Greetings!

It’s been almost three years since our last newsletter, so we’d like once again to tell you a bit about what we’ve been doing recently. As always, we would also very much like to know how you are faring in the world, and would be happy to share alumni information in future newsletters. (Send email to william.fitzpatrick@vt.edu)

Speaking of alumni feedback: Many thanks to all who responded to our questionnaire two years ago about the value of your training in philosophy to your current professional and personal lives. This has been very helpful to us, particularly for our advising of undergraduates. We’ve enclosed a copy of our current “Guide for Prospective Philosophy Majors,” which contains a selection of your responses that you may find interesting.

For more information about the department, please visit our website, at www.phil.vt.edu

Thriving Master’s Program

Our Master of Arts Program has maintained its outstanding national ranking in the Philosophical Gourmet report (which you can find at: http://www.blackwellpublishers.co.uk/gourmet/), and continues to attract excellent graduate students. It is currently ranked as tied with the M.A. programs at Arizona State University and the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee as the second best Master’s program in philosophy (behind only Tufts University). Our Master’s students who have chosen to continue their studies have secured placement in strong Ph.D. programs across the country, including: Emory University; The University of Illinois, The University of Kentucky, Northwestern University, Ohio University; Purdue, The University of Washington (Seattle), The University of Virginia, and Washington University (St. Louis).

Ph.D. Offered

We are now in a position to offer studies leading to a Ph.D. with a concentration in philosophy, in cooperation with the Science and Technology Studies (STS) program. For further information, please contact Joe Pitt, at jcpitt@vt.edu

Annual Spring Conferences

The department continues its tradition of organizing and hosting philosophical conferences each spring, attracting speakers and visitors from across the country and abroad. The papers delivered at these conferences are often then published in a book, or sometimes in a special issue of a journal. Some recent events:

Kant and the Sciences (1998): Organized by Eric Watkins, this conference brought together leading Kant scholars who focus on various sciences—physics, biology, chemistry, psychology, history, anthropology—in order to consider how Kant attempts to develop a unified philosophical framework for a wide variety of sciences. Invited speakers included Karl Ameriks (Notre Dame), Michael Friedman (Indiana University), Paul Guyer (University of Pennsylvania), and other notable Kant scholars. Papers from the conference are being published by Oxford University Press.

Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy (1999): Organized by Jim Klagge, the events began with a public screening of the Derek Jarman film “Wittgenstein” in the newly refurbished Lyric theater. Over 200 people attended, and the film was followed by a lively panel discussion. The conference had papers from 12 people, including Wittgenstein’s biographer, Ray Monk. A collection of papers deriving from the conference will be published in the next year.

Kuhn Reconsidered (2000): Organized by Roger Ariew, Richard Burian and Joe Pitt, this stimulating conference focused attention on the legacy of Thomas Kuhn, raising critical questions about Kuhn’s understanding of normal science vs. revolutionary science, his interpretation of the Scientific Revolution, the role of case studies in the philosophy of science, and other topics. Talks were given by several of our own faculty, a former colleague (Peter Barker, now at the University of Oklahoma), and Daniel Garber (University of Chicago).

Production and Diffusion of Public Choice (2000): Organized by Joe Pitt and Andrew Garner (an STS Ph.D. Student), together with the head of the Economics Department, the conference was a spirited celebration of the work of Nobel Laureate James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock. It honored their time at the Public Choice Center at Virginia Tech from 1969 to 1983, and Buchanan’s recent return as University Distinguished Professor of Economics and Philosophy Emeritus. The conference drew together diverse perspectives to assess how Public Choice Theory has influenced economics, philosophy, political science, and other disciplines.
Planned for 2001: *Caring About Nature*. The aim of the conference, which is being organized by Harlan Miller, will be to explore how and why we care about nature and natural places. What are the connections and tensions between these values and other things we value? Can it be argued that one ought to care, and if so, how?

