Greetings from the Department Head

On August 1st, less than twenty-four hours after returning to Oklahoma from a two-month trip to Barcelona, I began my tenure as the new Head of the Department of Philosophy at Oklahoma State University. Although I’ve been a faculty member in the department of philosophy for the past sixteen years, I had little idea as to what the job of Department Head would entail or how taxing it would be. Fortunately, and not unexpectedly, I’ve been the recipient of the unwavering support of our faculty, staff, students and alumni. This support has been a tremendous help.

Over the course of the last few years, philosophy faculty members have been discussing how to respond to the new challenges that confront our department in this rapidly changing world. We’ve made a number of important changes, but at the same time, we strive to preserve the supportive, collegial nature that many of us identify with the department of philosophy.

One of the more significant changes we’ve made is that we’ve begun to expand our presence in the world of online teaching. Although most of our faculty members believe that there is no substitute for traditional classes, in which students and instructors interact with each other in real time and face-to-face, we recognize that online education is a reality. Accordingly, during the past few years, several of our faculty have investigated how to best conduct online classes, and the department now offers an assortment of interesting and important online classes, including: Philosophy of Race; Philosophy of Sport; Sex, Love and Gender; Social Media Today; Logic & Critical Thinking; and Philosophies of Life. While this is a good start, we recently formed a committee, the charge of which is, among other things, to determine how to best meet the needs of students and others interested in online learning. Check out our website (philosophy.okstate.edu) or contact the philosophy department if you would like to find out more about our online offerings, and if we don’t offer a class in which you are interested, drop us line and tell us about your interests. Your input helps us determine future online offerings.

We also recognize that student life is changing. Students seem to be busier than ever. That said, many of our faculty members fondly remember being students and spending hours talking with our fellow students (and sometimes faculty) about the philosophical issues we were studying in our classes, current events and many other topics. We view this as an important part of our educations. Consequently, in the fall semester, the department opened the Philosophy Student Lounge, located amongst faculty and graduate student offices on the second floor in Murray Hall. This lounge is open to all students, and this semester we began scheduling regular events, including pizza and philosophy lunches and donut breakfasts. Other planned events include game nights and movie nights. I look forward to the day that I have to walk down the hall and close the door to the lounge because the students’ heated discussions are distracting those of us who occupy nearby offices.
Greetings from the Dept. Head cont.

Our faculty is also changing. During the past two years, we’ve hired three new assistant professors. This year we have welcomed another two new assistant professors, and we expect to hire an additional assistant professor next year. I am confident that this new blood will reinvigorate our department and help us understand and respond to the needs of students who grew up in the information age. New faculty members have already helped us to take a new look at how we represent ourselves online and in the world of social media. We recently began a complete redesign of our website and opened an OSU Philosophy Twitter account (@osuphilo). In addition, we’ve beefed up our presence on Facebook (www.facebook.com/PhilDept).

As my predecessor, Doren Recker, wrote in last year’s newsletter, the department is committed to strengthening and expanding the Ethics Center. This year we introduced an Ethics Center Speaker Series. In September the Speaker Series hosted a panel discussion addressing the events that took place in Ferguson, Missouri earlier in the year. The panel included two police officers, a historian, a political scientist and a philosopher. The auditorium in Murray Hall was filled to capacity. The Ethics Center continues to schedule monthly speakers, and the schedule can be found on the Philosophy website.

For several years I’ve fantasized about the Ethics Center sponsoring and training Ethics Bowl teams. The Ethics Bowl is a national competition, which is similar to debate, in which teams are provided fact patterns describing ethically challenging cases. Several weeks after receiving fact patterns, two teams face-off and provide an ethical analysis of the cases. The teams then respond to questions from judges and members of the opposing team. Earlier in the year, the Ethics Center sponsored and helped train two Ethics Bowl teams. The teams competed in Oklahoma City and in San Antonio, Texas, at the annual Ethics Bowl competition sponsored by the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics. Finally, the Ethics Center recently completed work on a National Science Foundation grant and is working on a proposal for a National Institutes of Health grant, focusing on issues related to the informed consent component of randomized clinical trials.

