

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



Volume 1, Issue 3

Spring 2003

What is happening to the College of Arts & Sciences and to the University

By Joe Pitt,
Philosophy Department Head



Dear Friends,

The Virginia Tech Department of Philosophy is alive and well despite the turmoil of the last year. It has been quite a ride. In reflecting back, I thought you might find a review of some of the key events helpful as you try to understand what is happening to the College of Arts and Sciences and to the University.

It all began in the Spring of 2001 when Dean of Arts and Sciences Bob Bates raised as a topic for discussion with his department heads the possibility of restructuring the College. He saw two problems with the current structure, which consists of approximately 22 departments ranging from physics to music: (1) there were too many different priorities for one person, the Dean, to address adequately, and (2) the College needed more than one voice at the university level to get the attention of the upper administration. The rest of that spring, some of the following summer, and most of the early fall were spent in intense discussions of how we might restructure the College to address those concerns. Then, in November 2001 Dean Bates announced he would leaving Virginia Tech to take the position of Provost at Washington State University, effective January 1, 2002. The discussions on restructuring Dean Bates initiated had the full approval of

continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 3** EVENTS (past present and future)
- 4** Many Thanks for Your Donations
- 4** ALUMNI UPDATE

Faculty NEWS!

Roger Ariew

Roger Ariew has completed a year as a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) fellow; this Fall semester he continues to work on the project, "Descartes' First Critics," with a Research leave from Virginia Tech. He will return to teaching Spring semester. Next summer, he will direct an NEH Seminar (for 15 chosen professors) on Leibniz and His Contemporaries, with Daniel Garber of Princeton University. He has also edited, with Garber, a 10 volume series of primary sources for Thoemmes Press, called The Reception of Descartes in Seventeenth-Century England. This year he will also finish a companion volume to Descartes's philosophy, Historical Dictionary of Descartes and Cartesian Philosophy, for Scarecrow Press, with four other scholars (Tad Schmaltz from Duke, Dennis Des Chene from Emory, Doug Jesseph from NC State, and Theo Verbeek from Utrecht University). Last June, Ariew lectured in Wolfenbuettel, Germany, and Nijmegen, The Netherlands; in September, he gave a series of lectures in Arad, Romania. He is looking forward to giving papers at Lecce, Italy during December, San Francisco CA, at the end of March, and Delphi, Greece and Paris, France, next June.

Anne Margaret Baxley

This past summer Anne Margaret Baxley traveled to Christchurch, New Zealand, where she participated in an international conference on virtue ethics. She was recently selected as an American Fellow of the American Association for University Women for 2002-2003 and has been awarded a Humanities Summer Stipend from Virginia Tech (for next summer) to work on her book on Kant's theory of virtue. This Fall Anne Margaret is teaching courses on Kant and early modern philosophy. She serves as the faculty advisor to Virginia Tech's Philosophy Club for undergraduates.

Richard Burian

Richard Burian will finish a two-year term as Director of Graduate Studies for the Department this year. He also serves as Past President of the International Society of History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology until July 2003 and maintains a full docket of commitments in history and philosophy of biology, plus some work in theoretical biology. This September, he and Prof. Denis Thieffry of the University of Marseille will deliver a pair of talks on "What Theoretical Biology Can Do and What It Cannot: Model Systems and Model Building in Developmental Biology" at a day-long workshop at the Konrad Lorenz Institute. The workshop is part of a larger international meeting on The Viennese Roots of Theoretical Biology. Among his new

continued on page 3

the Provost, Mark McNamee, who had only arrived in August 2001. With the announcement of Dean Bates' departure, the Provost seized the opportunity to open university-wide discussions on university restructuring, with the initial aim of reducing the number of Colleges from eight to six. There were campus wide meetings and smaller gatherings to discuss a cascade of new organizational plans. Just when we had one plan, a new one would appear and we would scratch our heads and try to understand what it meant for Philosophy.