**NEH Summer Seminars**

In addition to the spring conferences, the department has also recently sponsored Summer Seminars for faculty from other institutions, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In 1999, Deborah Mayo directed a six week seminar on “Philosophy of Experimental Inference: Induction, Reliability and Error,” aimed at examining and assessing competing traditions in the philosophy of confirmation and experimental inference. The focus was on how well accounts from each tradition help to solve philosophical problems about objectivity and induction, and progress and rationality in science.

This summer, Roger Ariew will direct—with Dan Garber—a month long seminar on “Descartes and his Contemporaries: Scholastics and Novatores.” The focus will be on Descartes’ philosophy in the context of seventeenth-century culture, and on debates about Cartesianism among three late seventeenth-century philosophers: the skeptic Pierre-Daniel Huet, the Cartesian Pierre-Sylvain Regis, and the scholastic Jean Dumont.

**Awards and Honors**

In 1998, Deborah Mayo became the first woman to receive the Lakatos Prize—the world’s premiere academic prize for the study of the philosophy of science. Named 25 years ago for a philosopher at the London School of Economics, Imre Lakatos, the prize was awarded to Deborah for her influential 1996 book, *Error and the Growth of Experimental Knowledge*. The same book also won the 1997 Sturm Award for Excellence in Faculty Research, given by the Mu chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

New ground has also been broken by Marjorie Grene, who is the first woman in the long history of the Library of Living Philosophers to be honored with a volume dedicated to her life and work. The prestigious series dates back to Einstein, who was the first to be celebrated, and has included volumes on Russell and Dewey, among many others. The volume will include an autobiographical contribution, contributions from various philosophers concerning Marjorie’s work, and her replies.

For his years of exceptional teaching, which many of you have had the good fortune to experience, Mark Gifford won a Certificate of Teaching Excellence from the College of Arts and Sciences, for Spring 2000.

In 1999, Harlan Miller received the Xcaliber Certificate of Excellence for the software accompanying his logic text, *Language and Logic*.

The Metaphysical Society of America awarded its 2000 Aristotle Prize to William FitzPatrick, for a paper defending a version of ethical realism against metaphysically motivated objections.

**What We’ve Been Up To**

Roger Ariew has published a number of books in the last two years, despite the extensive time commitments involved with serving as department head. In *Descartes and the Last Scholastics* (Cornell University Press, 1999), he argues that Cartesian philosophy should be regarded as it was in Descartes’ own day—as a reaction against scholastic philosophy (to which it was at the same time indebted). His aim is to illuminate Cartesian philosophy by analyzing debates between Descartes and contemporary schoolmen and surveying controversies arising in its first reception. Other books include: *Descartes’ Meditations: Background Source Materials* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), with John Cottingham and Tom Sorell; *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence* (Hackett, 2000), a collection of primary source material for the study of Descartes;

**Correspondence** (Hackett, 2000), a collection of correspondences between Leibniz and Clarke; and, with Eric Watkins, three edited volumes of primary sources for Hackett (see below).


William FitzPatrick, who joined the department in the fall of ’99, argues in *Teleology and the Norms of Nature* (Garland, 2000) that natural teleology in human life cannot have any relevance to a theory of ethical normativity. The book is largely a critique of a certain strand of neo-Aristotelian ethical theory as advanced particularly by his former teacher, Philippa Foot. At the same time, it is also a positive project in the philosophy of biology, seeking to formulate and defend a biologically informed account of functions and ends in nature. He is currently at work, with Eric Watkins, on a co-authored paper for the *Journal of Value Inquiry*, entitled “O’Neill and Korsgaard on the Construction of Normativity.”

Mark Gifford has been working recently on reconstructing a more authentic version of the introductory chapter to Aristotle’s famous and influential treatise on the nature of scientific cognition—the *Posterior Analytics*. In an extensive paper entitled “Lexical Anomalies in the Introduction to the *Posterior Analytics*” (forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*), he
argues that the chapter in question was modified, in a philosophically inept fashion, by an early editor of the Aristotelian corpus, creating the need for a more satisfactory reconstruction. Mark also serves as the faculty advisor for the Philosophy Club.

