

# University of Minnesota Duluth Department of Philosophy Presents The Dialogue

Fall 2019, Volume 4

## Welcome!

Welcome to the fourth volume of *The Dialogue*, the annual newsletter of the UMD Philosophy Program! In this volume of *The Dialogue*, we introduce our new Cognitive Science Major, not one but TWO new faculty, pass along some fun facts about what UMD Philosophy folks have been up to, hear about some awesome things our students have done, and conclude with a couple of fun philosophical jokes and a puzzle.

Enjoy!

—Alexis Elder, Assistant Professor

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—Bridget Park, Executive Office Administrative Specialist

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## New Faces in Philosophy!

*We are delighted to welcome two new faculty members this fall! Say hello when you see them, and check out their courses and research!*

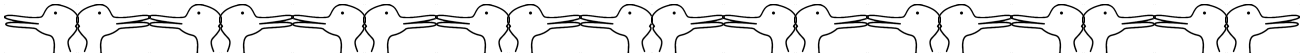
Here's what **Dr. Caroline Christoff** has to say about herself: "I'm interested in questions of care ethics and disability. Specifically, I'm interested in trying to answer the exhausting questions of 'why should we care?', 'when should we care?', and 'how much should we care?'. I consider both how we ought to care for others as well as whether we have an obligation to care about things like homework. I also try to use the concept of ethical caring to inform how we treat people with disabilities. I consider the ways



**Dr. Caroline Christoff**

having a disability makes somebody similar to or different from somebody without a disability, and examine how these similarities and differences can impact how we treat each other. The practical goal of my work is to improve the environment for individuals with disabilities, especially (but not exclusively) in academia.

Outside of philosophy, I spend a lot of time swimming and ice skating. I'm very excited to be moving to a city that enjoys hockey as much as I do. I also have a small dachshund named Emma who follows me everywhere I go. Her favorite activities include napping on my lap and staying underfoot while I'm baking so she can eat any dropped batter."



**Dr. Laura Engel**

And here is what **Dr. Laura Engel** has to say: "As a Minnesota native, I'm thrilled to be joining the UMD philosophy department! My philosophical interests include the nature of value (questions like: What does it mean to value something? Do we create values? Can we be wrong about what we find valuable? How do we know whether the statement "X has a reason to Y" is true?), structural injustice (Can people be wronged without a particular person or policy being responsible? What are our responsibilities in these cases?), and global ethics, to name a few. I look forward to exploring these questions with you all!

Outside of the classroom, I spend a lot of time baking, practicing aerial dance (aerial silks are my apparatus of choice), playing board games, hiking, and spending time with my fiancé and our two cats. In fact, I do some of my best philosophical thinking during these activities. I've always loved the fall, so I'm particularly looking forward to experiencing the fall colors along the North Shore."

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## It's Alive!!!

The new Cognitive Science major went live in Spring 2019! Students can now earn a degree in Cognitive Science by taking a combination of courses from participating academic programs, including Philosophy, Linguistics, Computer Science, Psychology, Communication Sciences and Disorders, and Neuroscience, plus Introduction to Cognitive Science and the new Cognitive Science Seminar, COG 4900! Two students have already graduated with a major in Cognitive Science, and at least 10 more are enrolled as majors.



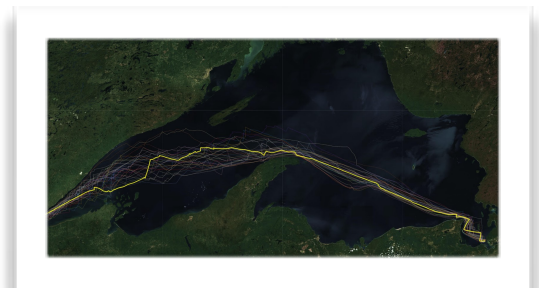
Image source: [www.modup.net](http://www.modup.net)

# Fun Facts! Did You Know That...

- Eve Rabinoff has moved on to the University of Kentucky. We miss her, but wish her all the best!
- Dr. Jeanine Weekes Schroer is the new Chair of the Philosophy Program!
- Jeanine is also the new chair of the board of directors for PAVSA!
- Furthermore, she is co-editing a book on philosophy and microaggressions!
- Bob and Jeanine published a paper together on psychology and moral responsibility, in the journal *Philosophical Psychology*!
- Bob Schroer taught an Honors class on space and time, and reports that it was great fun!
- Bob published a paper, “Conceivability arguments, properties, and powers: A new defense of dispositionalism” in the *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*
- Bob sailed in the 2019 Trans-Superior Race (from approximately Sault Ste. Marie, MI to Duluth), racing solo for the first time, and won the First-Time Single-Handed category!
- Alexis Elder taught the Philosophy Senior Seminar last year on robot ethics!
- Alexis published a paper on chatbots imitating the dead, in the *Journal of Applied Philosophy*!
- And she traveled to Poland to give a talk at ETHICOMP. While there she visited the largest castle in the world measured by land area: Malbork!
- Jason Ford has been promoted to Interim Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts!
- Jason presented a talk titled “Time and the Gorilla” to the Science of Consciousness Conference in Interlaken, Switzerland!
- Sean gave a talk titled “Ethics of Perpetrator Risk” at the Eastern APA!
- Sean’s son Kyler can now sing “You Are My Sunshine”!
- Bridget Park has returned as Philosophy’s Executive Administrative Specialist! Her office is 324 Cina Hall.
- Kelly MacPhail and his wife, Paula Derdiger, are proud parents! Their son Owen was born on Valentine’s Day!



