 1, Issue 5

Spring 2005

### From the Department Head,

By Joe Pitt,  
*Philosophy Department Head*



Greetings Friends,

This has been a very exciting year. We began the hiring process for a new interdisciplinary Ph.D. program for which we have been identified as one of the four "lead" departments, the others being History, Political Science and Interdisciplinary Studies. The program is called ASPECT, the Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical and Cultural Thought. This year we conducted searches to add two new permanent faculty members to the department, bringing us to a total of 13. Please welcome Steven Daskal and Simon May!

We were also given two new assistantships to award to philosophy oriented students who are likely candidates for entry into the ASPECT Ph.D. program when they complete our MA in philosophy. If everything pans out as proposed, we will be adding two more faculty positions later and we will receive a total of four more assistantship for students headed to the ASPECT program. Thus we are growing in absolute numbers both on the faculty side and on the graduate student side.

On the not so good news end of things I am sad to report the departure of two of our faculty colleagues. Roger Ariew, after 27 years at Virginia Tech, has left us to become head of the department of philosophy at the University of South Florida. Anne Margaret Baxley has accepted a position at Washington

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### EVENTS! Spring 2005 Commencement Ceremony

This year, the Philosophy had over 100 family and friends attend the Commencement Ceremony for our MA graduates and our undergraduate majors. The event, organized by Prof. Rosa Mayorga, was held at the Major Williams Atrium and was a great success.

#### GRADUATE

The following is a list of our MA graduate students and their plans for the coming year:

- Marley Banker:** University of Washington, Seattle, Ph.D. program
- Brian Berner:** teaching philosophy at Ulster County Community College
- Seth Brown:** working in politics
- Rob Eiben:** continuing his programming career
- Jason Gardner:** teaching for us next year as instructor
- Sarah Hippolitus:** working for the Department of the Treasury
- John Kane:** teaching philosophy for us and in NY over the summer
- Charles Repp:** University of Toronto Ph.D. program
- Roger Stanev:** University of British Columbia Ph.D. program

#### UNDERGRADUATE

The following are our undergraduates who majored in philosophy:

- George Harms
- Margaret Joyce
- Erik Lawson
- Michael Lesniak
- Katherine McAuliffe
- Eric Montgomery
- John Ryan
- Justin Short
- Evan Stacy
- Brandi Sweeny
- Ezra Wegbreit
- Shomir Wilson



We kicked off our 20th anniversary celebration with the "Peirce-pectives on Metaphysics and the Sciences Conference" on the philosophy of American pragmatist Charles S. Peirce.

Renowned philosophers from Navarre (Spain), Miami, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, and Albany joined our own Peirce scholars to present the three day conference. It was a huge success! The premier journal for Peirce scholarship, the

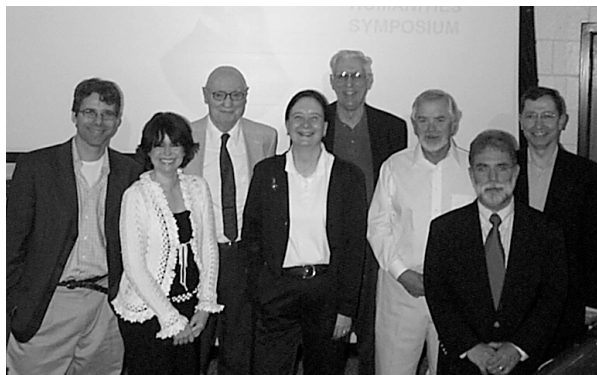
*Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* will be publishing the conference proceedings. Prof. Rosa Mayorga,

# 20th

# Anniversary

the creator and coordinator of the conference and the celebration, will be guest editor of the *Transactions* issue. And then, we partied! We had over 60 guests attend our cocktail reception at L'Arche: there was a live jazz ensemble, wonderful food, and a slide show covering the many years of Philosophy at

VTech. The weekend ended with an elegant dinner at the University Club on Saturday evening, and a home-style brunch the following morning.



Conference speakers Cornelis de Waal, Rosa Mayorga, Nicholas Rescher, Susan Haack, Robert Meyers, Hans Rott, Joe Pitt, Jaime Nubiola, Deborah Mayo (not pictured)



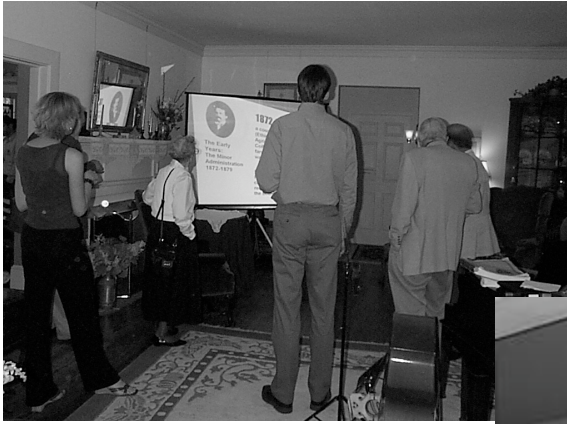
Graduate student Marley Banker, Karen Wallace enjoying a conference break



Conference speakers taking a coffee break

Joe Pitt in a lively discussion with Dean Niles, Mrs. Niles, Robert Porter, Evan Bohnen





Watching the slide show and listening to some jazz

Bill Fitzpatrick, Terry Zapata (sitting), Leisa Osborne (in background)



Roger Ariew, Dick Burian having a philosophical discussion with graduate students



Joe Pitt in  
discussion with  
graduate  
students



Recalling some  
fond memories



Looking forward to the next  
anniversary celebration!