While the discussions on restructuring were underway, the university was hit with a very large budget reduction due to decreased state tax revenues and, in hindsight, an ill advised tax reduction. In an attempt to meet the reductions, the university did a number of things, including offering a form of early retirement severance for staff and faculty close to retirement. The deal was too good to resist and so our own Harlan Miller, after 36 years of loyal service, retired June 30, 2002. The Department of Philosophy was required to reduce its base budget by 7%. This was a difficult task to accomplish. The bottom line was that we were looking at reducing our Philosophy course offerings by 500 seats. It was the undergraduates who would suffer. Two weeks before classes started in August the Provost's office found money to run those sections for Fall semester only. What we will do for Spring Semester is anyone's guess at this point. In the end, in addition to the loss of Harlan Miller's position, we had to reduce our receptionist's position to half time. This resulted in the loss of Cheryl Adkins, as she took a full time position in Northern Virginia. We have now filled the half time receptionist position. Ami Sanchez, a recent graduate of Hollins University, is a delightful addition to the department as she greets everyone with a big smile. We are fortunate to have her with us.

More or less final decisions on restructuring were made in June 2002. The College of Arts and Sciences will cease to exist June 30, 2003. In its place two new colleges will emerge from the ashes: the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Sciences. Thus, instead of reducing the number of colleges from eight to six, we have increased the number of colleges to nine. Philosophy will be part of the new College of Liberal Arts. The heads of the departments that will comprise the new college have been meeting all summer and fall planning for the transition. It has been both exciting and depressing. It has been exciting because we really are forming a tighter vision of who we are and what the role of the new college will be. It is depressing because so much hangs on the resources we will have available. For example, one of the exciting aspects of the new vision for the University is the commitment in the University Strategic Plan to the development of some Ph.D. programs in the

humanities and social sciences. But until we are given some idea of the resources allocated to the new college, which programs will be funded is unclear. We have submitted a proposal for a Ph.D. program, but we do not know at this point if we will be given the go ahead.

To make matters worse, in October the Governor instituted a second round of budget reductions. It is a staggering blow. Despite the fact that the Provost and President Steger have publicly asserted that core academic programs will be protected, it is very difficult to see how we can continue to offer the course and programs at the level and with the quality we treasure. Tuition went up and it will take students longer to graduate. These are basic facts.

So at this juncture we are in limbo. We do not know to what extent the College of Liberal Arts will be funded. We do not know how we are going to staff our courses. Nevertheless, there are good things to report. Enrollment in our courses is at an all time high. The faculty is more productive than ever with books and articles pouring out. Grants are coming in and conferences continue to enliven our intellectual life.

But, as you can see, more than ever we need you. We need your support. We need you to tell the university administration that the Department of Philosophy makes a valuable contribution and how you have benefited from it. We also need your financial support. As public funds dwindle, monies for research support become tighter and tighter. By your contributions to the Virginia Tech Educational Foundation Department of Philosophy account, you provide the means by which, for example, we can send a faculty member or a student to a library to do research or to present a paper at a national meeting. Research keeps us in the public eye and raises the profile of Virginia Tech. Our Graduate program is once again ranked 2nd in the national out of 78 masters program. The quality of our faculty and students continues to improve and to be recognized. With your help we can do more.

Please write and let me know how you are doing. Our students and our alumni, current travails notwithstanding, remind us why we are here and why we do what we love and why it is valuable.

Best wishes,
joe

(jcpitt@vt.edu)

■

publications this year will be an essay dealing with Marjorie Grene's philosophy of biology in the Library of Living Philosophers volume on Marjorie Grene. Professor Grene, now in her 90s, is still very active in the department; this volume is the first in this prestigious series to honor and probe into the work of a woman! In addition, Burian has a paper forthcoming in an issue of Perspectives on Science on the use of case studies in the philosophy of science and a pair of entries co-authored with Prof. Scott Gilbert (Swarthmore College) in a volume of Keywords in Evolutionary Developmental Biology, forthcoming from Harvard University Press. Prof. Burian is teaching Philosophy of Science in the Department this fall, and he and Prof. Barbara Reeves are pioneering the first capstone seminar course for doctoral students in Virginia Tech's Science and Technology Studies program. This course meets simultaneously in Blacksburg and Falls Church via a video link.

William FitzPatrick

William FitzPatrick works in moral philosophy, on topics ranging from ethical issues surrounding human embryonic stem cell research to questions about the foundations of ethics and the nature of normativity. He has just completed a paper in collaboration with Lee Zwanziger, Director of Research on the staff of the President's Council on Bioethics in Washington, D.C., on ethical problems pertaining to defense against biological and chemical warfare. Other papers now under review take up the debate between realists and constructivists in ethical theory—focusing on a critique of Korsgaard's influential neo-Kantian constructivism—as well as questions about the non-instrumental value of nature, and questions about whether those who accept the use of surplus embryos from IVF clinics for stem cell research should equally accept the creation of embryos for that purpose, through cloning. He has also recently appeared on a nationally syndicated radio talk show, "Viewpoints," discussing ethical issues in current affairs.

