Dear Friends,

The Philosophy Department continues to be an active place at Virginia Tech. Last spring’s Department Conference, organized by Walter Ott, brought a dozen scholars of Modern Philosophy to campus to discuss “Meaning and Modern Empiricism.” We started off the school year once again with a department outing to the Floyd Friday-night Bluegrass Jamboree. A good time was had by all. In November, our Graduate Conference focused on the topic of “Twentieth Century Ethics,” with a keynote address by Simon Blackburn. We also used this conference as a chance to connect with faculty and students from three universities in the region with especially diverse student bodies. We will be continuing and expanding those connections next year, as we just learned we were awarded a new grant along those lines. This spring we are hosting two PhD students from the London School of Economics in connection with a seminar and mini-conference by Deborah Mayo. This expands on connections she made while lecturing there in the fall, and will lead to a series of two conferences, one in England in June, and another here at VT next spring.

The department has gone through some losses and some gains. Mark Gifford took early retirement. Rosa Mayorga left to pursue other options closer to home, in Miami. Brian Epstein will be moving to Boston, where he will teach at Tufts University. With the economy as it is, we will not be able to replace these losses as soon as we would hope. In the meantime, Walter Ott was awarded tenure, and we are happy to secure his presence. In addition, there are three very new additions — Steve Daskal had a baby boy, Jack, who has been a regular and well-behaved presence at department meetings! Phil Olson had a baby girl, Maryn, who has yet to grace us with her presence. And Ashley Shew had a girl, Zora, who sometimes tends the phone in the journal office. The next generation of philosophers is already being trained!

Speaking of training the next generation, we are making some significant changes to our major — cutting down the history requirement, and offering “tracks” in bioethics, and perhaps other areas. We hope this will boost our number of majors. I know some of you may feel cheated — since you had to run the gauntlet of our four history courses, everyone should! But times change. The university is counting numbers more carefully, and we thought we should try out some other possibilities. This emphasis on bioethics also opened an opportunity for us to become involved in molding and teaching parts of the curriculum at the newly forming Virginia Tech-Carilion Medical School. This is truly putting philosophy to work in the world!

Now and then we hear from alumni by e-mail. We always want to know how you are doing. Please send us your e-mail addresses so we can more easily keep up with you (ottw@vt.edu). (And keep us updated on your physical address.)

Finally, in terms of losses, I have to note the passing of Marjorie Grene. Many of you at least passed her office, and if you took my Metaphysics class, you got the opportunity to hear her give a guest lecture. What a presence she was! On May 3rd we are having a Memorial Gathering in her honor. Whether to honor her, or for general use, please consider making a donation to the Virginia Tech Foundation — Philosophy Fund. Every little bit helps!

Thanks for your interest and support.

~Jim Klagge
**In Memoriam**

**Marjorie Glicksman Grene**

Marjorie Grene passed away March 16 at age 98 after a brief illness. Marjorie Glicksman Grene, born Dec. 13, 1910, was an important historian of philosophy, epistemologist, and philosopher of science, especially biology. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in zoology at Wellesley, she studied with such figures as Heidegger, Jaspers, and Whitehead. Her doctorate in philosophy was awarded in 1935 by Radcliffe, since women were not then formally admitted to Harvard. From 1937-1944 she was an instructor at the University of Chicago; from 1944 to 1957 she continued to publish, but her main occupations were raising her family and helping to run a farm, first in the US, then in Ireland. In 1950 she met Michael Polanyi and served as his research assistant (largely by correspondence). Thanks in part to this work, she held temporary positions at the University of Manchester (1957-8) and then at the University of Leeds (1958-60), before becoming a Lecturer in Philosophy at Queens University, Belfast (1960-65). She returned to the US, first as a faculty member, then as Chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of California, Davis, which she built into a major department.

Philosophically, one of the most salient threads in her work is her view of philosophy as a continuous dialogue involving the thought of all major philosophers in the main philosophical traditions, with a strong contextualist twist. She insisted on the necessity of interpreting philosophers both within the context of their own times and places...and from the perspective of one’s own context...” — Richard Burian

Marjorie Grene in her office at Virginia Tech

“...and from the perspective of one’s own context (in which their thought is brought to bear on a new set of problems, highlighted by a different physical, social, technological, and conceptual background). In epistemology, she was firmly anti-Cartesian, insisting that humans are embodied beings whose characteristics are built in interaction with and in reaction to their physical and social environment. She maintains that human beings should be understood in light of their animal lineage. In keeping with her larger philosophical views, she treated biological knowledge as a dialectic involving the history of biology and the shifting problems and technologies encountered in different settings.

