Greetings from the Department Head

On the morning of March 15th, I was eating beignets at the Café du Monde in New Orleans, and when I opened the New York Times, I learned that Hilary Putnam, one of America’s most influential philosophers, had died two days earlier. In addition to being known for making important contributions to multiple areas of philosophy, Professor Putnam will be remembered as a provocative philosopher who had the courage to change his mind when presented with evidence demonstrating that his own intellectual or political commitments were wrong. And like his childhood friend, Noam Chomsky, Professor Putnam was not content to spend his life contemplating ideas in the ivory tower. In the 1960s, at Harvard University, Professor Putnam organized student protests against the Vietnam War and actively participated in the Civil Rights movement.

As Head of the Department of Philosophy, I hope our department grooms students to be, like Professor Putnam, both intellectually rigorous and exemplary public/private citizens. I don’t expect our students to become prolific philosophers, although that is possible. Rather, I expect them to learn to question their moral, political and intellectual commitments. Perhaps more important, I hope they develop the courage to regularly examine these commitments and to question whether they live up to them.

Several months ago, during a Republican presidential primary debate, candidate Marco Rubio stated that he didn’t understand why Americans stigmatize vocational education. He then asserted: “Welders make more money than philosophers. We need more welders and less philosophers.” I can only imagine how Professor Putnam would have responded to these comments. When I first heard them, I knew that Senator Rubio was wrong about the comparative earning power of philosophers vis-à-vis welders, a fact pointed out by numerous newspapers and other fact-checking organizations. But this last was not my primary concern. I do not know whether we need more welders and fewer philosophers, and I do believe that vocational education is important. That said I am confident that making money isn’t more important than living an examined life. My current and former students regularly tell me that some of the most important and memorable moments of their educations were discussions that took place in philosophy classes. Significantly, these students tell me that they appreciate that I (and my colleagues) didn’t try to convince them to adopt one point of view or another, but taught them to think for themselves.

As this academic year winds down, I want thank our alumni for helping the philosophy department carry out
Undergraduate Advising
Anthony Valentine

Over the last year Philosophy has enjoyed steady undergraduate interest. Department faculty continue successfully to visit introductory classes, urging interested and undecided students to consider the value of a minor or major in philosophy. Recruitment is only one area of concern for the department, however. Of late some time has been spent looking at issues that impact retention and graduation for our undergraduate majors. Understandably, for many majors the question of employability, that is, of the practicality of a philosophy degree, is a central concern.

For many decades majoring in the humanities or liberal arts—and philosophy in particular, if cartoons in the New Yorker are given even a cursory glance—has been the focus of some head-scratching, or even mockery. Today’s undergraduates are inundated with handwringing about the changing job market and its challenges for university graduates, as well as with time-honored haranguing about liberal arts graduates and their futures as fry cooks.

In an effort to provide some detailed and practical guidance for majors, the department recently offered a session in cooperation with Arts and Sciences Career Services. The event was well-attended, with half a dozen undergraduates...
Outstanding Undergraduates

Kristin Mikeska, 2016 Outstanding Senior
Kristin will be graduating with a bachelor’s of arts in philosophy and in political science. While pursuing these degrees Kristin participated in both athletic and academic endeavors. She is a member of the OSU cheer team and the OSU STUNT team. She is also a member of two honor societies, Phi Sigma Tau and Pi Sigma Alpha, of which she is the vice president. Aside from honor societies and athletics, she is an active member in the Oklahoma Intercollegiate Legislature, a mock state legislature, where she won the title “Best Delegate in the House of Representatives” in Fall 2015. Kristin has not only participated in the educational environment of OSU, but has also contributed to this environment as a teaching assistant for Introduction to American Government for five consecutive semesters. She has loved every experience and opportunity she has encountered while at OSU. Although bittersweet, Kristin looks forward to graduating from OSU and pursuing a legal education from The University of Virginia School of Law. Prior to attending law school Kristin plans to do political work in Washington DC. Kristin’s long-term aspirations are to be a public servant that pursues social justice for the people of the United States. Kristin is grateful for her time here at OSU and especially the faculty, in both the philosophy and political science departments, who have nurtured and encouraged her to chase her dreams.