**Bob Schroer with his Trans-Superior Race trophy**



**Tweety's race route!**

# Student Achievements!



This year's Ehlers' Scholarship winners are Jack Broughten, Aurora Schuety, and Seth Trussell!

Angelica Fleury won the Center for Ethics and Public Policy's best student paper prize!

Aleksander Holleran successfully defended his Honors Thesis, "Are We Patient-Centered Yet? A phenomenological assessment of the patient-centered medicine movement", graduating with departmental honors!

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Philosophy major (and double major in Computer Science)  
Angelica Fleury has had a busy year!

Angelica presented her research on Buddhist AI ethics at the UROP showcase this spring before taking her work on the road, giving a talk at IACAP, the International Association of Computing and Philosophy's annual conference in Mexico City! From there, she traveled to Pennsylvania to participate in the Rock Ethics Institute's PIKSI (Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute) program!

We asked her about her experiences. She says, "I learned (and am currently learning) how to do Philosophy outside of a classroom setting which has been immensely valuable. Attending conferences and programs such as IACAP and PIKSI has been eye-opening because I had gotten to participate in and learn about various current topics of interests in different sub-fields of Philosophy that may not have been covered in the curriculum."

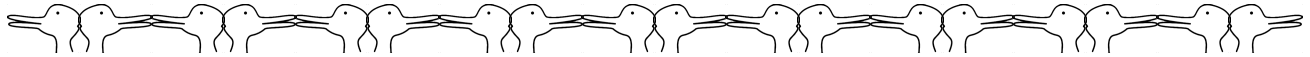
We also asked her for advice for other students about pursuing extracurricular philosophy: "My advice would be to consider being open to exploring different philosophical interests. Even if you have a main area of focus you're interested in, you may be surprised in how other schools of thought are interconnected. Also if possible, I would urge other students to seek out faculty mentors whose interests and works align with yours since often times, they have been in your shoes and have valuable information and advice for your academic journey. Lastly if you're able, to be proactive and



**Angelica with Philosophy Program robot "Vector"**

making the time for applying to programs and extra-curricular activities that you would want to be involved in.”

About her double major, she says, “Adding Philosophy as a second major to Computer Science has been helpful in giving me insight on how the two overlap— specifically in areas such as Ethics, Epistemology and Logic. In addition, Philosophy in particular has been beneficial in teaching me how to think abstractly and critically through dissecting and constructing arguments, which is a bit different from what I learn in my CS coursework, but has only been complementary.”



**Elijah Farley**

This spring’s Commencement for the CLA and SCSE ceremony featured graduating Philosophy major Elijah Farley! Elijah represented both colleges, with dual majors in Philosophy and Chemistry. A former president of the Chemistry and Biochemistry Club and an active member of the Queer and Allied Student Union (QASU), he won the 2018 Best Initiative award from QASU for his presentation on “Queer People in Science”.

We asked Elijah about his experience with Philosophy, starting with how he came to major in it: “It was mostly serendipity, I took one philosophy class, then another, then another and suddenly I found myself loving it enough to double major.” When asked what he considers important about his experience in the major, he replied, “I learned how little I really knew and understood about philosophy. The more you learn, the more you realize the foundations that your knowledge is built on can be broken down themselves.”

Asked for advice for other philosophy students, he says, “My advice is to take a step back and just let yourself be. You don't have to prove that you're the smartest, or that you know more about a subject than someone else, because the point of discussions are to gain knowledge as much as they are to share knowledge.”

About his double major, he says, “I’m glad I did a double major, because I don't think I would have had as much fun in my other classes without being able to apply different areas of knowledge to each other. For example, science is like anything else, you can apply different optics to something as rigid as chemistry.”



# A Joke, A Philosophical Puzzle & One More Philosophy Joke

Three philosophers walk into a bar. The bartender asks the first person, "would the three of you like a beer? " The first philosopher says, "I don't know" . The bartender asks the second person the same question, and again the answer is "I do not know". The bartender asks the third one, "would the three of you like a beer?" This third philosopher says, "Yes".

## THE TAXI COMPANY PUZZLE

A logician wants to take a cab to the university to attend a logic talk. But she wants to be sure she goes with the most logical choice of cab company. There are two in town: the Blue taxi company, and the Green one. So she takes a look at their safety records.

It's widely known that these two are the only cab companies in the city: The Green one has 17 cabs in service, the Blue one just 3. A cab has recently been involved in a hit-and-run accident, and an eyewitness has identified the vehicle in question as belonging to the Blue cab company. The logician knows eyewitnesses are, on average, accurate 80% of the time, and misreport 20% of the time.



What are the odds that the cab involved in the accident was actually Blue, as reported?

**HINT:** This is a form of logic puzzle that often trips people up, in real life as well as in thought experiments, because we tend to forget about earlier evidence when estimating probabilities and just focus on the last piece of data. So the answer is NOT 80%.

...If you're still stuck, try working out the odds that a witness IDs a taxi as Blue even if there are NO Blue cabs on the road!

# SHERLOCK HOLMES GOES CAMPING

In the middle of the night, Holmes nudges Watson awake, and says, "Watson, look up and tell me what you see."

"I see millions of stars, my dear Holmes."

"And what do you infer from these stars?"

"Well, a number of things," he says, lighting his pipe:

"Astronomically, I observe that there are millions of galaxies and billions of stars and planets.

Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo.

Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three.

Meteorologically, I expect that the weather will be fine and clear.

Theologically, I see that God is all-powerful, and man, his creation, small and insignificant.

What about you, Holmes?"

"Watson, you fool. Someone has stolen our tent!"