Due to her foreshortened career, after her mandatory retirement from UC Davis, Prof. Grene found it financially and intellectually desirable to continue working in academic settings. In 1988, when her daughter Ruth moved from Cornell University to Virginia Tech, Prof. Grene moved from Ithaca, NY to Blacksburg, VA where she was named an Honorary University Distinguished Professor and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy and Science Studies at Virginia Tech. She played a significant role in both of these units for many years, participating in colloquia, tutoring students, and collaborating with various colleagues. She remained intellectually active until about 2005, publishing her last major book, The Philosophy of Biology: An Episodic History, written with David Depew, with Cambridge University Press in 2004.

Marjorie Grene is survived by her daughter Ruth, who is on the Virginia Tech faculty in Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science, her son Nicholas, who is the Professor of English Literature in the School of English, Trinity College, Dublin, his wife Eleanor, six grandchildren, Sophia, Hannah, Jessica, Clement, Nick and Lucy Grene and one great granddaughter, Nazyia Terry.

— Richard Burian

Papers on both coasts have run obituaries:

A memorial gathering will be held on Sunday 3 May, from 4-6pm, in 1100 Torgersen Hall. On that day, the University will fly the state flag at half-staff in her honor.

A Memorial Fund in Marjorie’s honor has been established by the Philosophy Department to sponsor an annual Marjorie Grene Graduate Prize and events that honor her memory. If you wish to contribute, please make checks out to the Virginia Tech Foundation (please refer to fund number 874804 in the memo field) and send to: Marjorie Grene Memorial Fund, University Gift Accounting Office, 902 Prices Fork Rd., Blacksburg, VA, 24061. Marjorie also supported various good causes and would have appreciated contributions to the ACLU (http://www.aclu.org) and to Amnesty International (http://www.amnestyusa.org).
Commencement

Spring 2008 ceremony

At 11:00 a.m. on May 10, Jim Klagge, chair, presided over the Philosophy Department’s graduation ceremony in the atrium of Major Williams. James W. Garrison, Professor in the School of Education and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy, gave the address, entitled “Two Questions about Your Degree in Philosophy.” Walter Ott presented the Williams Prize for undergraduate excellence in philosophy to Patrick Epley. Steve Daskal presided over the hooding ceremony. The following students received degrees:

Bachelor of Arts:
- Al-Haj, Jeremy
- Brennan, Jr., Thomas David
- Brown, David Aaron
- Brzyski, Katherine Jane
- Bunai, Dominique Christabel
- Entsminger, Nathan Brown (Fall 07)
- Epley, Patrick George
- Finn, Jr., Patrick Doherty
- Gibbs, Kelly Elizabeth
- Glaser, Tyler Alexander
- Hogan, Lawton Benjamin Potts
- Kinsey, Jr., David Jonathan
- Koshetar, Paul Wilkes
- Lefevers, David Scott
- Lindsey, Samuel Andrew (Fall 07)
- Loop, Sara Ashley
- O’Brien, Michael Lee (Fall 07)
- Shiner, Nicole Munier
- Smith, Lauren Paige (Posthumously awarded)
- Urban, Justin Thomas (Fall 07)
- Wood, Matthew Michael
- Zoller, Kari Tomlinson

Master of Arts:
- Adams, Nathan Paul
- Crabill, Joshua David
- Harwood, Christopher Kenneth
- Hefflin, Ashley Shew
- Hill, Rodney Harrison
- Inglehart, Ashley Jeanette
- Kenenitz, Gregory
- Reed, Douglass Thomas
- Sommerlatte, Curtis Neil
- Stewart, Robert Brandon
- Wanttaja, Ryan Glen
- Wilson, Richard James
Alumni Notes

Alexis Bozzo (B.A., 2007) was recently accepted to a PhD program at University of Florida. Alexis will be pursuing a Doctorate in Tourism and Recreation with a focus on Ecotourism, with a cognate in Urban Planning.

Adel Ghaderi (B.A., 2007) is finishing his second year in the chemical engineering doctoral program at MIT. Ghaderi writes, “Coming from a materials, theoretical, and chemistry background, I have been surprised at how easily I have been able to incorporate my knowledge (and myself!) into the biotechnology field. I am grateful to my background as, every day, it gives rise to new ideas, applications, and approaches. As my thesis work and career progress, I look forward to being able to integrate all of my knowledge and experience in order to generate new technologies we can all make use of.”