University at St. Louis. And while we wish them both well, they will be sorely missed.

Back to good news! The graduate students organized their first ever conference this fall and it was a fantastic success. Not only was John Kane, the organizer, able to attract one of the top moral philosophers working today, Dr. Christine Korsgaard from Harvard as the keynote speaker, but the conference received excellent submissions from graduate students at such top-flight schools as Princeton and NYU. The success of the conference has inspired our 1st year graduate students to continue what we hope will become a tradition. They are already busy organizing next year's conference, having secured Helen Longino as their keynote speaker.

Not to be outdone, the undergraduates, through the Philosophy Club, organized the first ever "Philosophy Week" this spring. It involved a week-long series of talks by the faculty on the topic of "How Modern Technology is Changing the Face of Ethics". The lecture series attracted a strong audience and generated a lot of discussion. Bravo!

The graduate program continues to attract very strong students and our current graduates are venturing out to Ph.D. programs at places like the University of Toronto, the University of Washington/Seattle, and the University of British Columbia.

Graduation this year was the largest ever. We graduated 12 undergraduates and 9 MA students. In attendance at graduation were over 100 happy family members spanning many generations. It was a lovely event for which we must thank Rosa Mayorga, and our department staff Leisa Osborne and Terry Zapata.

As we look forward to next year, we anticipate two more faculty searches, this time to replace our departing colleagues. In the fall we will have our second annual graduate student conference and in the spring Laura Perini has organized another departmental conference. So it is going to be an event filled year!

Please remember to come by the department to say hello when you come back to campus. We all would love to see you and hear about your adventures. And don't forget emails. We love to hear from you.

joe

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## First Graduate Conference

This year, our department held the first Graduate Conference, which was organized by graduate student John Kane. The conference was a great accomplishment: the keynote address was by the renowned philosopher Christine Korsgaard (Harvard University) and the following graduate students presented papers: Colin Klein (Princeton University), Jason Decker (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Daniel Moseley (University of Virginia), Jonathan Ichikawa (Brown University), Samantha Corte (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), and Clare Batty (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). We hope this is the beginning of a new tradition in our department.

## News from Alumni:

**Shomir Wilson**, Spring 2005 graduate, is having his article "The Pathological Liar: An Exclusionary Approach to the Black Sheep in Natural Language", about the truth semantics of the liar's paradox in natural language, published in *Aporia*.

**Justin York**, who graduated last year, is going on to the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ph.D., in Educational Policy Studies.

## Faculty NEWS!



### Faculty Feature:

**Brian Epstein** joined the philosophy department at Virginia Tech in the fall, after receiving his PhD from Stanford. This year he has taught the undergraduate and graduate logic sequence, as well as a graduate seminar called "The Construction of Social Reality," on some emerging issues in the philosophy of language.

Dr. Epstein grew up in Atlanta, was an undergraduate at Princeton in Philosophy, and then received a master's degree in Philosophy from Oxford. He also spent a few years working for a consulting firm in Cambridge, MA, and in technology in Silicon Valley.

Dr. Epstein works primarily in philosophy of language and the philosophy of social science. Among his interests are questions of the relation between culture and language, the emergence of mathematical formalism, and the nature of the objects of the social sciences, particularly economics and music.



### Roger Ariew

is now the Department Head at University of South Florida.

### Anne Margaret Baxley

after four wonderful and productive years with the philosophy department at Virginia Tech, is leaving us for a new position in the philosophy department at Washington University in St. Louis. Anne Margaret extends her warmest wishes to her former colleagues and students at Virginia Tech.

### Richard Burian

specializes in philosophy of biology, with specific concerns in the history of nineteenth and twentieth century evolutionary theory, theories of heredity, and theories of (biological) development; the relations among biological disciplines; the impact of the molecular biology on the theory and practice of biological disciplines; historiography and methodology in history and philosophy of science; and scientific realism. He just published *The Epistemology of Development, Evolution, and Genetics* New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

### Andrea Falcon

a visiting assistant professor at Virginia Tech from 2003-5, will be moving to Canada at the end of the summer, and will be teaching in the Department of Philosophy at Concordia University, Montreal.

