Happy New Year 2008!

This second issue of the Philosophy Newsletter focuses on alumni; please see the News From Our Alumni on page 3, plus the great photo three of our grads that follows this column.

Meet the Philosophy Department Professors who introduce themselves on page 2—all except our newest member, Dr. Brian D. Huss, whom I subjected to an interview instead of forcing him to write about himself; Dr. Huss authors our first front-page Philosophers’ Corner puzzle, which we hope will be a standard feature of future Newsletter issues.

Our department is fortunate and very pleased to be able to host the SUNY Potsdam NEH Distinguished Visiting Professor this year, Dr. Mark McPherran. See page 4 for a brief account of his bona fides. A brief listing of the Fall 2007 activities hosted by The Philosophy Forum also appears on page 4.

Our philosophy majors and minors are movers and shakers on and off campus! For example, major Vita Ayala was one of 15 students accepted for the 2007 Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. This program introduces “undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds to the various areas of specialization” (Institute poster) in philosophy, to top philosophers in a variety of fields, and to what graduate studies in philosophy is all about. Congratulations, Vita!


What Has Gone Wrong Here?

The Argument (concerning the 1980 U. S. Presidential Election):

Premise 1: If a Republican will win the election, then if Reagan does not win, Anderson will win. (This is true because Reagan and Anderson are the only two Republicans running for president.)

Premise 2: A Republican will win the election. (This is true because Reagan will win the election.)

Conclusion: Thus, if Reagan does not win the election, then Anderson will win. (This is false because, if Reagan doesn't win, Carter will.)

Symbolization of The Argument:

P1 R → (~G → A)
P2 R
C ~G → A

This argument form is called modus ponens and it is a valid form of argument. (The definition of a valid argument form is that, if all its premises are true, then its conclusion must be true; it is impossible for a valid argument form to have all true premises and a false conclusion. The definition of an invalid argument, on the other hand, is that its form is such that it is possible for all its premises to be true and its conclusion false.)

The Argument, however, seems to demonstrate that modus ponens is an invalid argument form!

Premise 1: If there is an instance of modus ponens with all true premises and a false conclusion, then modus ponens is an invalid argument form.

Premise 2: The Argument is an instance of modus ponens with all true premises and a false conclusion.

Conclusion: Modus ponens is an invalid argument form.

What Has Gone Wrong Here?

Send your explanation to hussbd@potsdam.edu and we'll print the best ones in the next issue!
Meet the Philosophy Department Professors

Dr. David C. K. Curry
After 17 years I still love teaching, Forum activities and the annual trip to an undergraduate conference with students. I joyfully gave up chairing the department 4 years ago; yet still find myself in more meetings than is either necessary or desirable. I will be on sabbatical in the spring of 2008, plugging away on yet another vision for a book laying out Plato's theory of Forms, now conceived as a book for a general, non-professional audience. My most recent publication is a piece in Ideas That Work In College Teaching, (ed. R. Badger, SUNY Press) entitled "Blinded by the Light: A Reflection on the Teaching of Introductory Courses in Philosophy".

I would be happy to share this piece in e-format with anyone who politely requests it, thereby letting you in on what I was really trying to do to you in that introductory class. <currydc@potsdam.edu>

Dr. Joseph J. DiGiovanna
To all those who have been through the DiGiovanna Mill and to all who managed to escape: Greetings!

I continue to teach some of the courses I have taught for a long time: Intro, Aesthetics, Medieval, to name a few and in recent years I have added Metaphor and a course on the philosophy of Laughter and Humor. I am always pleased to hear from any Alumni at digiovvj@potsdam.edu.

Dr. Judith A. Little
After earning a B.A. while working full-time as a Personnel Director, I quit my job in 1989 and began graduate study in philosophy. Why philosophy? Being a philosopher gives me the license to question the basic assumptions of all disciplines, even those of philosophy! I joined the department in 1994, became chair in 2004, and am happiest while designing philosophy courses, preparing to teach philosophy, and being in the classroom. I also enjoy reading philosophical science fiction. Prometheus Books just published my anthology, Feminist Philosophy and Science Fiction: Utopias and Dystopias.

Dr. Galen K. Fletcher
Having earned the Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, I began teaching philosophy of religion, ethics, comparative religion, and critical thinking at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville in 1970. I chaired the department (19 members!) from 1981-1987, and served as Associate Provost from 1989-1994, before coming to Potsdam in 1994 as Dean of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Philosophy. I have published in American Philosophical Quarterly and The Journal of Politics, among other places, on topics including mysticism, ethics, philosophy of science, and philosophy of religion.