Stanley Hassinger (M.A., 07) writes, “After graduating from VT in 2007, I married Allison on May 19 and we took a trip to the Mediterranean. In the Fall of 2007 I started medical school at UNC. I am now nearing the end of my second year and very much looking forward to being in the hospital full time starting my third year. I do not know what kind of doctor I want to be, but among the top choices at this point are general/trauma surgeon, family physician, pediatric internist, and emergency medicine physician. So far medical school is going well; it’s hard work but I’m enjoying it. I’ve been able to stay a little involved with philosophy, too. This past summer I got a research grant to investigate the ethics of pre-implantation genetic diagnosis of embryos and this semester I’m taking a course called Justice in the Allocation of Health Care Resources. Overall, I’m really happy and excited to be doing what I’m doing.”

Douglas Reed (M.A., 08) is a first-year PhD. candidate at the University of Virginia. His main area of research is ancient philosophy, particularly the Platonic dialogues. He is currently working on a paper in Plato’s epistemology.

Nicole Shiner (B.A., ’08) began working in February in Ghana and Mali with the Millennium Villages (http://www.millenniumvillages.org/). The Millennium Villages project focuses on infrastructure, agriculture, education and healthcare. Nicole’s work in the field began in the Ghanaian village, Bonsasso. She spent two weeks there before going to Accra, where she is working with a team that is looking at expanding the Village model to the regional level in Mali. Her job will be to price different agricultural products and to help determine what mix of crops would be most beneficial to the people of Mali’s poorest regions.

By April, Nicole says she had become “quite acclimated to Ghanaian culture-- I no longer have any qualms about eating with my hands, and in fact have found myself frustrated when those I dine with choose to use utensils and I feel I must follow suit. It used to bother me seeing the sheep that would be tomorrow’s lunch wandering around the outdoor restaurant where we take our lunch; now this seems completely natural. I am no longer bothered by calls from friends I have met once or twice at 6 am to wish me a good day, and in fact have come to treasure them. Multiple times each day, I realize that I have done something without a thought that would have seemed completely unnatural before I came to Ghana.”

“I know that I will change and grow in Ghana, and I know I will have a largely different world view coming out of it…”

Nicole Shiner

Most recently, Nicole was stricken with malaria. “The disease set in on Sunday night at about midnight. It started with severe muscle aches. Following in quick succession were symptoms equivalent to food poisoning, combined with a severe flu. At first I blamed the symptoms on the lunch of street food that I had eaten earlier that day. But by 6 am I was on my way to the hospital, having had only a few brief hours of sleep, and I was completely exhausted. By that point I found it difficult to sit up as the doctor interviewed me. The hospital I went to was very good; the staff was helpful and gentle.” Nicole is now home from the hospital and feeling better. We wish her a speedy recovery! Φ
Conferences

Graduate student conference and diversity initiative

This year’s graduate conference, entitled “Twentieth Century Ethics,” featured Simon Blackburn of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and Cambridge. Professor Blackburn’s ‘quasi-realism’ has been an influential — and of course, controversial — position in meta-ethics, as well as metaphysics and epistemology. The conference attracted a wide array of graduate student presenters from across the country. Each talk led to a spirited discussion (as one might expect of philosophers).

In connection with the conference, the Department sponsored a special recruitment effort aimed at increasing the diversity of our graduate student body. Professors Benjamin Arah of Bowie State University, as well as Professors Michelle Darnell and Joseph Osei of Fayetteville State University, attended, along with a dozen of their students. Other students, from Radford and Howard University, were also present. In addition to participating in the conference, they attended a specially organized recruitment lunch, along with several Tech faculty and students.

Meaning and Modern Empiricism conference

Drawing participants from as far away as Finland, the Department’s Spring 2008 conference was held the weekend of April 11 at Hawthorn Suites in Blacksburg. Entitled “Meaning and Modern Empiricism,” the conference focused on issues of language and representation, from Hobbes to Hume. Yale’s Kenneth P. Winkler, one of the best known Berkeley scholars in the world, gave the keynote address, “Signification, Intention, Projection.” This was well received, even though it in part critiqued the views of the conference organizer, Walter Ott. Other papers ranged from Sellars’ critique of Hume to memory and universality in Hobbes. We were pleased to host such established figures as Margaret Atherton (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) and Doug Jesseph (North Carolina State University), in addition to a number of junior scholars from around the world.