### William FitzPatrick

was promoted this year to associate professor (pending formal approval by the Board of Visitors). He serves as Director of Graduate Studies and is also chair of the New River Valley Local Human Rights Committee. His research

and teaching range over all 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 ethical issues surrounding human embryonic stem cell research (e.g., "Surplus Embryos, Non-reproductive Cloning and the Intend/Foresee Distinction," in *The Hastings Center Report*, Vol. 33, No. 3). Other current work addresses further issues in the debate between realists and constructivists in ethical theory, focusing on a defense of a moderate form of non-reductionist ethical realism.

### Mark Gifford

specializes in ancient Greek philosophy. His concerns range over most philosophical topics and figures in the Pre-Classical, Classical, and Hellenistic periods. He also has interests in the place of philosophy within the broader context of Greek intellectual, political, and cultural history. He is currently concentrating on the epistemological project of Plato and Aristotle, its relations with their ethics, and its significance for contemporary epistemological theorizing. Dr Gifford was on leave during the 2003-2004 academic year.

### William Goodwin

a visiting assistant professor at Virginia Tech from 2003-5, has accepted a two-year Mellon Fellowship at Swarthmore College. While at Swarthmore, Professor Goodwin will be teaching half time and trying to write a book on the philosophy of chemistry.

### Marjorie Grene

was featured in the March issue of *Believer* magazine. To see a copy of the article, go to [http://www.believermag.com/issues/200503/interview\\_grene.php](http://www.believermag.com/issues/200503/interview_grene.php)

### Valerie Hardcastle

has a new book out with Eric Dietrich in John Benjamin Press (the *Advances in Consciousness Research* series) called *Sisyphus's Boulder: Consciousness and the Limits of the Knowable*.

### Jim Klagge

is applying for a sabbatical for 2006-7. He's working on a book: "Wittgenstein in Exile", and hoping/planning/training to run a 50-mile ultra-marathon in spring, 2006.

### Deborah Mayo

has become a joint professor of Economics and Philosophy, and has taught courses in philosophy of science and Economic Methodology, jointly offered by these departments. She was elected to serve (for 2004-2005) as the U.S. representative to the International Congress of Scientific

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Unions (ICSU) "Ethics Review" Committee, helping to write a 50 page report: "Science and Society: Rights and Responsibilities", which will be published and circulated within the ICSU membership. She has organized a Workshop of leading philosophers of social science and economists of experiment on the Philosophy and Methodology of Experimental Economics, for June 27-29, 2005 at Virginia Tech. She has published numerous articles including "An Error-Statistical Philosophy of Evidence," in M. Taper and S. Lele (eds.), *The Nature of Scientific Evidence: Statistical, Philosophical, and Empirical Considerations*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004 and "Evidence as Passing Severe Tests: Highly Probed vs. Highly Proved" in P. Achinstein (ed.), *Scientific Evidence*, Johns Hopkins University Press 2005, and presented papers at several conferences, including the London School of Economics (Evidence Series) and the Econometric Society World Congress, London.

#### **Rosa Mayorga**

just returned from the University of Navarra, Spain, where she was invited to present a paper, "Peirce y la Metafísica" to the Grupo de Estudios Peirceanos, which will be published by *Anthropos*. She also presented a paper, "Peirce: Unpacking the Individual" at the Central APA meeting in Chicago in April. She published two papers, "The Hair: On the Difference between Peirce's Nominalism and His Realism," and "Diamonds are a Pragmatist's Best Friend" in the *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. She was named Guest Editor for the Spring 2005 issue of the *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, which will include the proceedings of the 2004 Spring Conference which she organized at Virginia Tech, for which she received a 2004 Humanities Symposium Award.

#### **Laura Perini**

spent Fall semester at the Center for Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh, studying scientific images and their role as evidence. Her paper, "The Truth in Pictures", appeared in the January 2004 volume of *Philosophy of Science*. During the year she gave presentations at the Philosophy of Science Association biennial meeting, the American Society for Aesthetics annual meeting, the University of Pittsburgh and James Madison University. Laura received a Humanities Summer Stipend Award in 2004, which supported a study of pictorial realism, as well as allowing for participation in an international, interdisciplinary workshop in Paris studying images in science. The first result of this workshop is an online conference, "Pictures in Cognition and Science" (<http://www.interdisciplines.org/artcognition>.) Laura is a co-organizer of an APA mini-conference on scientific images, which will be coordinated with a conference at Virginia Tech in 2005, in an effort to build momentum in philosophical studies of what images contribute to science and how they do so.

#### **New Faculty**

Steven Daskal and Simon May: look for features on them in our next newsletter!

## **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 Joe Pitt ([jcpitt@vt.edu](mailto:jcpitt@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:

<b>Friends:</b>	up to \$250
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## **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](http://www.phil.vt.edu)



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- Jody Roberts, Managing Ed Perspectives on Sci.
- Terry Zapata, Executive Secretary

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- |                               |                              |
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## DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY



## Spring 2005 Newsletter

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