Conner Eggers, 2016 Outstanding Junior
Conner James Eggers is a junior philosophy major. He aspires to one day attend Columbia or UT Law School. He is the President of the Phi Sigma Tau Honors society and has held numerous position in the Phi Kappa Tau fraternity. Conner just finished an internship under an Oklahoma Senator at the Capitol building in Oklahoma City and hopes to one day hold a public office after serving time as a public defender.

Conner and Kristin will be honored for their achievements at the department’s annual year-end meeting and awards ceremony, April 21st at 5pm.
Faculty News and Updates

Dr. Rebecca Bensen Cain
Dr. Bensen Cain is currently on sabbatical expanding her research on the conception of emotion in ancient Greek culture and the ways that emotions and the ordinary uses of emotional language are challenged by Plato and Aristotle. In August Dr. Bensen Cain and Dr. Tom Spector in the School of Architecture organized an interdisciplinary symposium through the International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture (ISPA). The symposium was hosted by the OSU Philosophy Department and Architecture Department at the Dole Reed Center in Taos, New Mexico (July 31-August 1, 2015).

Dr. Megan Burke
This year Dr. Burke has taught courses about gender-based violence, sexual politics, and global feminist politics. In research, Dr. Burke has been working on their first manuscript project, which examines the relation between temporality, gender, and sexual violence. They have forthcoming papers in Hypatia: A Journal of Feminism Philosophy and The Life Of a Sentence (Oxford University Press). Dr. Burke has also been busy organizing an international conference on philosophy and transgender studies to be held in May 2016 at the University of Oregon.

Dr. James Cain
This year Dr. Cain taught Symbolic Logic, Philosophy of Religion, and two seminars: one on Free Will and one on Aquinas. He has been working on papers on the philosophy of religion and free will.

Dr. Marty Heitz
Dr. Marty Heitz is excited to be returning this May to his alma mater, the University of Hawaii, to give a presentation at the 2016 East-West Philosophy Conference, entitled “I Am Here Now”—The First and Last Truth.” He has also been invited to contribute a chapter to a collection of essays by some of the former students of Dr. Roger Ames, a renowned scholar of Chinese Philosophy, who will be retiring from the University of Hawaii this year. Dr. Heitz is also happy to be teaching Taiji and Qigong once again, having taught a short Qigong class for the Wellness Center last summer, another in Taiji Fundamentals in the fall, and currently a Taiji class at the Colvin that he hopes to continue teaching regularly. Additionally, he taught a six-week Introduction to Daoism for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) in the fall and, due to popular demand, another this spring on Traditional Chinese Medicine. The folks at OLLI have also asked him to return in the fall of this year to teach an introductory class on Qigong. He is also hoping to re-start the Dialogue group, combining it with meditation, in the near future. Finally, Marty is especially excited to hike the John Muir Trail with his daughter, Kaily, this July, going from Yosemite to Mt. Whitney, if his knees hold out!

Dr. Justin Horn
Dr. Horn’s research focuses on metaethics, especially the philosophical implications of evolutionary psychology and moral disagreement. In March of 2015, he presented his paper “Evolution and the Epistemological Challenge to Moral Realism” at the Florida State Conference on Evolution and Ethics. That paper is forthcoming in the Cambridge Handbook on Evolutionary Ethics, ed. Michael Ruse and Robert Richards. He is currently at work on several papers on moral semantics, and greatly enjoys teaching Philosophies of Life and Biomedical Ethics.