The conference was funded by the Departments of Philosophy, Interdisciplinary Studies, Mathematics, and Psychology, with a generous grant from the Marchette Foundation. Vital funding also came from the Virginia Tech Foundation, and we thank those alumni and friends of the Department who contributed to this fund. Proceedings will appear in *Philosophia*.

Philosophy at Tech on Facebook

Want to meet up with other philosophers, VT philosophy alumni, and people with an interest in philosophy at VT?

The VT Philosophy Department Facebook group is up and running: http://www.facebook.com/groups.php#group.php?gid=78145381226

Click on the link, send us a request to join the group, and you can see pictures of our annual department trip to Floyd, watch the Monty Python philosophy football game (Germans vs. Greeks), and meet with your philosophy peoples.

If you have questions, email Lydia Patton at critique@vt.edu
Steve Daskal (Assistant Professor) specializes in moral and political philosophy, combining an interest in metaethics with work that addresses concrete political issues such as welfare policy. He has recently published “Plan Based Expressivism and Innocent Mistakes” in Ethics and his papers “Fellow Citizenship and U.S. Welfare Policy” and “Absolute Value as Belief” are forthcoming in International Journal of Applied Philosophy and Philosophical Studies, respectively. He is not teaching during the Spring of ’09 so he can take care of his first child, Jack, born on October 27th.

After five rewarding years with the philosophy department at Virginia Tech, Brian Epstein (Assistant Professor) is leaving us for a new position at the philosophy department at Tufts University. At Virginia Tech this year, Brian has had articles published in Synthese, The Philosophy of the Social Sciences, and the Croatian Journal of Philosophy, and he has presented his work at conferences in the Netherlands, Berkeley, Dubrovnik, Atlanta, and Charlottesville. Brian wants to express his appreciation to the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of the department, who have made the past five years so enjoyable, challenging, and productive. He extends his warmest wishes to everyone affiliated with the department.

William FitzPatrick (Associate Professor) works in ethics and serves as Graduate Program Director. His research and teaching range over the three major branches of ethics: metaethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. He has recently published articles on topics ranging from the foundations of ethics (e.g., “The Practical Turn in Ethical Theory: Korsgaard’s Constructivism, Realism, and the Nature of Normativity,” Ethics, Vol. 115, No. 4), to issues in normative ethical theory (e.g., “The Intend/Foresee Distinction and the Problem of Closeness,” Philosophical Studies Vol. 128, No. 3), to ethical issues surrounding human embryonic stem cell research (e.g., “Surplus Embryos, Non-reproductive Cloning and the Intend/Foresee Distinction,” reprinted in Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine, 7th edition) and global climate change (“Climate Change and the Rights of Future Generations,” Environmental Ethics, Vol. 29, No. 4). Other recent work explores the intersection of evolutionary biology and moral theory (“Morality and Evolutionary Biology,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy), develops and defends non-naturalist ethical realism, and defends claims of moral responsibility against recent skeptical arguments. He is a recipient of the 2008-09 Certificate of Teaching Excellence, and serves as chair of the New River Valley Local Human Rights Committee.

Assistant Professor Simon May works mainly in political philosophy. His present research project concerns conflicts of moral conviction in democratic politics, particularly as they affect the legitimacy and authority of democratic law, norms of public deliberation, the justifiability of public policies, and the moral status of conscientious objection to the law. This spring, his paper “Religious Democracy and the Liberal Principle of Legitimacy” appeared in Philosophy & Public Affairs.

Professor Deborah Mayo’s work is in the epistemology of science and the philosophy of statistical inference. Recent research has involved developing an account of experimental inference in science based upon statistical reasoning and the idea of learning from error. Most recently, she has been involved in a collaboration with the London School of Economics, giving a series of lectures there in the fall of 2008.

Visiting Assistant Professor Phil Olson’s research centers on (and branches out from) problems relating to virtue theory (in ethics and epistemology), rationality, and value theory. His approach to these problems is eudaimonistic and pragmatic, in a Deweyan sense. Olson teaches both in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies and in the Philosophy Department, and he is an ASPECT (http://www.aspect.vt.edu) affiliate. At Virginia Tech, he has taught introductory courses in ethics, metaphysics and epistemology, and ancient Greek culture, as well as advanced courses on ethical theory and philosophy of religion. In 2008–2009, Olson taught a graduate seminar in the Philosophy Department on the topic of virtue epistemology, and a team-taught ASPECT seminar on neo-liberalism. In the fall of 2009, he will teach a graduate seminar on American pragmatism.