Marjorie Grene will celebrate her 90th birthday in the coming academic year, and she remains as prolific as ever. She has recently published, among other things, “Descartes and Skepticism,” in The Review of Metaphysics 52 (March 1999) and “The Philosophy of Science of Georges Canguilhem: A Transatlantic View,” in the Revue de l’Histoire des Sciences, 2000 (53/1). Marjorie will also write an intellectual autobiography for inclusion in the Living Philosophers volume to be dedicated to her, as well as responses to the other contributors (see “Awards and Honors”).

Valerie Hardcastle has recently focused on the problem of chronic pain—something that costs our society more than any other disease, and yet is still poorly understood. In The Myth of Pain (MIT Press, 1999), she looks at the now common idea that various forms of pain are “all in your head” and argues that this simply isn’t so. All pains are created alike and learning about them can tell us much about how the mind and body work together. Valerie is also the Neurophilosophy Editor for the new journal, Brain and Mind, and will serve as the new Director of the Science and Technology Studies (STS) program in the fall.

Jim Klage continues to focus his research on Wittgenstein, and has recently published “Wittgenstein’s Community,” in Metaphysics in the Post-Metaphysical Age: Papers of the 22nd International Wittgenstein Symposium, vol. VII (1), and “Wittgenstein on Non-Mediatieal Causality,” Journal of the History of Philosophy, October, 1999. In addition to his philosophical research and work as coordinator for undergraduate advising, Jim continues to serve as chair of the Montgomery County School Board, and has recently been elected to another four years on the board.

Deborah Mayo has been funded for the past two years by a Science, Technology and Society Scholar’s Award from the National Science Foundation. She has traveled and lectured extensively on topics related to her prize-winning book, Error and the Growth of Experimental Knowledge, in which she develops her error-statistical account of objectivity and progress in scientific knowledge (see “Awards and Honors”). She has recently given joint lectures with Prof. Aris Spanos (of the Economics Department) on statistics and the philosophy of science, at Oxford University and the London School of Economics.

Harlan Miller has published his text, Language and Logic, along with accompanying software—which won the Xerox Certificate of Excellence in 1999—with Kendall/Hunt. He also continues to provide valuable computer support to the department in his capacity as Webmaster and all around problem solver. Harlan is active in the Society for the Study of Ethics and Animals (SSEA), and is currently organizing a conference for next spring on valuing nature and natural places.

Joe Pitt brings to light important connections between the philosophy of technology and the philosophy of science in Thinking About Technology (Seven Bridges Press, 2000). He argues, in particular, against the common view that technology is merely the “handmaiden of science,” showing how scientific change itself parasitic on technological change. Some of his other recent publications: “What Engineers Know,” in Techné, The Society for Philosophy and Technology Quarterly Journal, Vol. 5, No. 2. (in press); “Design Mistakes; The Case of the Hubble Space Telescope” in Research in Philosophy and Technology (in press). Joe also serves as Director of Graduate Studies and Caretaker for a number of very large Irish Wolfhounds.

Eric Watkins has co-edited, with Roger Ariew, three important new collections for Hackett, emphasizing a contextualist approach to the history of Modern Philosophy. The first is a comprehensive anthology entitled Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources (1998). This has led to two spin-offs, to be published in the fall: Readings in Modern Philosophy, Vol. I: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Associated Texts; and Readings in Modern Philosophy, Vol. II: Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Associated Texts. Eric has also published a number of articles on Kant, including “Kant’s Justification of the Laws of Mechanics” (Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science, 1998), where he seeks to show that the differences between Newton’s laws of motion and Kant’s laws of mechanics are crucial for understanding Kant’s larger project. Eric will visit the department of philosophy at Yale University in the fall, and will then begin an NNI fellowship.

What’s New in the Department

James Buchanan—Nobel Laureate in Economics, author of such works as The Calculus of Consent and The Limits of Liberty; and former Director of the Center for Public Choice at Virginia Tech—has retired from George Mason University and returned to Virginia Tech as University Distinguished Professor of Economics and Philosophy Emeritus.