Dr. Apple Igrek
Professor Apple Igrek’s current project is moving forward with the development of an ethical and cultural methodology that prioritizes the role of infinite modes of differentiation while avoiding the traditional view in continental philosophy that being more open to such infinite otherness is crucial to ethics. The method of thanato-vitalism therefore strikes out on a new path. One such example can be applied to the process of scapegoating. Traditionally it is argued that if we were more open to our own mortality and inherent vulnerability (which is ultimately a manifestation of infinite change and self-differentiation), then we would be less likely to scapegoat. But insofar as there is something infinitely unknowable about our own embodied mortality, it is impossible to be more or less open to it. The more interesting and provocative claim, then, would be that the affirmation of any group value will inevitably run into conflict with values embodied by some competing outside group, in which case the said conflict cannot be explained away by references to scapegoating, the politics of fear, media deception, etc.

Dr. Brian Kim
I’ve been spending most of my time writing about the role that knowledge plays in our practical decision making. The hope is to develop a view where knowledge plays a special and important role in our deliberations about how to live. And this special role turns out to show that being somebody who knows rather than being somebody who has beliefs that just so happen to be true is necessary for well-being. Apart from those topics, I remain interested in philosophical puzzles and having had so much fun writing a paper on the surprise exam paradox with Anubav Vasudevan, we are writing another paper on a puzzle in game theory.

Dr. Lawrence Pasternack
Pasternack was on sabbatical in the Fall, during which time he participated in a symposium on his 2014 book on Kant, wrote a number of papers on Kant for Cambridge University Press collections, completed the first two volumes of his Kant’s Sources in Translation
(Bloomsbury 2016), submitted a paper (now accepted) to the Journal of the History of Philosophy, and also spent a month in Canada via a SSHRC grant. He has since secured a contract with Cambridge University Press for a collection on Pascal's Wager and recently hosted a 3-day series of events on probability and decision theory in the Philosophy of Religion. As time permits, he is working on his next book, which will explore Kant's doctrine of the Highest Good.

Dr. Doren Recker

2015 was a busy year in the classroom, with the introduction of a new course within the OSU Teach program for prospective science teachers, “Patterns in Science.” The course was offered for the 1st time in Spring, 2015, before the official program began. It was revamped and offered as an OSU Teach class during the Fall, 2016 semester. Two course packets were produced for this course, one covering the history of astronomy and physics from Plato to Newton, and the other covering the Darwinian Revolution in biology. I also revamped and scheduled Philosophy of Biology during the Fall, 2015 semester (for the 1st time in more than a decade). Instead of the purely historical approach I had always taken, it now includes The Origin of Species as well as contemporary articles on controversial issues. I also (reluctantly) participated in a public Creation/Evolution debate in the Fall of 2015 in support of a new student group, which did recruit about ten new members the night of the debate. It filled the auditorium in the Student Union (as these things usually do). I try to avoid such things, as they are very time consuming, and always leave a bad taste in my mouth (besides, they provide publicity for creationism), but it did provide a boost for the student organization, and I tried hard to debunk the claim that this is a scientific debate.

I am still working on new controversies concerning the compatibility of science and religion, and am currently preparing my 1st article on this topic (as well as a Power-Point for my upcoming faculty presentation). As usual, my original ideas have greatly expanded since I took this topic up a couple of years ago, but after nearly 700 pages of notes, I can now navigate within more familiar territory. These issues remain the focus for the 1st couple of chapters in my proposed Evolution/Creationism book. The take on religion/science, the nature of science, and the means I’ve developed over many years to present and clarify complicated and controversial topics in these areas are the main innovations in this project.

Dr. Eric Reitan

Eric Reitan continues to pursue his research interests in ethics and the philosophy of religion. In June, he participated in an interdisciplinary “Rethinking Hell” conference at Fuller Theological Seminary, where he presented a paper defending Christian Universalism against challenges raised by annihilationists. An essay on Don Marquis’s pro-life argument, “Avoiding the Personhood Issue: Abortion, Identity, and Marquis’s ‘Future-Like-Ours’ Argument,” was accepted by the journal Bioethics and is now available in a pre-print online format.

