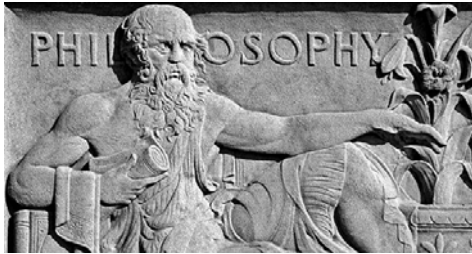


Michigan Philosophy News

Fall 2013

For friends, alumni, alumnae of the Department of Philosophy, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor



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Dear Friends of Michigan Philosophy,

With my term as Chair of this Department ending this coming summer, it is as a lame duck that I write to you. As far as I can tell, this makes me the only thing that's lame about Philosophy at Michigan. These pages will celebrate the accomplishments, aspirations, and remarkable productivity of our students and our faculty. This past year, that productivity included, but was not limited to, prize-winning undergraduate essays, senior theses, graduate dissertations, innovative new courses, curricular initiatives, major faculty publications – and a bevy of philosophical babies. The meat of this newsletter will be field reports supplied by those on the front lines of teaching and research. I will begin with an overview of Departmental activities.

Faculty News

While there are no new permanent faculty members to introduce, we have three visitors to welcome and four colleagues returning with deservedly elevated statuses.

The visitors: **Iskra Fileva** joins Philosophy this year as a Lecturer. She is helping us hold down the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) fort while PPE's founder and motive force, Elizabeth Anderson, is on leave. Iskra works on issues at the intersection of ethics and psychology, such as the connection between rational and psychological explanations of action, the influence of character traits on reasons for action, and the boundary between rationality and irrationality. Also joining us will be Columbia University's **Macalester Bell**, who will be a Visiting Assistant Professor for the Winter 2014 semester. Macalester's research addresses matters of ethics, moral psychology, and aesthetics. One focus – reflected in her recent book *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt* (OUP, 2013) – is the question of what feelings and attitudes are appropriate responses to severe injustice. Finally, **Timothy Williamson**, the Wykeham Professor of Logic at Oxford University's New College, will have a return engagement this winter semester as the Nelson Visitor in Philosophy. A leading figure in philosophical logic, philosophy of language, metaphysics and epistemology, Tim will lead a mini-seminar covering his recent work in epistemology.



David Manley

The elevated: Having sailed through their tenure promotions with flying colors, **David Manley** and **Sarah Moss** return to us as Associate Professors of Philosophy. Rising out of the Associate ranks is **Sarah Buss**, who returns to us as Professor of Philosophy. Finally, **Elizabeth Anderson** was named the John Dewey Distinguished University Professor of Philosophy and Women's Studies. Distinguished University Professor is one of the University's top honors; Liz was one of nine faculty members across the institution to be recognized this year. She retains her title as Thurnau Professor, a status reserved for the College's best teachers.



Sarah Moss

The College offers teaching recognitions beyond the Thurnau, and this year Philosophy made a clean sweep of them: **Sarah Buss** received the John Dewey Award for long-term commitment to the education of undergraduate students, and **David Manley** and **Sarah Moss** each received the Class of 1923 Memorial Teaching Award for outstanding teaching of undergraduates. These are especially meaningful awards: the winners are selected each year by the College Executive Committee from among those recommended for promotion. In the 50 year history of the 1923 Award, **David Manley** and **Sarah Moss** are the first winners from our department! **Sarah Moss** also received the 2013 LSA Excellence in Education Award.

Although **Liz Anderson** received no teaching awards (this year), she had other recognitions to juggle. These included a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Michigan Humanities Award, and an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship. Later in the *MPN*, Liz describes the research project she'll pursue with the help of these awards. Also offered ACLS Fellowships were **Sarah Moss** (Charles A. Ryskamp Research Fellowship) and **Eric Swanson** (Burkhardt Fellowship). Also securing a Michigan Humanities Award was **Tad Schmaltz**.

Fellowships and leaves breed scholarly output, and there is a fair bit of that to report. Along with her co-editor Mary Kate McGowan, **Ishani Maitra** has published the collection *Speech and Harm: Controversies Over Free Speech* (Oxford University Press, 2012), whose contributors draw on a variety of disciplinary perspectives to articulate and address questions about whether and how speech can harm, as well as about what can be done about speech that does harm. **Larry Sklar** has published *Philosophy and the Foundations of Dynamics* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), a philosophically nuanced historical engagement with issues in the interpretation of classical mechanics. And **Allan Gibbard** has published the eagerly anticipated *Meaning and Normativity* (Oxford University Press, 2012), an investigation of the meaning of meaning that builds upon the expressivism about normative concepts developed in his landmarks *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* and *Thinking How to Live*, and aims to understand normative thinking as something to be expected from the sorts of natural phenomena human beings are.

Special Events

2012-2013 was another event-filled year. A very special event was **Brian Weatherson's** inaugural lecture as the Weinberg Professor of Philosophy, "Running Risks Morally," delivered in November before an audience that included multiple Deans and the Professorship's namesake and sponsor, Marshall Weinberg. We had colloquium talks from Joel Velasco (Cal Tech) on tree systematics in evolutionary biology; Clinton Tolley (UCSD) and Dina Emundts (Konstanz) on Kant's theories of intentionality and self-consciousness, respectively; Sally Haslanger (MIT) on social structure and social explanations; Derrick Darby (Kansas) on an inequality conundrum; Jeff Horty (Maryland) on common law reasoning; Daniel Nolan (Australian National University) on noncausal dispositions; and Barbara Herman (UCLA) on Love and Morality.