In closing, I would like to thank our alumni and friends, as many of the changes taking place in the Department of Philosophy would not be possible without your support.

Shalom.
Undergrad Advising cont.

undergraduate. Our degree allows between 12 and 18 upper-division hours in any subject or program, and offers 14 hours of general electives. This means that, without adding any hours to the degree requirements, a student can complete 26 – 32 hours of concentration in a second area! This easily accommodates a minor or the lion’s share of many major requirements. Naturally if a student would like to look at how best to incorporate our degree requirements into their plan, I will be happy to sit down with them. Ask them to call (405) 744-5658 or to e-mail anthony.valentine@okstate.edu for an appointment.

Outstanding Undergraduates

Award Winners

Every year the Philosophy Department faculty select and outstanding Junior and Senior for recognition. The Department is proud to announce this year’s award recipients.

Ryan Wellington, 2015 Outstanding Senior

Brenna Baer, 2015 Outstanding Junior

Ryan and Brenna will be honored for their achievements at the department’s annual year-end meeting and awards ceremony, April 20th at 5pm.

Fall 2014 Essay Contest

Last fall the Philosophy Department sponsored its first Undergraduate Philosophy Student Essay Contest. All students enrolled in a Philosophy class were eligible to participate. The topic: “Is morality a matter of opinion or is it a matter of knowledge?” The Department offered a cash prize of $100, and the essays were judged by faculty. The winner was Cordelle Elsener. Congratulations, Cordelle!
Dr. Megan Burke
Dr. Megan Burke is a new hire from the University of Oregon who will become a faculty member at OSU next Fall. She specializes in feminist philosophy and twentieth century continental philosophy, and her current research examines how sexual violence structures conceptions and experiences of gender and sexuality. Dr. Burke will have teaching and research responsibilities in the program of Gender and Women’s Studies.

Dr. Rebecca Bensen Cain
Dr. Bensen Cain is one of several co-editors for the new interdisciplinary journal in applied philosophy, Architecture Philosophy, which has its home base at OSU. The first issue came out Spring 2014. Dr. Bensen Cain is collaborating with Dr. Spector on writing a panel proposal on special topics in philosophy and architecture for the American Society of Aesthetics conference in Fall 2015. She serves as an Advisory Board member for the OSU Museum of Art, Postal Plaza Gallery. Dr. Bensen Cain’s research in aesthetics is the study of emergent or expressive qualities in landscape paintings and recent attempts to characterize and evaluate them for their aesthetic importance to our appreciation of nature. Her concern in teaching aesthetics is how to broaden our aesthetic range of feelings in response to nature and to art. She is concerned with the visual pleasures that landscape painting offers and especially those expressionist styles which bring about the greater sense of mood as a whole blend of elements which provide other ways to appreciate nature in relation to us, as artists of life.

Dr. James Cain
This year Dr. Cain has taught courses in medieval philosophy, philosophy of religion, logic, and philosophy of language. He gave presentations at the Central and the Pacific Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association. A paper he wrote on free will was published and another was accepted and is forthcoming.

Dr. Mary Gwin
Dr. Gwin presented her paper, “A Worthy Conception of Sport” at the Central APA in 2014, and this paper is currently under review at The Journal of the Philosophy of Sport. She presented another paper, “Personal Worth and Sport” at the New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society meeting in April 2014 at the University of Texas, El Paso. In November 2014, she presented comments on a paper at the Southwest Philosophical Society meeting, and these comments will be published in the upcoming issue of the Southwest Philosophy review. In March, Dr. Gwin presented her paper, “Chemical Kinds: Modal Conventionalists Can’t Have Their Cake and Eat it Too” at the New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society. At the meeting she was elected Treasurer of the society. Her current writing projects include a paper on Descartes and virtue epistemology (with Doren Recker) and a paper on teaching critical thinking skills as inclusive philosophy pedagogy. Additionally, she has attended two workshops—one on applying for NSF grants and another on pedagogy.