The main focus of his current research, however, has been on the topic of same-sex marriage. He recently submitted a revised version of a paper on same-sex marriage and political liberalism to Public Affairs Quarterly, and he is excited to have received a contract offer for a book on same-sex marriage and the Christian Love Ethic with Cascade Books.

Dr. Shannon Spaulding

In the Spring, I was on research leave at University of Edinburgh in Scotland. While in Scotland, I worked on a new research project on the psychological factors that distort how we understand other people, presented several talks at universities in Scotland, and toured Scotland’s historic and beautiful sites. Once I was back State-side, I presented talks at the University of Kansas, Duke University, George Washington University, University of Houston, and conferences in Durham, NC, New Orleans, and Catalina Island. I had 5 papers accepted for publication in 2015, including a paper in Journal of Philosophy. In the Fall, I started a new position as Graduate Coordinator. My new responsibilities include mentoring our graduate students on teaching, writing philosophy, and applying to PhD programs. I am hopeful that all of the administrative work will pay off for our graduate students.
Diversity

Before Ferguson, the University of Missouri, and the rise of #BlackLivesMatter, Oklahoma State University’s philosophy department saw the need for conversations about race and diversity. Beginning in April of 2014 with a discussion about the microaggressions students of color experience at predominantly white universities, the Critical Conversations series, hosted by the Ethics Center, has had discussions about topics as diverse as the legacy of the Voting Rights Act of 1964, Militarization of Police in black communities, and Islamophobia in the United States. Lecturer, Diversity Coordinator, and Office of Institutional Diversity Fellow Lawrence Ware gives leadership to these series of events.

Critical Conversations are panel discussions composed of scholars, activists, and students about issues of diversity found in the news, while Critical Colloquia are academic talks from top scholars doing work that touches upon diversity. The average attendance of conversations is around 150 while the attendance for colloquia is just under 100. These events have been featured in both the local and state media, and Lawrence Ware is a highly regarded teacher and speaker around the country. In addition to public events, the department has committed to expanding the diversity of classes offered to include subject matter like Philosophy of Race, Philosophy of Sexuality, and Race, Class, and Gender. The Critical Conversations series continues to set the standard on campus for public dialogue about diversity and inclusion, and the OSU philosophy department is unique in it’s dedication to giving voice to those typically marginalized in the history of philosophy.

Critical Conversations

“Do you See What I See? How Social Differences Influence Our Perceptions”
9/24/2015

“The Hospitality of Receiving: Gandhi, King, and Interreligious Dialogue”
10/16/2015

“Confederate Flag: Heritage or Hate?”
11/19/2015

“Islam as Other”
2/11/2016

3/29/2016

“When Anger is as Essential as Fire: On Political Change and What We Can Learn From Black Feminist Thought”
4/14/2016

“Whose Land is this? Native Americans and Colonialism”
4/19/2016
Ethics Internship

We are excited to announce that the OSU Philosophy Department has teamed up with Payne County Youth Services to offer a summer ethics internship.

The intern will shadow Payne County Youth Services employees, observe ethical issues in the PCYS employees’ work, and talk with the PCYS employees about any ethical issues or situations that they regularly face. PCYS may request a particular ethical issue or area for the student to focus on, depending on current situations and needs. In addition, the intern will interact with residents in the emergency shelter and participate in evening activities. The intern will keep a journal and meet with the faculty advisor each week. Two weeks after the last meeting at PCYS, the intern will submit a final report to the faculty advisor and to Payne County Youth Services. Due to the nature of the population and services provided at Payne County Youth Services, the intern must maintain strict confidentiality of any content or identity of any clients that may be encountered during the internship.

Interested students can apply by submitting their resume, cover letter, and references to philo@okstate.edu.
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 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.

2015-2016 Officers

Michael Jamaledine, President
Conner Eggers, Vice-president
David Hidinger, Secretary-Treasurer
Brian Deer, Faculty Advisor

41st Annual Philosopher in Residence

This year’s Philosopher in Residence event was a great success. Friends of the Forms hosted Dr. Paul Saka, University of Texas, who serves as Area Editor in philosophy of language for the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy and as Consultant Editor for Episteme. Dr. Saka gave a well received public lecturer titled, “Providence and Probability: God, Chance, and Ultimate Meaning.” He also participated in a workshop on decision theory cosponsored by the Norris Foundation.

2015-2016 Friends of the Forms Talks

Why I Am Not a Christian
Justin Horn, OSU Philosophy Dept. 9/24/2015

Oracles, Astrologers, and Sibyls (Oh My!): Prophecy and Paradox from Delphi to Hogwarts
Christopher Weimer, OSU Foreign Languages Dept. 10/14/2015

Effective Altruism and the Farm Animal Welfare Controversy
Bailey Norwood, OSU Agricultural Economics Dept. 11/11/2015

The Methodological and Philosophical Crises of Modern Psychology
James Grice, OSU Psychology Dept. 3/3/2016

Religious Literacy, Public Education, and Islamaphobia
Stephanie Whatley, OSU Religious Studies 3/31/2016

Do We Really Want Excellence in Education?
Russell Rhinehart, OSU Chemical Engineering Dept. 4/12/2016

Visit our Events page to watch recorded lecturers online!
philosophy.okstate.edu/events/events
Brian Deer
Student Organization Faculty Advisor and Undergraduate Liaison

Brian Deer teaches Classics, Asian philosophy and classes on death and dying. Within the department Mr. Deer has been working as undergraduate Liaison, and in this position he coordinates the department’s student activities such as the Friends of the Forms annual events. He is also coaching the OSU Ethics Bowl team, serving as the Ethics Club’s faculty advisor. Extending his research beyond the classroom, Mr. Deer is currently engaged in community-based mindfulness practice with the state of Oklahoma’s Department of Corrections.

Ethics Club

The OSU Ethics Club moved from the Business College to the Philosophy Department in 2015. The club had an exciting first year in the Philosophy Department, forming an ethics bowl team and competing locally at the Oklahoma Ethics Statewide Student Challenge at Southern Nazarene University, and then going on to compete at the Texas Regional Ethics Bowl at St. Mary’s University. Next year the club is organizing an OSU Ethics Bowl to be held on the Stillwater Campus, with sponsorship from the Ethics Center.

OSU Ethics Bowl Team competing at the Texas Regional Ethics Bowl. From left to right: Harley White, Spencer Coles, Andrew Stegeman, Micheal Owens. 11/15/15
Pascal’s Wager and the Dynamics of Rational Deliberation  February 18th, 2016

Dr. Pasternack and Dr. Kim were awarded a Norris Foundation Grant to bring in Dr. Paul Bartha, Professor and Department Head at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. Dr. Bartha’s public lecture on Pascal’s Wager was well received, and the department enjoyed the opportunity to meet with him and engage philosophically.

We would like to thank Dr. Bartha for his time and thoughtfulness. Dr. Bartha generously donated his Norris honorarium to the Philosophy Department’s Student Fund, which covers expenses for student travel, student events, and scholarship awards.

You can watch Dr. Bartha’s lecture and other events online by visiting our events webpage at philosophy.okstate.edu/events.

The Coddling of the American Mind: Vindictive Protectiveness on Campus

In September 2015 The Atlantic featured an article by Greg Lukianoff (FIRE) and Jonathan Haidt (NYU-Stern School of Business) titled “The Coddling of the American Mind” about why the increasing demand for trigger warnings might be disastrous for education. The article sparked a lot of discussion, and the Department felt the need to bring a representative from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) to campus. On March 23rd Robert Shibley the Executive Director of FIRE gave a lecture on free speech and academic freedom on college campuses, tackling the current atmosphere surrounding student protests, safe spaces, trigger warnings, macroaggressions, and other topics important to free expression. The lecture was sponsored by the Philosophy Department and the Arts & Humanities Lecture Series.
Thinking the Anthropocene: What Pigs Tell us About the History of Our Changing Planet

This lecture by Dr. Thomas Fleischman is scheduled for Thursday, April 13th at 4:30pm in CLB 212. Dr. Fleischman is Writer in Residence at New York University, and his forthcoming book Three Little Pigs: East Germany’s Green Revolution 1945-2000 is slated for release in 2018. His visit is funded by the A&H Speaker Series and the OSU Philosophy Department.

Statistical Fallacies in the Climate Change Debate, and Why They Don’t Matter

This lecture by Dr. Anubav Vasudevan is scheduled for Friday, April 8th at 1pm in CLB 112. Dr. Vasudevan is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago. He received his PhD from Columbia University, and his current research interests are in the areas of Epistemology and Philosophy of Science, especially the foundations of probability. His visit is funded by the A&H Speaker Series and the OSU Philosophy Department.

Graduate Student News and Updates

Mary Danley
Mary Danley’s current research interests are in the area of aesthetics, especially Nietzsche’s aesthetics. She is looking forward to teaching Philosophies of Life in the fall, and she plans to pursue a PhD in Philosophy after graduation.

Jeremy Watkins
Jeremy Watkins is currently researching pantheist and multiverse solutions to the problem of evil. He plans to graduate in spring 2017, and he anticipates applying to PhD programs and further developing his brainchild for a nonprofit (after-school and adult education) with a focus on teaching critical thinking to any community that will have him. It is his hope that philosophy will continue to enable his tacos con chile verde habit long after graduation.

Ryan Wellington
Ryan Wellington’s current research interests are within the Philosophy of Religion and problems with accounts of miracles, problems of religious revelation due to conflicting religious experiences, and the Problem of Divine Hiddenness. He hopes to attend the University of Notre Dame or Saint Louis University for a PhD in Philosophy.
ALUMNI UPDATES

Kirk Essary (kirkessary@gmail.com)
I've recently taken up a three-year postdoctoral research fellowship at the Australian Research Council Center of Excellence for the History of Emotions (Europe, 1100-1800) at the University of Western Australia.

Dennis Heinzig (dennis_heinzig@yahoo.com)
I am retiring in March 2016 as Chief Executive Officer, Chairman of PartnerRe America Insurance Company. Selling my house in San Francisco and moving to Whitefish, Montana. I hope to now have time to read all those philosophy books that have been stacking up over the years!

Ian McDaniel (ian.k.mcdaniel@gmail.com)
I finished my Doctoral Dissertation with Don Marquis here at KU entitled "Life and Death Issues in Bioethics: Abortion, Persistent Vegetative State, and the Definition of Death". I defended my dissertation with honors in December and am now on the job market.

Jeffrey Trissell (jeffrey.trissell@gmail.com)
I am a 2010 OSU Philosophy alumnus. After OSU, I attended law school at the George Washington University Law School in Washington, D.C. I graduated in 2013 and then took and passed the California Bar examination that same year. I am currently employed with the Law Office of Charles LiMandri in Rancho Santa Fe, California. I practice general civil litigation. I also work with Freedom of Conscience Defense Fund on pro bono religious liberty cases. In that regard I have drafted two United States Supreme Court *amicus curiae* briefs and am now representing David Daleiden and the Center for Medical Progress in the matter *StemExpress, LLC, et al. v. The Center for Medical Progress, et al*. In that case I successfully defeated an attempt by StemExpress to prevent CMP from being permitted to release a specific undercover video. In August 2014 I was married to my beautiful wife Madeleine nee McCanbridge.

Anastasia Smith (Anastasia.lee.smith@gmail.com)
Anastasia recently donated a painting of a rhinoceros to the game reserve Dinokeng in South Africa with the intention of auctioning it off to procure funding toward protecting the park's rhinos. You can view her work at www.theartistanastasia.com.

Calvin Harrison Warner (cwanner10@student.gsu.edu)
I am currently teaching Intro to Philosophy at Georgia State University in Atlanta. I'll be wrapping up my MA this Spring.

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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