from Steven Luper, Chair . . .

Dear Alumni,

Greetings, once again, from San Antonio! The department now has a new colleague, Rachel Johnson. She earned her Ph.D. from UCLA, and she does ethics. She has been doing a terrific job teaching, and she is a wonderful colleague. I am confident that you will be hearing of her very soon, as she will be publishing brilliant scholarship.

Meanwhile, Damian Caluori has been doing impressive things. It looks like a book he has written about Plotinus, based on Damian’s award-winning dissertation, will be published by Cambridge University Press!

Our students have also done impressive things. The winner of the 2014 Hemlock Award for best philosophical essay was **Austen Hall ‘16**, who wrote "David Chalmers' Naturalistic Dualism." The second place winner was **Evan Snow ‘15**, who wrote "A Defense of Monism about Literary Interpretation." As they have done for years now, alumnus **Kathy Schnare ‘89** and her husband, William Reid, have funded this award, and we are grateful.

A little about me. I am in my last term as Chair of the department. **Andrew Kania** will serve as Acting Chair in the Fall, and he will take over when my term ends, a couple of years from now. A book I’ve edited, *Cambridge Companion to Life and Death*, appeared earlier this year. I published a few papers and gave some talks about death and about the nature of persons. (Even as we speak, I continue to write about these very topics.)

We had a number of great speakers during the last couple of terms. Philosopher Andy Hamilton, Durham University, UK, gave a talk on artistic truth, and classicist philosopher Michael Lurie, Davis Fellow at the National Humanities Center, gave a spirited talk on pessimism in Greek philosophy. In April, Jay Atlas, Member of the Common Room, Wolfson College, University of Oxford, spoke about literal and metaphorical distinctions in analytic philosophy.

I am particularly pleased to write that Derek Parfit, Emeritus Fellow, All Souls College, Oxford, spoke on Trinity campus. His main claim was that you and I are not human beings! While on campus, two groups of philosophy students met with Dr. Parfit for lunch discussions and represented both the university and the department exceptionally well.

I hope you will all consider emailing me and letting me know what you are up to. I’d be happy to hear from you.
It looks like another year has come and gone. I had an enjoyable year. I got to teach logic, nonclassical logics, and philosophy of mind, all of which I enjoy. I also was lucky to have the opportunity to teach Philosophy of Literature for the first time. This is something that had been on my list of things to do at least once before I retire. (No, retirement isn’t coming any time soon, but it’s important to think ahead!) This will not become a regular class for me, and indeed I may never teach it again, but I really enjoyed doing it. I had the students read Vladimir Nabokov’s Pale Fire, one of my favorite novels. We also read a textbook and a number of journal articles on various topics in the philosophy of literature. It was a lot of work designing a course from scratch, something I had not done for quite a while, but the material was a lot of fun.

This summer, as I write this note, I am participating in a summer undergraduate research project funded by the Mellon Foundation. Along with three students and Dr. Seth Fogarty in the Computer Science department, I have been working on the issue of what it is for a physical process to be a computation, and how to draw the dividing line between processes that are computations and those that aren’t. We have been reading material in both philosophy and computer science, and trying to forge some links between the two literatures. Dr. Fogarty and I have met with the students nearly every day for the ten weeks of the project, and have had some great conversations. We are now looking forward to the upcoming campus conference at which the students will present their work.

I will teach another new course in the fall—a first-year seminar called “Minds, Brains, and Computers.” I am currently working on planning that. It has given me an excuse to read some interesting recent books, including Read Montague, Your Brain is (Almost) Perfect, and Ray Kurzweil, How to Create a Mind. These books are popular science rather than philosophy, but they are nevertheless very interesting from a philosophical point of view. As to this year’s pleasure reading, I enjoyed The Goldfinch, by Donna Tartt. It’s a less conventional bildungsroman than I expected when I began it. I also read the similarly-titled The Sparrow, by Mary Doria Russell. This seems to be an attempt at a novelistic response to the “problem of evil”: if there is an all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing God, then how can the world contain as much misery and suffering as it does? I found the explanation offered at the conclusion of the novel to be pretty unsatisfying philosophically, but despite that the story was vivid and interesting.

“We can deny every instinct we have for survival for a mere idea. No other species can do that.”