Dr. Marty Heitz
Dr. Heitz continues to teach Asian Philosophy each semester and especially enjoys introducing students to non-dualistic philosophies. Having had the opportunity to teach Indian Philosophy in the spring of 2014 he is now leading a graduate seminar in East-West Comparative Philosophy, focusing on the later writings of Martin Heidegger in comparison with the works of the Daoist philosophers Laozi and Zhuangzi. He was nominated and selected to be the recipient of the Office of Fraternity & Sorority Affairs Outstanding Faculty Award of the College of Arts & Sciences for the 2014-2015 academic year. As a co-editor of a forthcoming book titled Practical Wisdom in the Age of Technology, Dr. Heitz is contributing a chapter on the predominant phenomenon of gazing at various electronic screens, entitled “The Screening of Reality: A Phenomenological Perspective on the Computer Screen.” He is also currently working to establish an interdisciplinary Center for Mindful Inquiry devoted to both practicing various techniques of mindfulness as well as teaching methods of introducing mindful inquiry into the classroom. While still in the initial stages, he is excited by the interest in and support of this venture and hopes that it will be an avenue toward the cultivation of embodied wisdom.

Dr. Justin Horn
Dr. Horn is interested in understanding exactly what it is we are doing when we make moral judgments and moral claims. His current research explores whether the phenomenon of moral disagreement has implications for moral semantics. His paper, “Evolution and the Epistemological Challenge to Moral Realism,” will appear in the forthcoming Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics, edited by Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards.

Dr. Apple Igrek
Dr. Apple Igrek’s research is currently focused on developing the concept of ‘entropic affirmation’ in conjunction with a new methodology that goes by the name of ‘thanato-vitalism’. The controversial premise behind this concept and method is that all cultural values equally affirm the meaningless of death. Using this as a starting point, the challenge of this method is to develop a moral theory that provides us with an honest account of why we have obligations even though all of those obligations are necessarily infused with their own purposelessness. The first chapter of Dr. Igrek’s book in progress will be presented at the 10th Annual Meeting of the Comparative and Continental Philosophy Circle this May at the University of Iceland. Past research has been accepted for publication in 2015 in the Journal of Comparative and Continental Philosophy and the Review Journal of Political Philosophy.

Dr. Brian Kim
Dr. Kim is a graduate from Columbia University by way of California where he was born and raised. He primarily works on issues in decision theory and epistemology. His interest in these two areas are tied together by a pragmatist bent in his philosophy. More specifically,
much of his current research is focused on understanding what knowledge, rational belief, and other epistemic states play in our practical and theoretical decision making. He also has a long-standing interest in philosophical puzzles and have recently completed papers on the preface paradox and the surprise exam paradox.

Dr. Lawrence Pasternack
Pasternack has four pending invited papers, two for Cambridge University Press collections, two for special issues of journals. A third symposium on his recent book is being planned, with invited comments from Allen Wood and Christopher Insole. If he can find the time, he is also hoping to begin writing a book on Kant’s conception of the Highest Good. He recently presented a paper on this topic at the Pacific Division meeting of the North American Kant Society.

Dr. Doren Recker
Doren Recker has developed a class for the new OSUTeach Program sponsored by the colleges of Arts & Sciences and Education to provide better academic training for science teachers. The course is Phil 3743: Patterns in Science, and covers the history of astronomy and physics from Plato to Newton, and the Darwinian Revolution in Biology from the early 19th century to the present. He has also developed a course packet with primary and secondary materials for both of these topics. In research, he submitted a paper on Descartes’s ontological argument to History of Philosophy Quarterly in October (which is still under review), and completed a book review for the National Center for Science Education Newsletter on a new festschrift dedicated to Michael Ruse. He is also working on a paper on science and religion, a paper on Descarts’s science, and beginning to plan a book on Creation/Evolution.

Dr. Eric Reitan
In 2014, after two years of heavy involvement with organizing the annual conferences of the Central States Philosophical Society (as Vice President and then as President), Eric Reitan returned his attention to writing. In April, his article, “A Deontological Theodicy? Swinburne’s Lapse and the Problem of Moral Evil,” was published in Faith and Philosophy. In May, his essay “Slumber Parties” (a personal essays on living meaningfully in the shadow of death) won first place in the essay competition of the Oklahoma Writers’ Federation annual writing competition. And in September, Dr. Reitan received the 2014 Outstanding Writer Award at the annual Rose State Writing Conference.