The new PPE Program sponsored exciting events as well: in January, Cristina Bicchieri delivered "Upholding Fairness Norms," the inaugural lecture of the Ferrando Family Lecture Series. Although Stephen White (Texas) on Aristotle's pleasures was the only free-standing talk in our Classical Philosopher Series, in October UM hosted a major meeting of the International Plato Society dedicated to the topic of Plato's moral psychology.

The IPS meeting was just one stop on a very full schedule of conferences and workshops this past year. In June, the Templeton Foundation Science of Ethics grant led by **Dan Jacobson** held a workshop on moral psychology and human agency. October saw Ken-fest, a conference in honor of Ken Walton on the occasion of his retirement and dedicated to the topic of imagination and make believe in art and philosophy. A Philosophy and Linguistics Workshop entitled "Science and Methodology" was held in December.

Every March we host a spring colloquium conceived and executed by our graduate students. This past March, the spring colloquium "Method in Metaphysics" featured faculty speakers Kris McDaniel (Syracuse), our own **David Manley**, Daniel Nolan (ANU), Karen Bennett (Cornell, and also a UM PhD), and graduate student commentators Billy Dunaway, Dmitri Gallow, Patrick Shireff, and Rohan Sud. Patrick and Rohan also organized the colloquium. Another graduate student-initiated workshop, this one funded by the Rackham Graduate School in support of an interdisciplinary reading group in the foundations of physics, was held in early May. "The Foundations of Quantum Field Theory" brought together speakers from Britain and North America and drew attendance not only from a variety of UM departments but from across the Midwest and Canada.

April's Weinberg Symposium in Cognitive Science, entitled "Rethinking Rationality and Its Bounds," was organized by the Psychology Department. A bracingly interdisciplinary lineup of speakers engaged empirical and philosophical work on the roots, and underlying strategies, of our problem-solving behaviors. The headliners were Konrad Kording (Physiology, Northwestern); Laura Schulz (Brain and Cognitive Science, MIT); Jonathan Cohen (Psychology, Princeton); and David Danks (Philosophy, Carnegie Mellon). The headlines included the revelation that infants already have a handle on something I struggle to explain to my introductory logic students: the relevance of base rates to probabilistic reasoning.

April also featured the Tanner Lecture, "Publicness (and its Problems)," delivered by Craig Calhoun, sociologist and Director of the London School of Economics. A riff on John Dewey's 1927 *The Public and Its Problems*, the lecture interrogated the Habermasian ideal of "the public sphere," a space where individuals come together for undistorted and rational communication about the problems they confront and how to proceed in the face of them. Revealing the limits of the metaphor of the public sphere, the Lecture nevertheless communicated optimism about the attainability of ends the public sphere was conceived to promote. Commenting on Calhoun at the Tanner symposium were Geoff Eley (UM History), George Steinmetz (UM Sociology), and Michael Warner (Yale, English).

Babies



As described in more detail later in the *MPN*, this past year **Brian Weatherson** piloted a new course called "The Philosophical Baby." The Department also had more than its share of less theoretical engagements with philosophical babies. Four members of our faculty and two of our graduate students acquired new family members this past year. Pictured modeling the UM Philosophy "GO GRUE" onesie issued to each new faculty offspring is Ari Douglas Jacobson, whom **Dan Jacobson** and LeAnne Kent welcomed on May 2. Joining Ari in philosophical

infancy are Aura Elisabet Aarnio, whom **Maria** and Ville **Aarnio** welcomed on April 13; Oliver Alexei Swanson, whom **Sarah Moss** and **Eric Swanson** welcomed on July 17; Theodore Lucian Shaheen, whom **Jonathan** and Michelle **Shaheen** welcomed on March 7; and Theodore Richard Herold, whom **Warren** and Laura **Herold** welcomed on May 29.

Appreciation

Even part way through this catalog of goings-on, the debt of gratitude we owe our donors is apparent. Donors help us to maintain the outstanding faculty whose exploits are chronicled in these pages. Particularly instrumental here are the Malcolm L. Denise Philosophy Endowment, honoring Theodore Denise and supporting faculty recruitment, and the Nathaniel Marrs Fund, promoting faculty retention. Donors help us to support, and to recognize, outstanding students at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Particularly instrumental here are the Weinberg Endowment for the Frankena and Stevenson Prizes and the Weinberg Endowment for Philosophy. Donors help us to enrich the student experience; for instance, through Richard and Carolyn Lineback's sponsorship of graduate student editors for the *Philosopher's Annual*. Donors help us to participate in sustained and thoughtful interdisciplinary interactions; for instance, through the Weinberg Fund for Philosophy and the Cognitive Sciences. In the present economic climate, maintaining a competitive philosophy department serving the constituency of a public university is no mean feat. I like to think that we're pulling it off. I know that, if we are pulling it off, it's only with the help and support of readers of the *MPN*. We are grateful to all of you. Those of you who have supported the Department financially this past year, we acknowledge on Page 11 of this newsletter. If you would like to appear on the list next year, the enclosed card affords you one way to do so. (You can also donate on-line through our home page: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/philosophy/>.)

Yours,



Laura Ruetsche
Professor and Chair



Graduate News

By Victor Caston, Director of Graduate Studies

Our graduate students this year have continued to distinguish themselves by winning highly competitive awards, thereby bringing recognition to the Department.

Sven Nyholm was awarded the ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award for his dissertation on Kantian ethics, *On the Universal Law and Humanity Formulas*, which he wrote under the direction of Professors Elizabeth Anderson and Sarah Buss.

Chloe Armstrong received a Rackham Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor Award for her creativity and exceptional ability as a teacher. Three of our students – **Dmitri Gallow**, **Bryan Parkhurst**, and **Dan Peterson** – all succeeded in winning the highly competitive Rackham Predoctoral Fellowships for funding the final year of their dissertation research in 2013/14. There was also recognition from beyond the University: **Patrick Shirreff** won a handsome multi-year fellowship from Canada's prestigious *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council* (SSHRC).

The Department also gives awards to those graduate students who have excelled in their research, demonstrated creativity and originality, or have been highly successful as teachers over the past year (2012/13). **Annette Bryson**, **Dmitri Gallow**, and **Dan Peterson** were all awarded Cornwell Fellowships for academic excellence. **Annette Bryson** also won the John Dewey Prize for excellence in teaching as a Graduate Student Instructor, while **Chip Sebens** earned the Charles L. Stevenson Prize for excellence in a dossier. Various fellowships were awarded for Fall and Winter terms or for the Summer. **Steve Nayak-Young** and **Adam Rigoni** received Weinberg Dissertation Fellowships, which were given in honor of accomplished students who will be seeking an academic position the following year, and Weinberg Summer Fellowships were given to **Daniel Drucker**, **Jeremy Lent**, **Cat Saint Croix**, and **Umer Shaikh**. A Haller Summer Fellowship, which is awarded periodically for outstanding academic achievement, was also given to **Chip Sebens**. Finally, several John H. D'Arms Summer Fellowships were awarded to students as part of John H. D'Arms Faculty Awards for Distinguished Graduate Mentoring: **Robin Zheng** was given one from Liz Anderson's award and **Ira Lindsay** was given another from Peter Railton's.

The graduate students were also active in professional activities in Ann Arbor, nationally, and internationally. **Chloe Armstrong**, **Patrick Shirreff**, and **Nils Stear** served over the summer as co-editors of the prestigious *Philosopher's Annual*, which selects the ten best journal articles published in English in the previous year (2013). **Dan Peterson** and **Jeremy Lent** both participated in the Spencer Foundation's inaugural Philosophy of Education Institute over the summer, continuing the tradition of work in this area by former UM faculty John Dewey and William Frankena. The papers Dan and Jeremy wrote for the Institute have since been accepted for the 2014 American Educational Research Association conference. Although we cannot list them all here, the rest of our graduate students continued to be active in the profession, presenting their research at conferences from Fort Wayne, Indiana, to Berlin, Germany. These successes are a tribute to their talent, hard work, and discipline, but are also an honor to the Department, something of which we can all be proud.

And last, but certainly not least, our graduate students have been active in the local community as well, spearheading our outreach efforts. Michigan's regional High School Ethics Bowl is off the ground with four high schools committed (some of which

fielded 2 teams!), which is enough to send the winner to the national competition. Fabulous work by Jeanine DeLay and her colleagues at A2Ethics.org, **Kimberly Chuang**, **J. Dmitri Gallow**, **Zoe Johnson King**, **Umer Shaikh**, **Robin Zheng**, and Matt Deaton from the Squire Family Foundation. **Zoe Johnson King**, with assists from **Kimberly Chuang**, **Robin Zheng**, and **Jon Shaheen**, crafted a letter of interest for an Arts of Citizenship Graduate Student Grant in Public Scholarship, too.



Undergraduate News

By Sarah Buss, Director of Undergraduate Studies

It is my pleasure to greet the University of Michigan philosophy alumni as the Philosophy Department's new Director of Undergraduate Studies. Since taking over the position last year, I have focused most of my efforts on thinking about how the Department can encourage even more undergraduates to take our courses. To this end, I am currently revising the text on our website. More importantly, with the help of one of our graduate students, I have been assessing the results of hundreds of surveys we distributed in our classes at the end of last year in an effort to better understand who takes our courses and why – and what lies behind the decision so many students make to limit their diet of philosophy to just one course.

Preliminary data suggest that we may be able to gain some insight into the perplexing and vexing fact that relatively few philosophy majors are women. We have begun engaging in conversations with departments in other colleges and universities about what might be done to alter this country-wide pattern; and I hope that the information gleaned from the surveys, as well as from the records of our Registrar, will suggest some measures we might take to improve the situation.

In the meantime, we are thinking of ways to make the Department an even more welcoming place for students than it already is. We have instituted a mid-fall study break with pizza and cookies; and this spring we will host our third annual Philosophy Movie Night, at which we will show a movie at the Michigan Theater (admission free!) with a brief philosophical presentation and discussion directly following.

As many of you know, in seeking to strengthen our outreach to students, I also sent out a letter requesting information about what our majors have done professionally since graduating from the University of Michigan. I have been overwhelmed by the response I have received so far: over 160 emails, and a few real letters, too! Thanks so much to those of you who took the time to write. And to those of you who have not yet done so: it's not too late! I look forward to sitting down sometime before the end of the year to read through what we have collected by then. I know that our students will benefit from what you tell me; and if I learn anything I think would be of interest to you too, I will let you know.

No DUS report would be complete without including an update about the recent activities and accomplishments of our wonderful students. As always, we awarded several prizes. Here, in chronological order, is the list of the students who received the \$250 Haller Term Prize, awarded for exceptional performance in one or more upper-level philosophy courses:

Anthony Bryk, for his work in PHIL 405, "Philosophy of Plato," taught by Professor Matthew Evans. **Leila Pastore**, first for her work in PHIL 409, Philosophy of Language, taught by Professor Eric Swanson, and then again (in the following semester) for her work in PHIL 402, "Causation, Responsibility, and the Force of Language in *The Brothers Karamazo*," also taught by Professor Eric Swanson. **Alicia Patterson**, for her work in PHIL 467, "Philosophy of the Enlightenment," taught by Professor Jamie Tappenden and PHIL 486, "Feminist Philosophy," taught by Professor Ishani Maitra.

Shai Madjar won the department's annual William K. Frankena Prize. This prize is awarded to the graduating major with the most impressive record in philosophy. It carries a monetary award of \$750. **Shai** was one of four students who completed senior honors theses last year. His thesis was on a topic in metaethics. **Alicia Patterson** wrote her thesis on the obligations of friendship. **William Englehart** wrote on the moral and aesthetic significance of branding in fashion. **David Hopkins** wrote on the debate over gay marriage.

Several of our majors continue to participate in the Philosophy Club. Others have revived the Undergraduate Philosophy Journal, *The Meteorite*, the most recent issue of which was published on-line in May 2013. You can access it by going to <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/meteorite/home>.

Benjamin Rossi and **Seth Wolin** each presented two papers at two undergraduate conferences. **Noël Gordon**, one of our minors in Moral and Political Philosophy, co-founded the Coalition for Queer People of Color, and won the MLK Spirit Award in recognition of his dedication to serving others. **Dominique Brooks**, who is double majoring in political science and philosophy, is the first undergraduate to intern with the Michigan in Washington program at the U.S. Copyright Office. (Dominique received philosophy department support for her internship; and Noël received department support to study HIV prevention in Jamaica.)

As we continue to do our best to train and inspire our students, we think fondly and with gratitude of the students who have inspired us in the past, and of the many other people who have supported our efforts. We thank you for your continued interest in the philosophy majors and minors who will soon be joining your ranks.



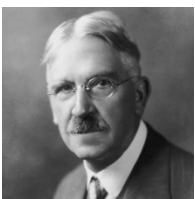
Moral Epistemology from a Pragmatist Perspective

By Elizabeth Anderson, John Dewey
Distinguished University Professor

Three hundred years ago, most of the world accepted the practice of slavery. About 250 years ago, abolitionists began to actively contest slavery on an international scale. By the early 20th century, antislavery moral convictions had triumphed worldwide. Philosophers have yet to systematically theorize the implications of this revolution for moral epistemology. With the support of a sabbatical leave and ACLS Fellowship, I am writing a book that will develop a naturalized, pragmatist epistemology of moral learning by considering episodes in the history of abolition and emancipation.

Much contemporary moral philosophy relies on moral intuitions elicited in thought experiments to develop and test proposed general moral principles. Penetrating questions have been raised about this method. Why think the intuitions of a single or a few philosophers agree with or (if they disagree) are better or more reliable than the moral intuitions of the wider population? Given that moral intuitions have changed over time, why take the trustworthiness of current intuitions for granted? How can we be confident that our moral intuitions are not distorted by prejudice or other biases? The fact that most people's moral intuitions about slavery were long opposed to those held today should move philosophers to seek answers to these questions.

Pragmatism suggests some promising ways to expand our methods of moral inquiry that can respond to these challenges. As articulated by John Dewey, pragmatism holds that the most important tests of a moral theory arise not in thought experiments, but in actual experiments in living according to the theory's principles. Such experiments often yield unexpected consequences, and unanticipated moral reactions to these consequences. We aren't very good at forecasting our reactions to future events.¹ So we can learn things from actual experiments in living that we can't in thought experiments. We can also learn by examining the processes of belief change, to see if they amount to epistemic improvements. For example, they cause belief change by bringing morally relevant information to the attention of the actors, or by correcting biases. This gives us grounds for thinking that the change in moral view is a case of moral learning. This conclusion may be further tested by a new experiment in living according to the new moral view. Do people find life under the new moral practices more satisfactory than life guided by the previous principles?



John Dewey

Naturalized moral epistemology draws from research in the social sciences to help us identify the circumstances under which moral blindness or biases are likely to occur or be corrected. For example, empirical research finds that individuals standing in relations of power over others are more

likely to stereotype and be prejudiced against them than third parties are.² Power corrupts. John Dewey identified another psychological mechanism linking power to corruption. Knowledge of the right arises from certain interpersonal interactions – for example, of being called to account by others, blamed, shamed, and punished for wrongdoing, being criticized for arrogance and negligence, being exposed as unable to justify one's conduct before those whom one has injured or neglected. Such social practices arouse people's moral consciousness, making them sensible that they are accountable to standards of conduct arising from the needs and interests of others, not just to their own desires. But the powerful are rarely subject to such experiences in relation to those they govern. As Dewey argued:

It is difficult for a person in a place of authoritative power to avoid supposing that what he wants is right as long as he has power to enforce his demand. And even with the best will in the world, he is likely to be isolated from the real needs of others, and the perils of ignorance are added to those of selfishness. . . . The history of the struggle for political liberty is largely a record of attempt to get free from oppressions which were exercised in the name of law and authority, but which in effect identified loyalty with enslavement.³

The task in such cases is to develop social practices whereby the aggrieved and their allies can break through the selfishness and ignorance of the powerful, so that they can be exposed to the characteristic experiences that jog recognition of their claims. Pure moral arguments are not enough. In the absence of some felt need to change their ways, people entertain moral arguments merely speculatively, not as practical deliberation. What is needed are practices of contention – systematic activities of claim-making that aim to arouse a recognition in the powerful that they can't proceed as usual, that they need to revise their practices.

"Contention" comprises a wide range of practices of interpersonal claim-making whereby people challenge what would otherwise be done. I borrow this concept from social theorist Charles Tilly, who used it to describe practices of claim-making addressed to the state.⁴ However, I extend it to include all addressees (for example, slave owners). While contention includes pure moral argumentation, it includes many additional ways of making interpersonal claims that challenge the status quo, including petitions, hearings, testimonials, election campaigns, voting, litigation, political street theater, demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, disobedience, and rebellion. I have already noted one advantage of expanding our repertoire of modes of challenging normative principles: the modes of contention beyond pure moral argument are more likely to trigger real practical deliberation, by alerting those who are maintaining the status quo of the urgency of objections to it, exposing them to the experience of being held to account by the aggrieved, and being warned that the aggrieved are not willing to continue going along with it.

Another advantage is that it dramatically expands the participants in moral inquiry. Few people have been trained to conduct moral inquiry in the argumentative mode of analytic

philosophy. Philosophers comprise a relatively privileged and demographically unrepresentative range of the human population. We should take seriously the worry that the moral intuitions and methods of philosophers may reflect biases of privilege and insularity not shared by the wider population.⁵ Expanding the range of activities that contribute to moral inquiry dramatically expands the range of people who can participate, and thereby offers the prospect of overcoming biases of narrower and more privileged groups. This move comports with recent work by historians, showing how slaves participated in the transatlantic Enlightenment through contention against their bondage.⁶

We can model the epistemic value of different modes of contention in terms of their potential for inducing error-correction, counteracting bias, clearing up confusion, taking up morally relevant information, making people receptive to admitting mistakes, drawing logical conclusions, and other epistemic improvements. We may have a fairly good idea of characteristic sources of moral error, ignorance, bias, and blindness, drawn from social and cognitive psychology and from historical investigation. In different social contexts, different modes of contention may be helpful in overcoming these sources of bias, opening people's minds to morally relevant considerations, and exposing their conduct to moral accountability.

The British abolitionists invented a particularly powerful form of contention, which we know today as the social movement. A social movement is "a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities."⁷ Abolitionists created the first nationwide "cause" organization with local chapters, mailing lists, fundraising from members, and newsletters informing members of the progress of their cause, including the first "report card" on how members' representatives voted on laws advocated or opposed by the movement. They enlisted thousands of activists to agitate for their cause, flooded the public sphere with debates, testimony, books, pictures, and pamphlets informing people of the horrors of slavery, created the first logo and slogan to encapsulate their demands, initiated the first consumer boycott (of slave-grown sugar), and launched the first mass petition campaign to lobby Parliament – initially to abolish the slave trade, and ultimately to end slavery itself.⁸ The features of their social movement were well-suited to correct the biases – the selfishness and ignorance – of the powerful and of everyone else whose conduct sustained the status quo.

For pragmatists, however, the most important evidence of moral progress lies in practice. A social movement may be able to jog recognition of moral objections to a practice without being able to offer a superior alternative. To its advocates, slavery was necessary for civilization. The dominant assumption at the time was that if people were not forced to work, they would choose "barbarism": that is, they would quit working as soon as they had secured basic subsistence.⁹ Without a surplus, society cannot

support an advanced division of labor: there would be no manufacturers, merchants, or financiers, no artists or scientists, no clergy or educators, no writers or publishers, no magistrates, civil servants, or navy – in short, no civilization. Experience at the time offered little evidence to undermine the proslavery theory that force was needed to induce work. At the dawn of the antislavery movement, 95% of workers worldwide were subject to some form of involuntary servitude – if not slavery, then serfdom, debt peonage, apprenticeship, indenture, *corvée*, military impressment, penal servitude, or other forms of coercion, such as coolie labor.¹⁰

Adam Smith famously disputed this proslavery argument. He replied that the central issue was incentives: the slaves would be more productive if they were freed, because if they were paid a wage they could gain from whatever surplus they produced. While it was true that slaves would produce more than they needed to survive only when forced, this was because slave owners offered them no prospects of gain for producing more than their subsistence.¹¹

Members of Parliament, in debates over abolishing the slave trade and slavery itself, conceived of abolition as a "mighty experiment" in free labor. The principal commodity produced by Britain's slave colonies was sugar. Would the colonies continue to profitably produce sugar once the slaves were freed? Unfortunately, the early results of emancipation were taken to confirm the proslavery argument. Production on sugar plantations plummeted, costs rose with wages, and free sugar could not compete against slave-grown sugar from Cuba. Wherever open land was available, the freed people abandoned wage labor in favor of farming on small independent plots, a system which gave priority to subsistence over cash crop production. Slave labor turned out to be more productive than free, because the whip elicited an exhausting and debilitating level of labor continuity and intensity that no free person would accept. Slaves were literally worked to death across the West Indies, leading to declining populations that could be replenished only through the slave trade with Africa.¹² In retrospect, however, people revised their standard of success. Abolition had not created a system of free labor; lesser forms of involuntary servitude continued for decades. (In the U.S., 13th Amendment litigation against criminalizing employees' breach of contract by quitting continued well into the 1940s.¹³) The struggle for a system of genuinely free labor had taken a step forward with abolition, but involved continuous contention after emancipation. As labor regimes became more free, it became evident that civilization could flourish without involuntary servitude. It had never really been at stake in the "mighty experiment." What had been at stake was only the price of sugar. Europe's sweet tooth could hardly justify working millions to death. Moreover, as John Stuart Mill argued, civilization could hardly advance unless the mass of people – workers – were able to enjoy its fruits. Only under a free labor system were those who produced the surplus required for civilization able to enjoy its benefits.¹⁴

Let's return to the skeptical questions raised about moral intuitions in the second paragraph of this essay. Pragmatists argue that a priori moral theorizing cannot answer these challenges. Introspection and a priori moral reflection do not offer reliable ways to detect whether a moral intuition is prejudiced or otherwise flawed. For thousands of years, proslavery moral intuitions had dominated the moral consciousness of Europeans, with only scattered dissent that confronted seemingly powerful arguments on the other side. Despite the weaknesses of a priori moral reflection, the history of abolition offers us lessons on how we can improve our moral convictions. The key is to join moral reflection to moral practice. The abolitionists didn't only engage in moral arguments; they devised a repertoire of contentious practices designed to expose and root out the influence of selfishness and ignorance on the moral intuitions of the relatively powerful, and to disrupt established practices enough to instigate genuine practical deliberation about the difference between the good for oneself and moral duties to subordinates in the division of labor. Abolitionist contention brought about a vast experiment in living in accordance with principles of free labor (or relatively freer labor), which was ultimately to refute the principal arguments for slavery, and vindicate free labor as a foundation of civilization. The practical tasks for us today are to refine contentious practices in light of deeper, empirically informed understandings of the sources of bias in our thinking, and to test our moral intuitions in real experiments in living.

¹Gilbert, Daniel. 2006. *Stumbling on Happiness*. New York: A.A. Knopf.

²Goodwin, Stephanie, Alexandra Gubin, Susan Fiske, and Vincent Yzerbyt. 2000. "Power Can Bias Impression Processes: Stereotyping Subordinates by Default and by Design." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 3(3): 227–56.

³Dewey, John, and James Hayden Tufts. 1932. *Ethics*. New York: H. Holt, p. 226.

⁴Tilly, Charles, and Sidney Tarrow. 2006. *Contentious Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁵Dotson, Kristie. 2012. "How is this Paper Philosophy?" *Comparative Philosophy* 3(1): 3–29.

⁶Dubois, Laurent. 2006. "An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the Atlantic." *Social History* 31(1): 1–14.

⁷Tilly, Charles, and Sidney Tarrow. 2006. *Contentious Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 111.

⁸Hochschild, Adam. 2005. *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

⁹For a characteristic statement of this view, see Wakefield, Edward Gibbon. *A Statement of the Principles and Objects of a Proposed National Society for the Cure and Prevention of Pauperism, by Means of Systematic Colonization*. London, 1830, pp. 15–37.

¹⁰Drescher, Seymour. *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor Versus Slavery in British Emancipation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 14.

¹¹Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. 5th. ed. London: Methuen and Co., 1904, I.8; III.2.

¹²Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, ch. 3, 10.

¹³See, for example, *Pollack v. Williams*, 322 U.S. 4 (1944).

¹⁴Mill, John Stuart. "The Negro Question." *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Vol. XXI- Essays on Equality, Law, and Education [1850]*. Ed. John Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1850, p. 674.



Philosophical Babies

By Brian Weatherson, Professor

In Fall of 2012, I taught a first year seminar called *Philosophical Babies*. The idea behind the seminar was to investigate the relationship between recent philosophical work, and recent work in developmental psychology. The course had 20 students, all first years, and met twice a week to read and talk about papers in philosophy and in developmental psychology, based around Alison Gopnik's recent book *The Philosophical Baby*. The two fields turn out to have a lot of interests in common. In particular, our course looked at debates about causation, about the nature of mind, and about value, where the fields overlap.

In all of these fields, there is the potential for healthy influence in both directions between philosophers and developmental psychologists. This is already showing up in the literature on causation. Philosophical work on causation has been influencing what kind of experiments are run to see when young children will make causal inferences. And, although there is less literature on this, these experiments should influence how philosophers think about the concept of a cause.

It turns out that very young children don't equate causation with correlation. They are remarkably good at tracking correlations, better than most adults who tried to consciously track correlations would be. But they know that not all correlations are causal. In particular, they know that if a correlation is screened off by a salient variable, that correlation will not be causal. Working through these experiments was illuminating about the nature of young minds, and useful to thinking through what a plausible regularity theory of causation must look like.

The work on the nature of mind, and in particular on mind-reading, was the most fascinating part of the course. Until the mid-2000s, developmental psychologists thought that children only understood that people could have false beliefs at around 42 months. One possible explanation of that is that humans have a special purpose 'mind reading' module that only develops at around that age. But a flood of recent data has suggested that children understand that people have false beliefs at much younger ages, perhaps as young as 12–15 months. If that's right, it's more plausible to think that mind reading is a function of general intelligence, rather than a late blooming dedicated module. It was exciting to be working through such cutting edge scientific work, especially work that has such striking ramifications for the way we think about how we understand each other.

The last unit of the course was on ethics, and how young children understand ethical thinking. This, unfortunately, wasn't successful. In part, the problem was that the relevant experimental work was too recent. There are many fascinating studies that are ongoing about how children react to things that cause harm. For instance, experimenters have compared their reactions to creatures that harm balls with and without faces

drawn on them. Harming something with a face is much worse! And they've studied their reaction to creatures that harm things that have previously caused harm. There's some evidence that this makes you better in children's eyes; you're a good vigilante. But the data here is sketchy.

And this was part of the problem. In order to try to keep my students up to date with recent work, we ended the course looking at papers that hadn't appeared, even as pre-prints posted to a researcher's website, when the course started. And that meant we were often scrambling. And I think the fact that many of the experiments about ethics and value concerned much older children than we'd previously looked at, often 4 and 5 year old children, upset the continuity of the course.

I liked teaching the course, but if I did it again there are a couple of things I would do differently. For one thing, I'd have more time to read over the experiments about ethics, and wouldn't be scrambling to assign new pre-prints in week 10 of the course. But more importantly, I think I'd assign fewer philosophy papers. In this course I tried to make the readings balanced between experimental papers from developmental psychologists, and papers by philosophers. But research articles by philosophers don't, I think, work as well in this context. They are often less self-contained, and make a lot more assumptions about the reader, assumptions that are false when the reader is a first year college student. I think it would be better to read the psychology, and teach the philosophy.

One other advantage of this would be that psychology papers work surprisingly well as case studies for critical reasoning style classes. In a typical developmental psychology paper, it's reasonably clear, if one reads at all carefully, what the premises are, and what the desired conclusion is. And it's really valuable to think through whether the premises support the conclusion. Getting the students to think about what the possible explanations for a particular result are, and whether we have sufficient reason to settle on one such explanation, or what further evidence we need to support that explanation, turns out to be really good training in critical thinking. Of course, it's particularly valuable training if the student goes on to work in psychology. But I think a lot of introductory philosophy courses could benefit from working through fun experimental work, and thinking hard about when experimental data supports a theoretical conclusion. This wasn't what I intended the students to get out of the seminar, but it's something I'll try to draw out in any future iteration of the course.



I'm a Believer (Not a Skeptic)

By Jeremy Lent, Graduate Student (with apologies to the Monkees)

Performed in December 2012 for two sections of Phil 232 (Problems of Philosophy)

Verse 1 – I thought skepticism was a problem only in philosophy,
And I took a deep sigh of relief.
But then I started wondering, “Maybe I was wrong,
And maybe I don't have any justified beliefs...”

Chorus – But then I saw my hands:
Now I'm a believer.¹
Not a chance that I could be wrong.
I really know (ooh-hoo):
I'm a believer and a true perceiver after all.

Verse 2 – Someone said that my brain might be in a vat.²
That's when I put on my thinking hat.
After a lot of frustration, I tried inference to the best explanation—
Just like Russell when he thought about his cat...³

Chorus

Verse 3 – I used to think the world was undeniable.
My belief mechanisms were so reliable.⁴
But then doubt was out to get me – that's the way it seemed.
And what if this is all just one big dream?⁵

Extended Chorus

¹In his article “Proof of an External World” (1939), G.E. Moore argues that one can ascertain the existence of objects outside one's own mind by simply holding up one's hands and reasoning as follows: Here is one hand, and here is another. It follows that at least two human hands exist at this moment. Thus, there exist at least two objects outside of my mind. (Moore insists that it is simply common sense that we know that we have hands. To deny this knowledge, Moore says, would be absurd.)

²The “brain in a vat” scenario, popularized by John Pollock (“A Brain in a Vat,” 1986), is a modern update of Descartes's “evil demon” thought experiment. Pollock asks us to imagine that a team of neurosurgeons has been abducting people from their bedrooms, bringing them to a secret laboratory, removing their brains, and connecting the brains to computer monitors that simulate all normal sensory experience, as though nothing unusual had happened. (Any memory of the abduction is removed, so that it seems to these people that they wake up in their bedrooms the next morning, bodies fully intact.) Pollock implicitly asks how we can know that such a fate has not befallen us.

³In his book *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), Bertrand Russell asks how he can know that his cat is an independently existing object, and not merely a collection of his mind's sensory impressions. He proposes that the continued existence of his cat, even when unobserved, is the best explanation for him having impressions as of a cat at one end of the room, at then later at the other end. That is, it is simplest to suppose that the cat occupied intermediate positions, moving from one point to another. It follows from this supposition, Russell notes, that the cat cannot merely be a collection of his sensory impressions, since his sensory impressions do not exist when he is not experiencing them.

⁴Within epistemology, reliabilists maintain that a belief is justified so long as it is produced by a belief mechanism that is “reliable,” or that produces true beliefs sufficiently more often than false ones. For instance, using our visual perceptions to form beliefs about medium-size physical objects in our vicinity is presumably a reliable mechanism, whereas using horoscopes to form beliefs about our upcoming day's trajectory may not be.

⁵Beginning with Descartes, many epistemologists have wondered how we can know that we are actually doing the things we seem to be doing, rather than merely having very detailed and sequential dreams.



The Truman Show

By Nils-Hennes Stear, Graduate Student

Last March the Philosophy Department screened *The Truman Show* at the Michigan Theater. The film depicts Truman Burbank, the unwitting star of a reality TV show, every facet of whose life is broadcast to a worldwide audience of millions. Truman is completely oblivious to the fact that he lives in “the world’s largest television studio,” an entirely artificial “town” called ‘Seahaven’ that is decked out with cameras, populated solely by actors, and whose every minute detail, including the weather, is determined from on high by the show’s director, Christof. The screening attracted around 100 viewers who were treated (subjected?) to post-movie talks by Dmitri Gallow and me on the film’s philosophical themes.

I discussed two themes. First, I explored ways in which Truman’s false world resembles skeptical scenarios familiar from philosophical thought-experiments. Second, I examined some of the ethical lessons *The Truman Show* offers up, particularly in connection with the ways Truman’s world *differs* from those conjured by philosophical skeptics.

For the purposes of motivating universal epistemic skepticism, it’s important that traditional skeptical worlds be flawless in their evidential deviance; the Evil Demon, or the brain-in-a-vat scientist, must never tip their hand. Seahaven is in this respect unlike the worlds of other skeptical hypotheses. For one thing, Seahaven is *real* and authentic at some substantive level of description; a Seahaven-bicycle really is a bicycle, for instance, in a way that a brain-in-vat bicycle isn’t. But more interestingly, the illusion presented to Truman is imperfectly sustained. In one scene, a studio-light falls from Seahaven’s vast canopy, crashing around Truman’s feet. We see activists and the fame-hungry break into Seahaven to tell Truman his world is a sham, only to be dragged away by security. In another scene, Truman catches sight of an actor who stands unnaturally still while waiting for his cue. Noticing Truman’s gaze, the actor awkwardly begins to walk so as not to arouse Truman’s suspicion. By the end of the film, Truman finally questions the veracity of his world. But Truman’s blithe demeanour at the film’s beginning makes clear that his doubts come after some thirty years of uncritical acceptance.

The film is rich with questions. One that particularly fascinates me is this: to what extent is Truman *complicit* in his own ignorance? I find this facet of Truman’s situation – rather than more general worries about his epistemic state – most challenging about the film. In part, this is because I think Truman *is* culpable to some extent for his ignorance. Moreover, I think his culpability is ours.

During my discussion, I asked the audience how many knew the Central African Republic had undergone a coup earlier that week; the number of detainees still held at Guantanamo despite

being cleared for release (it’s currently 84); the number of children killed by US drone strikes (best estimates put the figure at around 200 for CIA drones in Pakistan alone). For each question, three or four people raised a hand. I then asked how many knew what the most current model of the iPhone was. Over half the audience volunteered a hand. The purpose of these questions – besides sadistically trying to make the audience feel bad, of course – was to bring out the way many of us (and I include myself here) couple an impressive repertoire of trivial knowledge with a worrying ignorance of much more significant subjects. *The Truman Show* functions in part, I think, as a metaphor for the ways in which members of affluent societies, like ours, remain culpably ignorant.

In one scene in the film, an interviewer asks Christof, the show’s director, why Truman has never questioned the authenticity of his world before. Christof gives a simple answer: “we accept the reality with which we’re presented.” But I think there’s more to the story than that. Truman doesn’t accept his world merely because it’s all that’s presented to him. I think he accepts it in part because it has *seduced* him. Seahaven is a thoroughly pleasant place, in a stilted, American-suburbia-of-the-1950s kind of way. The weather’s always clement; immaculate picket fences envelope manicured lawns; Truman enjoys a cozy desk job, a fact his vending-machine-stacking “friend,” Marlon enviously points out to him. His life is steeped in modest luxury. He lives in an idyllic suburban home with a doting wife pulled straight from a 1950s catalogue, his world reassuringly commodified by ubiquitous name-brand products. My suggestion is that this comfortable, luxurious existence insulates Truman (*literally*, since Seahaven is an island) from the harsh realities of the world – the literally *outside* world.

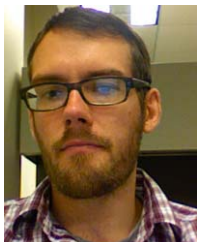
I think that widespread ignorance about important world affairs among affluent, educated people calls out for an explanation. And through the clever metaphor of a thoroughly ignorant man trapped in a life of ease, *The Truman Show* offers the germ of an answer. Condensed into a rhetorical question it is this: why worry about the Central African Republic, when I have my iPhone?

RECENT GRADUATES



Nathaniel Coleman defended his dissertation – *The Duty to Miscegenate: From Sexual Racism to Cross-Caste Companionship* – under the supervision of Elizabeth Anderson. In his dissertation, Nathaniel harnesses John Stuart Mill’s 19th century theory of social freedom to

explain and to dismantle contemporary racialised and gendered injustice. Nathaniel has accepted a postdoctoral fellowship at University College, London.



William Dunaway defended his dissertation – *Realism and Fundamentality in Ethics and Elsewhere* – under the supervision of Allan Gibbard. In his dissertation, William examines how the notion of metaphysical fundamentality can contribute to several outstanding problems in metaethics and elsewhere. William has accepted a postdoctoral fellowship at Oxford.



Jason Konek defended his dissertation – *New Foundations of Imprecise Bayesianism* – under the supervision of James Joyce. In his dissertation, Jason examines two kinds of statistical tools for taking prior information into account and investigates what reasons we have for using one or the other in different sorts of inference and decision problems. Jason has accepted a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Bristol.



Alex Silk defended his dissertation – *What Normative Terms Mean and Why It Matters for Ethical Theory* – under the supervision of Allan Gibbard and Peter Railton. Alex's dissertation is a study in how inquiry into the meaning of normative language can illuminate classic questions in ethics and metaethics. Alex has accepted a tenure track position at the University of Birmingham.



Daniel Peterson defended his dissertation – *Prospects for a New Account of Time Reversal* – under the supervision of Gordon Belot. In his dissertation, Daniel argues that to understand how time reversal transforms physical states, we should seek symmetry transformations that meet minimal criteria of time reversal-hood under which all of the fundamental physical laws are invariant. Daniel is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Berry College.

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