— Read Montague, TED Talks
It’s been another busy year for me, and for us all, I suspect. It’s great having Rachel Johnson aboard as our new colleague—and satisfying that our department is now 1/3 women. This reflects the national average of women receiving roughly 30% of the Ph.D.s awarded in philosophy, and beats the national average of women constituting less than 20% of full-time faculty in philosophy. It’s good to be ahead!

At the same time, Larry Kimmel is very much missed. This year I took on the daunting task of teaching a famously difficult class that he successfully taught for years, Contemporary Continental philosophy. I decided to focus much of the class on Foucault, since I have wanted an opportunity to really engage with his ideas for a long time. It was a wild ride, but I enjoyed it a lot, and I found Foucault in particular highly rewarding. We spent the most time on his book, *Discipline and Punish*, in which he looks at the history of punishment and the prison system, which, he points out, is ineffective at deterring crime. But his analysis helps explain why we, collectively, cannot seem to imagine a structure for punishment other than this admittedly failed one: it is too closely intertwined with our current notions of power and identity.

What I really appreciated in Foucault was how he helps us to distance ourselves from many of our current ideas. We can look at the past and think how silly they were, thinking that the world was flat, drawing and quartering was reasonable, or madness was prophetic. We see time and time again how history shows that people’s dearest assumptions were overturned. But it is hard for us to imagine our current assumptions as similarly tenuous. Until you read Foucault! He helps put many of these assumptions into question, by showing the specific contexts in which they arose. It is a fascinating and humbling experience! I would recommend *Discipline and Punish* as well as his history of madness (*Madness and Civilization*) or *History of Sexuality*. Other than reading Foucault (which can take as much time as you let it), I have been working on my ongoing project of translating the major work of the 19th century (pessimistic) philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, and writing about Schopenhauer’s theory of music. And since I have school-aged kids, I’ve been listening to plenty of music too—mainly the soundtrack of *Frozen*, over and over and over again. It’s only a matter of time before some opportunistic publisher offers a collection on the Philosophy of *Frozen!* (I wonder what a chapter on “Foucault and Frozen” would look like…)

For information on gender divides in philosophy see:

University, our Stieren Arts Enrichment guest in the Fall and the author of *Aesthetics and Music* (Continuum, 2007), which was one of the assigned texts for the course.

In the upcoming year, I’m looking forward to teaching two new courses: a seminar on the philosophy of the performing arts (in Fall 2014) and Philosophy of Literature (in Spring 2015). As it happens, the American Society for Aesthetics (the leading professional organization for philosophers of the arts) is holding its Annual Meeting in the fall, hosted by Trinity, and the seminar will be focused around this event. Students will attend the conference and then present their own research in a mini-conference modeled on the ASA’s professional example. In preparation, we will read recent work related to the papers being presented at the conference, together with a recent book by David Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts* (Blackwell, 2011).

It is with some trepidation that I step into the shoes of Larry Kimmel and, more recently, Curtis Brown, to teach Philosophy of Literature in the Spring. But I’m looking forward to adding this to my rotation of courses, and figuring out how to distribute some topics common to the philosophy of film and literature (e.g., issues in fiction and narrative) between the two courses. I’m also excited to be bringing Susan Feagin to campus as next year’s Stieren Arts Enrichment guest, in conjunction with Philosophy of Literature. Dr. Feagin is, among other accomplishments, former editor of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* – the leading journal for philosophy of the arts in America. Despite my re-immersion in teaching, I have managed to work on some research projects this year, too, principally an article on musical space and movement (What does it mean to say that one note is higher than another, or that a melody includes a large leap?) and a piece on why *Inception* isn’t as good as Christopher Nolan’s other films. The latter led to a short piece on women characters in Nolan’s film which I posted on a good new aesthetics blog. I’d love to see your feedback in the comments!


Well, that’s certainly enough about me, but I would love to hear from you. Please send me an email or give me a call and let me know what and how you’re doing.
This Spring I taught a most enjoyable class on Hellenistic Philosophy. I think students were particularly struck by some of the Stoic paradoxes in ethics, the most famous of which is that a Stoic sage is happy even on the rack! I was successful in convincing at least some of the students that this may be a paradox that strongly goes against our intuitions (as it already did in antiquity) but that this does not mean that it is absurd.