He has also been busy pursuing several new research projects. One, an essay on the ethics of abortion, is currently under consideration with the journal Bioethics. He has two other current projects on the topic of same-sex marriage: one assessing the so-called slippery-slope argument (which he presented to a standing-room only audience at a Friends of the Forms event in the spring), the other critically assessing versions of an argument—put forward by Francis Beckwith and others—holding that the liberal ideal of state neutrality with respect to comprehensive conceptions of the good life actually requires that the state not extend marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Dr. Shannon Spaulding
Dr. Spaulding’s research focuses on social cognition and imagination. Recently she published papers in Pacific Philosophical Quarterly, “Handbook of Embodied Cognition” (Routledge Press), and “Knowledge Through Imagination” (Oxford University Press). Dr. Spaulding has several papers in progress, including papers on the perception of mental states, emotions, and phenomenology. This summer she gave talks at University of Dusseldorf, Ruhr University Bochum, Berlin School of Mind and Brain, Cambridge University (at the Midsummer Philosophy Workshop), Oxford University, and University of London (at the Instituting Minds Conference). In the Spring, she is giving talks at Glasgow University (Scotland), University of Stirling (Scotland), Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology meeting in New Orleans, University of Kansas, and the Society for Philosophy and Psychology meeting in Durham, NC.

Dr. Timothy Weidel
Dr. Weidel taught a graduate seminar in Ethics and Global Justice in the Fall semester, and is teaching an upper-division course on Marxism and Critical Theory in the Spring. He recently presented his paper “Philanthropy, Cosmopolitanism, and the Benefits of Giving Directly” at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Philadelphia in December 2014, and at the Association of Practical and Professional Ethics meeting in Costa Mesa, CA in February 2015.
Ethics Center

The Philosophy Department’s Ethics Center has had an active year. The 2014-2015 speaker series, “Critical Conversations,” co-sponsored with the Office of Multicultural Affairs and spearheaded by the efforts of Lawrence Ware, has hosted panel discussions and individual presentations addressing important contemporary events and issues, especially insofar as they call attention to matters of race and social justice. The series kicked off on Sept. 2, 2014 with “Race, the Police, and Civil Disobedience in Ferguson, Missouri,” a well-attended provocative panel discussion.

Members of the Ethics Center have also been leading efforts to bring to OSU a “global village” modeled on the one run by Heifer International. A global village is an experiential learning center in which the living conditions of poor peoples around the world are recreated. Groups can participate in overnight learning exercises which challenge them to think about issues of global wealth distribution, sustainable technologies, and the daily challenges of those with limited resources. While a global village at OSU is still in its early stages, there is growing institutional support for the idea as well as the foundation for a solid partnership with at least two nonprofit organizations that run global villages: Heifer International and Habitat for Humanity.

Lawrence Ware
Lecturer and Diversity Coordinator

Lawrence Ware is the new Diversity Coordinator for the philosophy department. He has given over a dozen invited talks during the Spring 2015 semester for events commemorating Martin Luther King Day and Black History Month at universities around the country. He has also organized the Critical Conversations events at OSU through the Ethics Center and Office of Multicultural Affairs. In March he was a guest on the popular philosophy podcast The Partially Examined Life where he discussed Paul Ricoeur. In April, he will give a public talk discussing white normativity and white standards of civility at Wayne State University. In May, he will present a paper discussing the role of implicit bias in the deaths of unarmed black men at the hands of police and vigilantes at the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE).

Critical Conversations

“Race, the Police, and Civil Disobedience in Ferguson, MO” 9/2/2014

“Women of Color and White Standards of Beauty” 10/30/2014


“We Shall Overcome: The Role of the Black Church and Black Theological Reflection on the Civil Rights Movement” 2/10/2015

“Islamophobia in Stillwater: On Screen and in Schools” 2/23/2015

“Selma: 50 Years Later” 3/11/2015

“Acceptable Racism? Renaming OSU’s Murray Hall” 4/7/2015

“Race, Masculinity, and Identity” 4/23/2015
An interdisciplinary symposium on topics in Philosophy and Architecture, hosted by the OSU Philosophy Department and Architecture Department at the Dole Reed Center in Taos, New Mexico. This workshop is organized by our very own Dr. Rebecca Bensen Cain, with Dr. Tom Spector in the Architecture Department. For additional information, please visit http://isparchitecture.com/.
Friends of the Forms

Friends of the Forms, our student philosophy club, was formed in 1975 by Dr. Edward Lawry, who retired from the department in 2006. The organization arose from students interested in extra-curricular philosophical discussions. The name alludes to Plato's Sophist. The group schedules bi-weekly talks and discussions by on campus faculty from a wide variety of Colleges and Departments. Every Spring semester, they host a special "Philosopher-in-Residence" program. We invite a philosopher of national reputation to come for three days, give two lecturers, and meet informally with students.

2014-2015 Officers
Brittney Stone, President
Francisco Lozano, Secretary-Treasurer
Brian Deer, Faculty Advisor

40th Annual Philosopher in Residence

This year’s Philosopher in Residence event was a great success. Friends of the Forms hosted Sherri Irvin, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of Graduate Admissions at The University of Oklahoma. Dr. Irvin received her Ph.D from Princeton and specializes in aesthetics and the philosophy of art. She serves on the editorial boards of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Philosophy Compass. Dr. Irvin gave two very well received public lecturers during her visit.

Icons of False Hope? The Role of Images in Thinking about Racial Justice
February 24th, 2015

Abstract: I assess two claims that have been made about images and their connection to racial justice, specifically in the context of racialized police violence. First, I assess the claim that a specific image, that of a hug shared by a 12-year-old African-American boy and a white police officer, is an "icon of hope." I consider what it means to say of an image that it is an icon of hope, and I conclude, somewhat paradoxically, that if this image is such an icon, that is reason for us to be less hopeful that we are on the path to justice rather than more. Second, I assess the claim that moving images documenting police violence are a source of hope that unjustified police violence may finally be effectively addressed, thereby securing justice. I offer reasons to be skeptical about such hope, and I ground this skepticism in an aesthetic analysis of how these images function for and are used by viewers.

Norms and the Ontology of Contemporary Art
February 25th, 2015

Abstract: Traditional views about the nature of visual artworks have suggested that they are identical to or constituted by physical objects. However, this sort of account doesn’t work for contemporary artworks that are physically variable, either because the physical objects the artist made can be reconfigured or because the physical objects are partially or completely replaceable. I suggest that we must see many contemporary artworks as essentially normative, not just physical. I will discuss the different kinds of norms that are relevant to contemporary artworks and how these norms should affect our views about art interpretation and ontology.
Brian Deer
Friends of the Forms Faculty Advisor, Lecturer, and Undergraduate Liaison

Over the last year Brian Deer has been teaching Classics, Asian philosophy and classes on death and dying. Within the department, Mr. Deer has also been working as the Philosophy department’s undergraduate Liaison, in this position he has been coordinating the department’s activities such as the Friends of the Forms annual events and opening the new Philosophy Student Lounge. Extending his research beyond the classroom, he is currently engaged in community-based mindfulness practice with the state of Oklahoma’s Department of Corrections.

Visit our Events page to watch recorded lecturers online! philosophy.okstate.edu/events/events

Friends of the Forms talks

The End of Privacy
Eric Chan-Tin, OSU Computer Science Dept. 11/13/2014

Known Unknowns: New Frontiers in Terrorism Research
Stephen Nemeth, OSU Political Science Dept. 11/19/2014

Oklahoma Water Issues and the Need for Multidisciplinary Solutions
Garey Fox, OSU Biosystems and Ag Engineering Dept. 1/14/2015

How Influence and Leadership Really Work
Andrew Urich, OSU Business College

Relishing Rough Heroes: Moral and Aesthetic Defects in Works of Fiction
Eva Dadlez, UCO Philosophy Dept. 2/11/2015

Medical Ethics: Concussions in Sports
Val Gene Iven, OSU Sports Medicine. 2/19/2015

Minding What Happens: The Compulsive Pacmind (pt. 1 of 2)
Marty Heitz, OSU Philosophy Dept. 3/11/2015

Minding What Happens*: The Meditative Mind (pt. 2 of 2)
Marty Heitz, OSU Philosophy Dept. 3/25/2015

Utopian Realism: The Politics of Simulated Experiences
Mark Silcox, UCO Philosophy Dept. 4/8/2015

Nightmares of the Flesh in Art and Film
Apple Igrek, OSU Philosophy Dept. 4/14/2015
ALUMNI UPDATES

Eric Austin (eric.austin@stillwaterbible.org)
After graduating OSU in 2008 Eric went on to earn his Master of Theology degree in Bible Exposition from Dallas Theological Seminary in 2012. That following October he started at Stillwater Bible Church in Stillwater, OK as college pastor. He is still reading, learning, and teaching. He is married to Heidi and they have a one year old, Eli.

Christopher Caldwell (ccaldwell@vsu.edu)
Dr. Caldwell graduated from OSU in 1996. He recently become Chair of the Department of History and Philosophy at Virginia State University.

Kirk Essary (kirkessary@gmail.com)
Dr. Essary graduated from OSU in Philosophy in 2006. He just finished a PhD in Religion from Florida State University. He has published articles on Erasmus, John Calvin, and Cormac McCarthy, and is currently working at Cambridge University Press in New York.

Adrienne (Moan) Gebhardt
(adriennegebrhardt@gmail.com)
Adrienne graduated in 2006, and is married to Ross Gebhardt. She is working for Michelin as an Industrial Engineer now part-time, and she is a full-time momma to their two girls Lydia (4) and Colette (2).

Kayla Ragan (kayla.ragan@okstate.edu)
Kayla graduated in 2013. She has been working with the Kansas Humane Society since March of 2014.

Aswin Tony Subketkaew (subketkaew@gmail.com)
After OSU, Tony joined Teach For America and taught elementary school for two years in Baltimore. He went on to finish his law degree at Ohio State University and is currently working as a Program Specialist for the Food and Drug Administration in DC as part of the Presidential Management Fellowship program.

Ian McDaniel (ian.k.mcdaniel@gmail.com)
Ian graduated from OSU with an MA in Philosophy in 2008. He is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Kansas. His paper “The Responsibility Objection to Abortion: Rejecting the Notion that the Responsibility Objection Successfully Refutes a Woman’s Right to Choose” was published in Bioethics, April 10th, 2014. This last year he presented papers at the LIPS Conference (“The Responsibility Objection to Abortion”), MSU Grad Conference (“Defining Equity and Adequacy”), and the South Eastern Graduate Philosophy Conference (“Rejecting the Responsibility Objection to Abortion”). He also served as Chairperson on the Conference Organizing Committee for the Great Plains Philosophy Conference 2014 at KU.

Calvin H. Warner (cwarner10@student.gsu.edu)
Calvin Warner, BA 2014, is now studying for an MA in philosophy at Georgia State University, working mainly on issues in meta-ethics and political philosophy. Prior to arriving in Atlanta, Calvin worked for the University of Oklahoma Press as an Assistant Acquisitions Editor.

Donations
If you would like to donate to the OSU Philosophy Department or the Edward G. Lawry Philosophy Student Fund, please visit the OSU Foundation website at http://www.osugiving.com The Edward G. Lawry Philosophy Student Fund was established in conjunction with OSU’s Branding Success Campaign in honor of Ed Lawry, OSU Professor Emeritus, and founder of the Friends of the Forms with the hope that Dr. Lawry’s enthusiastic teaching, research and service will continue to benefit OSU, its students and alumni for many years to come. The funds are used for undergraduate student support, scholarships, conference travel, hosting undergraduate student conference and colloquia, Friends of the Forms support, lectures, receptions, Phi Sigma Tau support and discussion groups.

Please Keep in Touch! We would love to hear from you!
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