Valerie Hardcastle

is the current Director of the Science and Technology Studies (STS) program. She is also one of the senior project members for a 5-year million dollar grant from the McDonnell foundation for work in "neurophilosophy"—using brain studies to help answer traditional questions in the philosophy of mind. (This is the largest grant ever given in the humanities.) Her particular focus will be on the structure of neuroscientific theories and how they differ from theories in other branches of science, and how this should affect what we do with data in neuroscience. Val has just completed a book entitled *Constructing Selves* (MIT Press) and is nearing completion on a co-authored book with Eric Dietrich (who was a visiting professor for the department last spring) on the surprising relationship between the problem of explaining consciousness and other problems in metaphysics.

Mark Gifford

Mark Gifford's research was put on hold due to an

EVENTS (past, present, future)

NEH Summer Seminars

In addition to the spring conferences, the department has also recently sponsored Summer Seminars for faculty from other institutions, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities:

In 1999, Deborah Mayo directed a six week seminar on "Philosophy of Experimental Inference: Induction, Reliability and Error," aimed at examining and assessing competing traditions in the philosophy of con-firmation and experimental inference. The focus was on how well accounts from each tradition help to solve philosophical problems about object-ivity and induction, and progress and rationality in science.

This past summer, Roger Ariew directed-with Dan Garber-a month long seminar on "Descartes and his Contemporaries: Scholastics and Novatores." The focus was on Descartes' philosophy in the context of seventeenth-century culture, and on debates about Cartesianism among three late seventeenth-century philosophers: the skeptic Pierre-Daniel Huet, the Cartesian Pierre-Sylvain Regis, and the scholastic Jean Duhamel.

Our annual spring conference will take place from April 4-6, 2003, and is being organized by Bill FitzPatrick. The title of the conference, sponsored by the Matchette Foundation, is: "Philosophical Explanations of Moral Status: Perspectives on the Nature and Source of Human Value." Papers will be presented by Anne Margaret Baxley, Stephen Darwall (University of Michigan), Bill FitzPatrick, Thomas Hill (Chapel Hill), Sarah Williams Holtman (Bill Williams' daughter, from the University of Minnesota), James Rachels (University of Alabama), Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Chapel Hill), and possibly one or two others. Authors will address questions about the philosophical explanation of the nature of human rights, or of our status as ends-in-ourselves, which lies at the heart of much of moral philosophy, as well as questions about our moral status in comparison to that of other animals. For information about the conference, please contact Bill FitzPatrick at: william.fitzpatrick@vt.edu or logon to the department webpage, under "Events."

Next summer, Roger Ariew will direct-again with Dan Garber-a month long seminar on "Leibniz and His Contemporaries," an examination of G. W. Leibniz's philosophy in the context of late seventeenth-century culture, that is, the universe of Scholastics, Hobbesians, Spinozists, Cartesians, Lockeans, Newtonians. According to Ariew and Garber, by understanding Leibniz in this way we gain us an entry into the broader currents of European thought in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries on the threshold of the Enlightenment.

We have already begun planning our annual conference for Spring 2004, which will be on that great American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, and his contributions in both metaphysics (his extreme scholastic realism, his scientific metaphysics, his pragmatism) and in science (the problem of induction as error-correcting) and some possible applications of his theory (in economics, engineering, cryptanalysis).

unexpected but very serious illness which placed him on medical leave for the spring semester. He wants everyone to know that he is doing much better now, is back at teaching, and continues to work on his earth-shattering studies of ancient philosophy. Stay tuned.