Henry Bauer, Dean Emeritus of the College of Arts and Sciences, will take up residency in the philosophy department effective July 1st. Dr. Bauer was responsible for the establishment of the Center for Science and Technology Studies.

New Hires:

William FitzPatrick (Ph.D., UCLA) joined the department in the fall of ’99 as assistant professor. He works in moral philosophy, especially on questions concerning the foundations of ethics and the nature of practical rationality. He is also interested in issues that arise in the intersection of moral philosophy with metaphysics and the philosophy of biology.

Rosa Mayorga (Ph.D., University of Miami) will join the department in
the fall as assistant professor. Her work has centered on the metaphysics of C.S. Peirce—particularly his critique of Duns Scotus’ solution to the problem of universals.

Visitors:

Ben Bradley (Ph.D., University of Massachusetts) will join us for a second year as visiting assistant professor. His work is primarily in ethics, especially on problems in value theory surrounding the notion of intrinsic value, and on issues relating to consequentialism.

Michael Kruse (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin) will join us for a third year as visiting assistant professor. He works on the philosophy of science and the philosophy of statistics, taking up problems such as the reliability of statistical inference in connection with scientific prediction.

Koffl Maglo (Ph.D., University of Bourgogne), will be with us for another year as a visiting fellow. His work is in the history and philosophy of science, with a focus on the reception of Newton’s *Principia*.

Rose-Mary Sargent (Ph.D., Notre Dame), from Merrimack College, will join us this coming year as visiting professor. She is the author of *The Diffluent Naturalist: Robert Boyle and the Philosophy of Experiment* (University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Eric Dietrich (Ph.D., University of Arizona), who is the Director of the Program in Philosophy, Computer, and Cognitive Science at Binghamton University (SUNY), will be with us as a visiting associate professor in the spring.

Atteyat Abou El Saoud (Ph.D., Cairo University), a lecturer at Helwan University in Egypt, will be joining us this year on a Fulbright Scholarship. Her research here will focus on the value of nature and its implications for human activity.

Administrative Changes:

Roger Ariew took over as head in 1998, replacing Joe Pitt, who is currently Director of Graduate Studies. Valerie Hardcastle has been chosen as the new Director of the Program in Science and Technology Studies. Terry Zapata has just been appointed executive secretary, and Cheryl Adkins will join us as Office Services Specialist.

Departures:

Since our last newsletter, two faculty members have left for other universities. Pat Croskey is now Director of Honors at Ohio Northern University, and John Christman teaches at Penn State.

Many Thanks for Your Donations:

The Philosophy Department is always grateful for the generous donations so many of 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 visiting speakers, which is vital both to our functioning as a recognized center of active philosophical research and to the broad education of our students. Some recent contributors we’d like to acknowledge:

George Adams ('78)
Thomas Adams ('75)
Daniel Alexander ('95)
Mary Connella ('77)
David Davis ('74)
Regina DePalma ('75)
Elizabeth Hulett ('89)
Dale Jones ('81)
Shannon Miller ('91)
Mary Money ('72)
John Muller ('79)
Mary Overbay ('72)
Amy Pospichal ('93)
John Strawson ('85)
Jeffrey Trawinger ('87)
Patricia Warner ('79)
Betty Williams.

Distance Learning Seminars for Alumni?

Do you ever miss your days at Tech, when you could regularly leaf through old newspaper articles, or contemplate Descartes’ evil demon, or try to wrap your mind around Kant’s transcendental idealism? If so, and if you think it might be fun to take another philosophy course—from the comfort of your own home—we’d like to hear from you. We’re considering offering occasional Distance Learning Summer Seminars for Alumni, if there is enough interest. Please email your thoughts and any suggestions for possible seminars, to: william.fitzpatrick@vt.edu.

Concluding Thought: Philosophy in the News

After the announcement that he had won the 1999-2000 NBA MVP (nearly unanimously), Shaquille O’Neal said:

“From now on, I want to be known as the ‘Big Aristotle’. As Aristotle said: ‘Excellence is not a singular act, but a habit. You are what you repeatedly do.’”

Shaq says he remembers the quote from College. He must have had a very good philosophy professor.