Dr. Phil Tartaglia
After military service and rather starred for intellectual activity, I jumped into philosophy, not prejudiced against any part of it, and I soon fell thoroughly in love with it. Whatever area I studied, I studied sympathetically and refrained from committing myself to any philosophic perspective or school of thought. After many courses, much reading and study, I slowly became conscious of where my heart lay in philosophy; I slowly became aware of where my unconscious and semiconscious processing was leading me. This was naturalism, nominalism, and a sophisticated pragmatism. Thereafter, I read, argued, and wrote from this perspective, though always keeping an open mind.

I believe that much of what a philosopher does in his maturity is to articulate more explicitly and clearly what he has already put together in an inchoate way on a semiconscious level. A philosopher who does not take sides, one who values all positions, one who embraces all schools of thought, cannot be a good philosopher. On the other hand, a premature committal to a school of thought is nothing but dogmatism, and this is even worse than noncommittal.

Special Interview with Dr. Brian D. Huss

Why did you choose to study philosophy? In my first year of college, I took Intro to Philosophy and was amazed to discover that people gave arguments for things. For example, they actually gave arguments for the existence of God!

Describe your philosophical interests. Epistemology, the ethics of belief, argument, the standards by which we do philosophy.

What do you hope to accomplish in the classroom? To teach students to be able to use, and appreciate using, the analytic methods of philosophy to address problems. I try to accomplish this by choosing philosophical topics that interest most people, even if they haven't thought much about them. If I can get people to begin thinking about these things, then they have to do the philosophy.

Any comments on your first semester here at SUNY Potsdam? I have enjoyed my many philosophical conversations with students and some of my colleagues, and like being where the emphasis is on teaching students and not just operating a clearing-house. (Editor's note: According to The American Heritage Dictionary, 4th ed., a 'clearing-house' is a place where money is exchanged and accounts settled).

What one thing about you is weird or surprising? Unlike most, I am a full-time philosopher, 24/7, at work and at home, because my wife, Dr. Kristen Andrews, is also a philosopher.

Philosophy Students Need Your Help!
Alumni and alumnae who are eager to help support our students' philosophical activities may earmark a contribution for the SUNY Philosophy Department. You can send a check with a note stating that your donation is for the Philosophy Department to SUNY Potsdam College Foundation, Attn: Lisa A. Murphy, 44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY 13676-2294. You also could complete the College Foundation's Online Giving Form on the SUNY Potsdam website at https://secure.potsdam.edu/giving. You can even indicate the specific purpose your gift is to serve; for example, students' undergraduate conference trip expenses, book purchases, or small scholarships. No amount is too small and all contributions will be greatly appreciated by our students (and us professors).
News From Our Alumni

In October, 2006, Sara O'Brien (2006) was named the Education Specialist at the Frederic Remington Art Museum in Ogdensburg, and in January, 2007, began at St. Lawrence University as an Assistant Director for Alumni and Parent Programs for Reunion Planning. She “will help coordinate many of the activities that go on during reunion weekend every year and will interact with SLU Alumni volunteers.” Sara also wed last October and her husband works at SUNY Potsdam.

Charlotte Aldrich (2007) began traveling with her boyfriend and decided to live in Thailand for a year or so on the island of Ko Chang (Elephant Island). She works part time in a Scuba Shop while training to become a dive master, and loves “living on the beach but the island also has untouched rainforest areas and the marine national park is nearby.” Charlotte is "currently trying to see what I would like to venture into next."

Matt Robinson (2004) and his wife live in Troy, NY, where she teaches and he works at the R.P.I. campus as a mail clerk. Matt was working on a state-level political campaign when he dropped by the department for a visit last October and ended up attending Dr. Kristen Andrews’ presentation for The Philosophy Forum that evening. He plans to attend Law School and has submitted applications to Albany, Buffalo, Western New England, and Vermont.

"Hello, philosophy dept.!," writes Keith Kogut (2006), "I'm currently working towards a masters degree in Music Ed, part time, at SUNY Potsdam. I greatly miss taking philosophy courses and I still read philosophical works when time allows." Keith is the High School Band Director of Saranac Lake Central Schools.

S. Evan Kreider (1993) earned an M.L.S. from SUNY Albany, and the M.A. and Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Kansas. Evan is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin—Fox Valley and lives in Appleton, Wisconsin.

Christina Schmidt graduated in 2006 with a B.A. in Music and a minor in Philosophy. (She was inadvertently left off our list of 2005-2006 graduates in the last Newsletter—Sorry, Christina!) She is "currently working on a Masters of Divinity at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry" and writes, "Please share my 'hello' with the department."