Walter Ott (Assistant Professor) works on modern philosophy. In the fall, Oxford University Press, UK, will publish his book, Causation and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy. Laurien Berkeley, copy editor for the Press, objected to an example in the book – involving Mr. Owl’s famous conundrum, “how many licks does it take to get to the Tootsie Roll center of a Tootsie Pop?” – on the grounds that this particular confection (much less its 70s-era marketing campaign) is unknown to British readers. After prevailing in this dispute, Ott shipped her an entire box of Tootsie Roll Tootsie Pops, prompt-
ing Ms. Berkeley to suggest that Oxford offer a free ‘lolly’ with each copy of the book. So far, the Press has not responded to this inspired promotional idea.

Dan Parker (Assistant Professor) specializes in the philosophy of physics. His current research projects involve foundational issues in statistical mechanics such as the reduction of thermodynamics to statistical mechanics and attempts to ground the distinction between past and future in the 2nd law of Thermodynamics. Dan spent the fall of 2008 at the University of Pittsburgh, and the spring of 2009 in France. In April, Dan gave a talk at the Descartes Centre for the History and Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities entitled “Molecular Disorder and Probability.”

Assistant Professor Lydia Patton’s research centers on semantics and pragmatics in science, especially on the use of models in scientific experiment and theory building. Recent work focuses on Heinrich Hertz’s influence on special relativity, the discovery of electromagnetic waves and theory of electromagnetism, and the dialogue between empirical psychology, physiology, and neo-Kantianism in the 19th century. Her paper, “Signs, Toy Models and the A Priori,” is forthcoming in 2010, in Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science. Her article on Hermann von Helmholtz, a 19th century scientist and philosopher, can be found online in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermann-helmholtz/). Patton has recently given talks on “Models of Interactive Effects” at the Models and Simulations conference at University of Virginia on March 8, and at the Integrated History and Philosophy of Science conference at Notre Dame on March 13. She has been invited to visit the Center for Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh for the fall term of 2009.

Professor Joe Pitt was on leave spring semester 2008, during which time he made substantial progress on a new book, tentatively titled Seeing Near and Far: A Heraclitian Philosophy of Science. He also gave a workshop at the University of Illinois/Urbana, Champaigne on developing interdisciplinary programs. He was very impressed with the IU campus, which makes Virginia Tech look compact and small!

Joe also participated in a workshop at the Central Division APA session of the Society for Philosophy and Technology on Engineering and Philosophy, a growing interdisciplinary discussion which now has an international scope, as revealed by another workshop he participated in, Engineering in Context, held at the Colorado School of Mines. The result of that workshop is a book by the same name, published April 2009. In the same vein, Joe was philosophy program chair for Workshop on Philosophy and Engineering 2, held at the Royal Academy of Engineering in London, UK, in November.

From there, he continued on to give a talk at the Technical University of Athens (TUA), Greece. But when he showed up at the gates of the university they were bolted shut. It seems that in the 1960s, when Greece was governed by a military dictatorship, the students at TUA launched a series of riots resulting in the toppling of the dictatorship and the rise of a democratic government. To commemorate this event, the students at TUA riot every year on November 19, sometimes for serious reasons and sometimes for fun. This year there were serious issues. So, when Joe arrived to give his talk on November 16, the university had been closed by ‘the authorities.’ They were afraid the students would occupy it and do damage. Joe, his hosts, and a group of about 50 diehards who stayed around, wandered down the street until they found a coffee house large enough to accommodate the group. Joe gave his talk in a true Socratic environment, but spiced with Greek coffee! Although several other papers have appeared, and he has been asked by Springer to publish a collection of his articles on philosophy and technology, nothing this past year could top that!

Donations

The Philosophy Department is grateful for the generous donations you have made through the Virginia Tech Foundation. Your support contributes in a very direct way to both the intellectual and social life of the department. In particular, it enables us to continue our tradition of hosting regular conferences and colloquia, which is vital both to our functioning as a recognized center of active philosophical research and to the broad education of our students.

We’d like to acknowledge our most recent donors:

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Faculty and Friends donors:
Richard Burian
Deborah Mayo
Joseph Pitt
Betty Williams (widow of William H. Williams)

As you can see, the majority of our alumni donations have come from graduates from the 70s. We’re waiting for more recent classes to pitch in!

To make a donation, please contact our chair, Professor Jim Klagge (jklagge@vt.edu). If you are interested in making bequests or other special gifts, please contact Jocelyn Sanders (jocelyn1@vt.edu, or 540-231-2893).