The Stoics believed (in some ways followed by Kant) that everything that really matters is that you do everything you can to do the right thing. Yet if external circumstances prevent you from doing so, this should be of no concern to you. So they restricted the realm of what matters to the things that are in our power. Assuming that the sage on the rack did everything she could to prevent her – well – unfortunate situation, her being tortured is indifferent to her. And how can you not be happy if you have everything that matters?

As for research, I completed the revision of my book manuscript *Plotinus on the Soul*, which will be published by Cambridge University Press. It is the first systematic study of Plotinus’ theory of the soul since the early 70s.

While Aristotelian, Stoic, and Epicurean theories of the soul have been much discussed in scholarship in recent times and we have a fairly good understanding of them, Platonist theories of the soul are still comparatively less studied. I think that Plotinus’ theory is the most sophisticated and most interesting Platonist theory of the soul.

One of its virtues is exegetical: Plotinus manages to give a unified (and illuminating!) interpretation of the various and seemingly contradictory things that Plato says about the soul in his dialogues. I know of no other interpreter, ancient or modern, who succeeded in this.

In addition, I wrote an article ‘Francisco Sanchez: a Renaissance Pyrrhonist against Aristotelian dogmatism’ for a volume called *Skepticism: From Antiquity to Present*. One historically interesting thing about the 16th century skeptic Sanchez is that he uses arguments that the ancient skeptics directed against the Stoics and modifies them to undermine the scholastic Aristotelianism of his day.

Last month I attended a conference in Lisbon – what a beautiful city. When watching the World Cup soccer game Portugal-Germany on the Praça do Comércio, a magnificent square next to the sea, I was rooting for Portugal – alas, in vain. But the Germans seem to be particularly strong at this tournament.

Now I’m looking forward to the Final.

"Love is blind;
friendship closes its eyes."

— Friedrich Nietzsche
This was my first year teaching at Trinity. I joined the philosophy department in the fall having just completed my Ph.D. at the University of California, Los Angeles. I have been pleased to find the philosophy department, Trinity, and San Antonio to be very welcoming places and have very much enjoyed getting to know all three.

In the fall semester, I taught Professional Ethics and Philosophy of Law. Neither were subjects I had taught before, so developing and teaching these classes in my first semester was extremely challenging but also quite interesting. In the philosophy of law class, in particular, I learned a tremendous amount, along with my students. In the spring semester, I taught Environmental Ethics and a seminar for advanced majors. The environmental ethics class was another new subject for me. My research and previous teaching experience are primarily in more abstract ethical theory rather than applied ethics. Both the professional ethics class and the environmental ethics class I have taught at Trinity have given me an opportunities to apply this ethical theory to more concrete practical problems and discuss ethical theory with a much wider range of students than I have been used to. That has been interesting and rewarding.

The seminar I taught in the spring covered a topic much closer to my own research—whether there are objective moral truths. I had a wonderful group of six students in this class who enthusiastically dived into the subject. I was surprised by many of their responses to the questions we discussed and they led me to think about the material in new ways. I look forward to teaching a similar class in my Ethical Theory class this coming fall.

This summer I have received a summer stipend and am working on developing my dissertation into a series of shorter papers to submit for publication (while traveling to Minnesota, Los Angeles, and New England in order to escape some of the Texas heat). It is nice to be working on finishing up that project and beginning to think about what to do next.

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**ALUMNI SURVEY**

*Please help us in our assessment of the Department of Philosophy by taking our on-line Alumni Survey here:*  
**Take the Survey NOW!**

Your responses will contribute greatly to the future direction of the department.  
**Thank you!**
In 2013-2014, the department hosted two philosophical speaking events and the university hosted a philosopher for the DeCoursey Lecture. These lectures are designed to compliment student coursework and give students the opportunity to meet the very scholars whose work has been influential in the development of philosophical thought. As is customary, each event included a free, public talk and separate departmental talks or classroom lectures open to students and faculty. Each of the speakers also met at least once with philosophy students for group lunch discussions where the students were invited to ask the speakers questions about their talk topics and research.