Marjorie Grene

Marjorie Grene has just returned from Paris, where she gave the opening plenary lecture at an International Congress on the History and Philosophy of Science. The talk was called "Toward an Ecologico-Historical Philosophy of Science," and is a revision of the final chapter of a book she just finished writing, with David Depew of the University of Iowa for a Cambridge series on "the evolution of modern philosophy." The volume deals with the history of the philosophy of biology; it should be published next year. The volume on her work in the Library of Living Philosophers series should be out this month (with Open Court). It includes an intellectual autobiography, 23 criticisms of her work and her replies to them, and a bibliography of her work. Her translation of Herve le Guyader's GEOFFROY SAINT-HILAIRE; UN NATURALISTE VISIONNAIRE is to be published by the University of Chicago Press and should be out next year. It includes the text of the famous debate between Cuvier and Geoffroy in 1830 and other relevant documents, none of which have been previously published. She's also published a paper called "Darwin, Cuvier and Geoffroy: Comments and Questions" in HIST.PHIL. LIFE SCI 23 (2001), 187-221. This is revised version of a lecture she gave at the Max Planck Institut for Wissenschaftsgeschichte last year.

Jim Klagge

Jim Klagge is entering his eighth year on the Montgomery County School Board. He will then step down. But before he does, he will give a lecture in April, 2003, to the National School Board Association Conference in San Francisco, on Ethics in School Board Decision-Making. In January, 2003, Rowman & Littlefield will publish "Ludwig Wittgenstein: Public and Private Occasions," a new book of primary material from Wittgenstein, co-edited with Alfred Nordmann. It includes newly translated diaries and letters, and newly published lectures. Jim is training for his fourth marathon, to be run in Richmond, on November 9, 2002. He's shooting for 3:45.

Deborah Mayo

was recently a guest on "No Dogs or Philosophers Allowed", a philosophy television show directed to college and high school students. The focus of the 4-person forum was on methods of science. NDOPA airs on public television stations and the PhilosophyChannel, a new web-based source for philosophical media, and is shown at numerous universities and high schools. In the past year Deborah has published several articles on error statistics and theory testing, and given numerous talks, particularly on the topic of practical philosophy of science. These include a presentation to NASA, at the Langley Research Center, on "Severe Tests: Concepts

and Some Applications," and a seminar (with Arist Spanos, from Tech's Economics Department) at the National Security Agency on "Peircean Induction and a Self-Correcting Methodology". The goal of the NSA project is to develop a new system for finding patterns in data and achieving reliable inductive inference, based on C.S. Peirce's logic. Deborah has also been elected the Second Vice President of the Division of Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science of the International Union of History and Philosophy of Science IUHPS/DLMPS.

Rosa Mayorga

Rosa Mayorga successfully defended her dissertation, titled "On Universals: The Scholastic Realism of John Duns Scotus and Charles Sanders Peirce," at the University of Miami in November. She is organizing, along with Deborah Mayo and Joe Pitt, the 2004 Spring Conference, "Peirce-pectives' on Metaphysics and the Sciences." She will be submitting her dissertation work for publication as well as teaching a new class, Philosophy of Religion, in the spring.

Harlan Miller

Harlan Miller retired this year. However, he will still be teaching a course or two every now and then.

Laura Perini

Laura Perini is particularly interested in the use of visual representations in science. Her research is focused on answering questions about the nature of figures as representations and the epistemic roles they play in scientific research. She defended her dissertation in December, and is currently submitting work from her thesis research for publication. During the summer she participated in an NEH Institute: "Art, Mind and Cognitive Science". This experience will provide the groundwork for research comparing pictures in science and art. Laura is also very interested in

Many Thanks for Your Donations:

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.

ALUMNI UPDATE

Congratulations to **David Bruzina** (currently a Ph.D. candidate in English at Ohio University) and **Jesse Ehrnet** (currently working as a computer expert in Research Park associated with VT), for completing their theses.

Rhiannon Farmer is currently teaching private school.

Morgan Horowitz was accepted with partial funding, CCNY, but deferred for this semester. He plans to apply again to a PhD program next year.

Jacob Kelin is currently teaching private school.

Chris Mayer is currently teaching at West Point.

Lee Mayo was accepted, with full funding at Notre Dame.

Destanie McAllister was accepted, with full funding at UCSD.

Maria Rentetzi is a Ph.D. student in STS at VT.

Michael Sevel was accepted into the Philosophy program at the University of Texas Austin, where he is working on a Ph.D. in (classical Greek) philosophy.

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
229 Major Williams Hall; Blacksburg, VA 24061-0126

NON-PROFIT ORG.
BULK MAILING
US POSTAGE PAID
BLACKSBURG, VA 24060
PERMIT NO. 28

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED