

University of Minnesota Duluth Department of Philosophy Presents The Dialogue

Spring 2016, Volume 2

Welcome

Welcome to the second volume of *The Dialogue*, the annual newsletter from the UMD Philosophy Department! This volume of *The Dialogue* profiles of some of our current students, passes along some fun facts about UMD Philosophy, contains an update from the Department Head, profiles of some of our faculty (both past and present), and concludes with a couple of fun Philosophical puzzles.

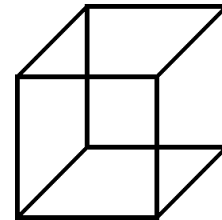
Enjoy!

—Jason Ford, Department Head

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—Terry, Executive Office Administrative Specialist

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Student Profiles

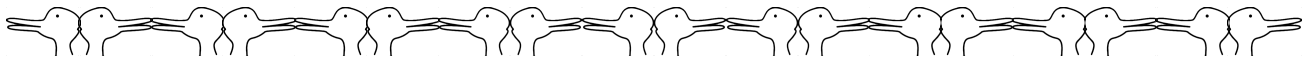
“I think I’ve always known I would major in philosophy -- but I also had a lot of hesitations. When I pictured myself in college, I imagined sitting under a large tree surrounded by books, thinking deeply. But that’s not what happened. I first went to a community college and took a few philosophy classes because they sounded interesting, not because I was intentionally seeking them out. It wasn’t until taking logic, though, that my life changed. I was always decent at math but never got good grades (doing homework wasn’t my forte) and I always questioned math (*why* does $2+2=4$? Isn’t that arbitrary? Couldn’t we just as easily say $2+2=5$? Are numbers even *real*?... Yeah, I should have known I’d choose philosophy). Anyway, logic was the first time math made sense to me. Using symbols to convey arguments, what a concept! Still, when I came to UMD I didn’t instantly choose philosophy as a major. I was intimidated by what I assumed would be



Aprill Emig

an argumentative environment; I've never been a fan of confrontation. Eventually I gained more confidence in my perspective and knew my feminist background would be an asset in the classroom. I was ready for the challenge of philosophy. There have been moments where I've doubted my abilities, but those are the times I've grown the most. Philosophy has given me the skills to think critically about issues and see all sides of a story. I know people say humanities degrees are useless, but the mental stimulation and challenge is exactly why I came to college. If I could do it all again, I'd still choose philosophy."

—Aprill Emig is a Philosophy and Women Studies double-major and the managing editor at the UMD Statesman. She recently completed an Honors Thesis in Philosophy titled "The Devil or the Corpus Callosum: A Genealogy and Critique of Transphobia in Radical Feminist Ideology". She is also wrapping up a UROP (a paid undergraduate research project) titled "How TERFs Expose the Singularity of the Internet and Real Life".



Adrian Quilling

"In Philosophy, different from all other Liberal Arts majors that I've encountered, you learn how and why you are acquiring the knowledge you have, and if that is actually good knowledge to have. It starts as a freshman when you begin working through Descartes and cover theory of knowledge ideas within the field of epistemology. I have taken a decent breadth of courses throughout my college career. I began with an Aerospace Studies minor, fulfilled my liberal education requirements and am now a double minor in International Studies and Political Science. In all other fields of study I've undergone throughout my time here, there has been a simple regurgitation of facts. You memorize something, and rewrite it on the test. In Philosophy you learn concepts, ideas, not facts. So to take a test, you must actually apply your knowledge in any course beyond the introductory level. I have on many occasions witnessed professors from other fields commit large flaws in reasoning even in their own fields of specialty. But nothing slips past my Philosophy professors. Even in idle conversation I get called out all the time on unknown fallacies."

—Adrian Quilling is Philosophy Major and an International Studies and Political Science minor. He is the Assistant to the Director of UMD's Kirby Student Center, he has founded multiple student-run clubs, he's the Student Coordinator for UMD's summer advising and registration program, he's been a teaching assistant on two separate occasions, he serves as an alcohol peer educator for UMD, and he spent two years in the Air Force ROTC program.

Fun Facts! Did You Know That...

- UMD Philosophy students can gain college credit by serving as teaching assistants for lower-level Philosophy classes! (Eight UMD students took advantage of this opportunity during the 2015-2016 academic year.)
- Two UMD Philosophy students are currently serving (and getting paid) as research assistants in a project that involves creating a database of slurs!
- Two UMD students are currently serving as assistants for the Center of Ethics and Public Policy!
- Dr. Jeanine Schroer won the College of Liberal Arts Teaching Award for 2015-16! (Jeanine won the University's Outstanding Advisor Award the previous year.)
- Our newest faculty member, Alexis Elder, plays the fiddle!
- The Philosophy Department has an unofficial mascot: "Phil", a giant sock monkey!
- Dr. Shane Courtland won the Chancellor's Service Award for 2015-16!
- Bridget Park, the department administrator, recently completed her Masters in Education!
- Dr. Eve Rabinoff and Dr. Sean Walsh have both been selected to attend 2016 Summer Seminar Programs sponsored by National Endowment for the Humanities!
- Over the last year or so, the Philosophy Department has offered Special Topics courses on the Emotions and the Nature of Storytelling! (Thank you Dr. Saint!)



Congratulations to our award winning students!

- This year's Ehlers' Scholarship winner is Annika Josephson! (Last year's winner was Clint Glenn.) This year's Ehlers' Book Award winners are John Sudduth and Frank Swanson! (Last year's Book Award winners were P.J. Ebensteiner and Erica Ronning.) MacKenzie Malloy won the Center's best student paper prize last year! And the Philosophy Department student office worker—Jessa Warner—was nominated for Student Worker of the Year!



Clint Glenn



P.J. Ebensteiner



MacKenzie Malloy



Jessa Warner

Department Report for 2015-2016

The 2015-2016 year was another busy one for the department. We've had some big changes:

- Shane Courtland is leaving UMD to take up a position as the director of the Center for Free Enterprise at the University of West Virginia.
- Michelle Saint and Gerald Marsh are leaving the department.
- We will be welcoming our new colleague Alexis Elder in the Fall of 2016.

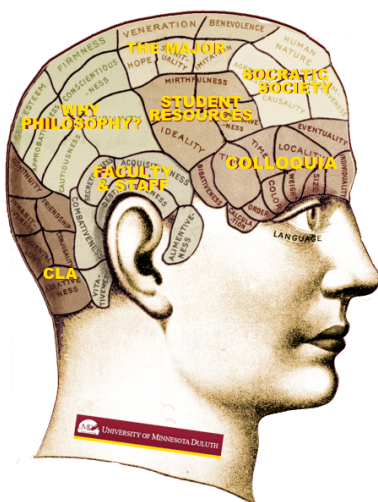
The current faculty members of the department are: Jason Ford, Jeanine Schroer, Robert Schroer, Eve Rabinoff and Sean Walsh, with Alexis Elder joining us in the Fall. (To learn more about Alexis, see the next section of the newsletter!)

In its 3rd year, the Cognitive Science Minor continues to grow, we now have over 37 students enrolled in it. The Philosophy Major currently has 48 enrolled students and the Philosophy Minor has 59 students in it.

We are happy to announce that Eve Rabinoff's manuscript, *Perception in Aristotle's Ethics*, has been accepted for publication at Northwestern University Press!

We are continuing to explore the opportunities for the creation of an interdisciplinary Religion Studies Minor program, and we are working on a new Ethics Minor.

—Jason Ford, Department Head



Q: How many Analytic Philosophers does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None - it's a pseudo-problem. Light bulbs give off light (hence the name) So if the bulb was broken and wasn't giving off light, it wouldn't be a 'light bulb' now would it?

Faculty Profiles

Meet the newest member of the UMD Philosophy faculty: Alexis Elder!

Greetings!

I spend a lot of my time thinking about the nature and value of close-knit social groups, and how emerging technologies affect our relationships. This includes questions like: If you were perfectly rational, would you be friends with anyone who shared enough similarities to your closest friend? Should we provide robot ‘friends’ to lonely senior citizens? And, how close and meaningful can relationships be if they’re conducted exclusively online? (My presumptive answer: more than you might think!) My approach brings together historical figures like Aristotle and the Daoist sages with contemporary theories in metaphysics, social ontology, and philosophy of technology.

My own close-knit social group consists, in part, of two dogs, three chickens, three cats, two goldfish, and a husband. An avid fan of the outdoors, I am thrilled to be moving to Duluth, where I look forward to hiking, biking, running, kayaking, and anything else that keeps me moving. When indoors, I love to cook, knit, and play board games and the fiddle.



Alexis Elder

—Alexis received her PhD from the University of Connecticut in 2013. She has published on such diverse topics as friendship, metaphysics, consciousness, and the various impacts that technological advances have on our lives. Alexis will begin teaching at UMD fall 2016.

An engineer, a scientist, a mathematician, and a philosopher are hiking through the hills of Scotland, when they see a lone black sheep in a field. The engineer says, "What do you know, it looks like the sheep around here are black." The scientist looks at him skeptically and replies, "Well, at least some of them are." The mathematician considers this for a moment and replies, "Well, at least one of them is." Then the philosopher turns to them and says, "Well, at least on one side."



Former UMD Philosophy faculty: Where are they now?

The Eve Browning edition.

If you were a student who studied Philosophy at UMD over the past 30 years, there's a good chance that you met Dr. Eve Browning. Eve left UMD in 2014 to become department chair of Philosophy & Classics at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She really misses UMD colleagues, students, and many Duluth friends. She reports that Texas is another planet and has its quirky ways, but some of them are very dear. For example, one day leaving campus she passed a total stranger sitting on a bench, and that person called out, "You have a nice evening now! It might rain, so be careful out there." Texas rains are more like the Biblical deluge than what we might consider rain in Minnesota.

Eve's horse John took some months to adjust to Texas heat but is now his old comical self. Eve send best wishes to all UMD Philosophy alumni and friends.

Eve is working on a book on Xenophon as a soldier/philosopher, presenting a paper about Aristotle on anger at a conference in Athens this summer (Aristotle's 2400-th birthday is this year), and a summer project on the ethics of political torture. Contact her at eve.browning@utsa.edu



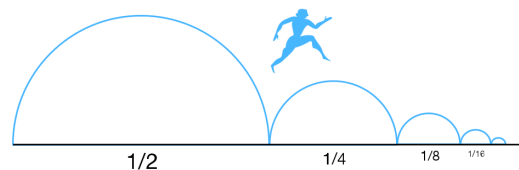
Eve Browning and John the Horse

—Eve Browning arrived at UMD Philosophy in 1984. She was a cornerstone of the Department for several decades, serving as Department Head multiple times. While at UMD, she also directed the Honors College and served a term as Associate Dean for the College of Liberal Arts.

"A horse is a thing of beauty... none will tire of looking at him as long as he displays himself in his splendor." —Xenophon

A Philosophical Puzzle (or two)

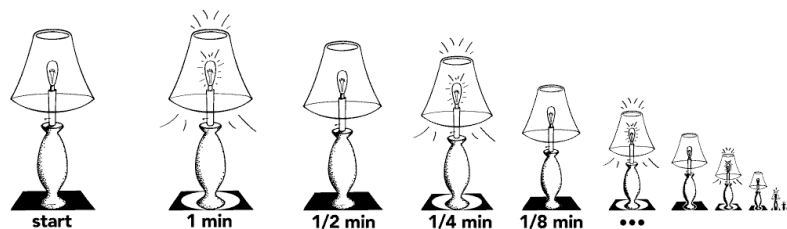
If you've studied Philosophy, you've probably encountered a version of Zeno's Dichotomy Paradox. It goes like this: In order to travel a finite distance—say 10 feet—I must first travel $1/2$ of that distance (5 feet). Then I must travel $1/2$ of the remaining distance (2.5 feet). Then, after that, I must travel $1/2$ of the remaining distance (1.25 feet). And so on. Assuming that a finite distance in space is *infinitely divisible*, it seems that I need to execute an infinite number of tasks before I can reach the 10 foot mark! What's worse, assuming that each of these tasks takes at least some finite amount of time to accomplish, it appears that it will take an infinite amount of time to complete my journey! IN SHORT, I'LL DIE OF OLD AGE BEFORE I REACH THE 10 FOOT MARK!!!



Various solutions to Zeno's paradox have been proposed. Rather than talk about any of those, however, I'd like to introduce you to a new paradox that is inspired by Zeno's Dichotomy. This paradox involves what's known as a "supertask" and was created by J.F. Thompson in 1954.

THOMPSON'S LAMP

A mad scientist owns a desk lamp. It begins in the toggled on position. The scientist toggles the lamp off after one minute, then on after another half-minute. After a quarter-minute the lamp is toggled off, then the scientist waits an eighth-minute and turns the lamp on again. The scientist continues toggling the lamp, waiting one-half of the previously waited time between toggles. **After a total sum of two minutes of toggling, what is the state of the lamp: on or off?**



Given that a finite stretch of time (2 minutes) is *infinitely divisible*, it seems that in principle **there will always enough time for another flip of the switch before reaching the 2 minute mark**. But we know that after the 2 minute mark, the lamp must either be on or off. **How can the light be in a settled state after 2 minutes—either on or off—if there is no final flip of switch prior to its entering that state?!?!?**