In graduate school at Albany, Justin Weil (2001) is now ABD and working on his dissertation in Epistemology. He's teaching his third course entitled World Views, which examines theistic, humanistic, and epistemic worldviews. Justin writes, "I had the great fortune of meeting and having lunch with Alan Goldman. It was quite an honor. I love teaching and can't imagine doing anything else...Please give my best to Dr. Curry and the rest of the department."

Andrew C. White (2006) is currently the Resident Hall Director of Bowman Hall West. It's a pleasure to have him back on campus and we particularly enjoy his dropping by the department every few weeks or so for interesting discussions!

Andrew Marder (2003) and Alexandria Rieke moved to Philadelphia after graduation where he worked on a few political campaigns and for Williams-Sonoma. After Alexandria got her M.A. in English from the University of Pennsylvania, they married in 2004. They both quit their jobs and went to Europe in 2007 when Andrew earned the M.A. in Philosophy at Virginia Tech. Andrew interviewed with Barclays Bank in London, U. K., and began Barclay's two-year graduate training program last August. They plan to stay in London for "at least five years."

When Wynnton Marsalis was performing on campus last October, Karen Martino (1994) stopped by the department—"we had a good visit. Karen teaches dance at the University of Rochester.

Geoffrey Mackey (2000) and Erin Goodwin married in 2002, and their son, Gabriel Allen, was born in August 2005. Since their son's birth, amongst other things, Geoff has worked and taught at the Adult and Continuing Education cohort of Nyack College in Manhattan, served as Administrative Coordinator of Extension Ministries for Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Pennsylvania. Currently, he is the Academic Resources Coordinator in the School of Adult & Distance Education at Nyack College, and has applied for the Master of Arts in Teaching program at SUNY New Paltz.

Karen (Regan) Satterlee (1984) lives in Schenectady and is a paralegal with Sven R. Paul, Esq. She is "so happy to see the Philosophy Forum going off campus for conferences. Prof. Joe DiGiovanna has well earned the Distinguished Professor accolade. He was like a 2nd advisor to me by guiding & mentoring me. My four years at Potsdam did so much to open my mind. It taught me how to learn." Thanks, Karen.

After graduation, Jake Feldman (2006) traveled to Washington and "bought a 2-month Greyhound bus pass and journeyed solo around the country. I stayed out in Washington for about 7 months in all" before moving back to New York. Jake is submitting applications to the University of Colorado, Cornell University, and Syracuse University for graduate study in philosophy.

After eight years as a Massage Therapist, Julia (Henery) Maum (1997) begins the Childhood Education program at LeMoyne College in Syracuse this semester. She, husband Darren (1997), and two-year-old Sophia, who is "precious, brilliant, adorable and a handful 😊" live in Marietta, where Darren organically farms three seasons of the year. Julia also enjoys teaching "tribal fusion style" belly dancing, which is "a big stress-reliever... and way too much fun!"
We are very excited to have Dr. McPherran in the department for the spring semester! Professor McPherran earned the Ph.D. in philosophy from UC—Santa Barbara and is currently on leave from chairing the Philosophy Department of Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, BC, Canada. As a scholar in Ancient Philosophy with many publications, his current research focuses on Socrates and Plato. He is teaching two courses for the department, on Socrates and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy, and will present three papers.

Please join us in welcoming Dr. McPherran to SUNY Potsdam!

The Philosophy Forum
Fall Semester 2007

- Viewing and discussion of the film, *The Fountain*
- Fall Semester Mixer
- Reception celebrating Dr. DiGiovanna’s appointment as SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor
- Student Andrew Brink’s presentation: Watching without Seeing
- Dr. Kristen Andrews, York University, "Animals as Moral Agents?: Studies in Natural Moral Psychology"
- Dr. Tom Gerstenberger (Psychology), "Change Blindness"
- Student Matt LaVine paper, "Acting and Saying: A resuscitation of the Performative/Constative Distinction"
- Drs. Libbie Freed (History) and Jennifer Seely (Politics) presentation: "Aren’t You the Wrong Color To Study That? Race and Culture in the Study of Africa"
- Viewing and discussion of the documentary film by Arwen Curry and Cerissa Tanner, *Stuffed*; its East Coast Premier
- Dr. Brian Huss (Philosophy), "How To Argue: A Pragmatic Account of Critical Discourse"
- Dr. Steve Stannish (History), "Demeter and Persephone in Sicily"