Sponsored by the late Arthur T. Stieren and Jane J. Stieren Foundation and hosted by Dr. Andrew Kania, Dr. Andy Hamilton, gave a talk entitled "Art and Entertainment: Louis Armstrong, Charles Dickens, and Howard Hawks", and participated in a live interview with Kory Cook, Music Director at Trinity jazz radio station, KRTU. Dr. Hamilton teaches Philosophy and History and Aesthetics of Jazz at Durham University; he also teaches at Hong Kong University and has been Adjunct Lecturer at University of Western Australia, Perth. He has published many articles and books on aesthetics, political philosophy, philosophy of mind, is a long-standing contributor to The Wire, Jazz Journal and International Piano magazine and is also a jazz pianist.

Renown philosopher, Dr. Derek Parfit, presented the Trinity University DeCoursey Lecture for the 2013-2014 academic year. In his public talk, “We Are Not Human Beings,” Dr. Parfit explored problems of personal identity, rationality and ethics and the relations between them.

Dr. Parfit’s 1984 book, Reasons and Persons and his most recent book, On What Matters (2011), have been very influential in the field of philosophy. He has worked at Oxford for the whole of his academic career and is presently an Emeritus Senior Research Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. He is also a Visiting Professor of Philosophy at New York University, Harvard University, and Rutgers University.

The DeCoursey Lecture Series is made possible by a gift from the late Gen. Elbert DeCoursey and Mrs. DeCoursey of San Antonio.

The Department of Philosophy and Dr. Curtis Brown hosted Dr. Jay D. Atlas for public talk on the distinctions between metaphorical and literal discourse, entitled "There Are No Metaphors: Analytic Philosophy and the Literal/Metaphorical Distinction". Dr. Atlas is co-founder of the department of Linguistics at Pomona College and is a member of Common Room, Wolfson College, University of Oxford. He has achieved international recognition for his work in philosophy and linguistics and is the author of numerous papers and of two books, Logic, Meaning, and Conversation: Semantical Underdeterminacy, Implicature, And Their Interface (Oxford University Press, 2004) and Philosophy Without Ambiguity (Clarendon Press, 1989).
Our thanks to Derek McCrea for giving us permission to showcase a several of his beautiful paintings in this issue of the newsletter. Derek is visual artist and a retired U.S. Army Infantry Soldier. He has always loved to paint and was introduced to art at an early age by his mother, also a painter. From 1982 to 1986 he painted under the instruction of Jimmy Peterson, a well known artist from Georgia, and in 1986 won first place in the Georgia Arts Exhibition.

After joining the United States Army in 1987, he continued self study and *en plein air* landscape painting while serving in France, Holland, Germany, Italy and Hungary.

Derek’s art can be found in galleries throughout the Southeastern United States and in private collections worldwide. He has consistently donated several works every year to charities and loves to give back to the community for a good cause. His works are published in over 50 international publications and he has received numerous awards and honors for his work. He presently resides in Alabama with his wife, Sheila, and his two sons.

Derek McCrea’s blog and website:
http://watercolorpaintingart.blogspot.com/
http://www.derekmcrea.50megs.com
2014 Hemlock Award Winners for Outstanding Philosophical Essay

1st Place
"David Chalmers' Naturalistic Dualism"
Austen Hall ‘16

2nd Place
"A Defense of Monism about Literary Interpretation"
Evan Snow ‘15

The Hemlock Outstanding Philosophical Essay student awards are made possible through a generous donation from Kathy L. Schnare ‘89 and her husband, William Reid. The students who author the winning essays are recognized at the Spring Honor Awards Convocation.
Trinity University

Philosophy Department Home Page:
http://new.trinity.edu/academics/departments/philosophy

Upcoming Events

Spring 2015, Date / Time TBA
Stieren Arts Enrichment Series Lecture
Dr. Susan Feagin, Temple University
Former Editor, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism
Topic: Philosophy of Literature
Reception to Follow

Alumni Weekend
October 10-12, 2014
Trinity University Alumni Relations:
https://trinity.site-ym.com/

Trinity University
Philosophy News
Philosophy Alumni Newsletter

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“Hark, now hear the sailors cry / smell the sea, and feel the sky /
let your soul and spirit fly, into the mystic.”

– Van Morrison