Greetings, once again, from San Antonio!

We have had an unusual Spring, and the same goes for the first part of Summer: it has been raining! Because of the rain, I had a great crop of asparagus, plums, garlic and tomatoes. All sorts of critters steal my plums—raccoons, possums, etc. I’m used to this; the trees have enough for me and the wildlife too. But unfortunately for the first time this Spring the squirrels have decided that they like green tomatoes. They took half my crop before I had time to build squirrel-proof cages. It is pretty surprising how relentless squirrels can be. For instance, bird netting does not stop them.

It is amazing what happens when a significant amount of rain falls in this arid part of the world. The temperature goes down, and the countryside greens up. I’ve even gotten stuck at home a couple of times because the Guadalupe River rose several feet over the road to my house. But thankfully my house is far enough away from the river not to be susceptible to flooding. I pity the poor people in Wimberley and other parts of Texas who lost everything.

At school things are going well. We now have yet another new university president, Dr. Danny Anderson, and the shift over to the new curriculum is almost complete. My colleagues continue to do impressive scholarship. As for me, I continue to work on the topics of death, the nature of persons, the concept of well-being and the interests of animals, and epistemology. Just now, I am in the middle of an essay concerning nonexistence. The question is, ‘Does coming into existence benefit us?’

The present philosophy majors are as impressive as ever. We had a very active student-led philosophy club again this year, led by Dominic Pierce ‘16. The 2015 Hemlock Award for best philosophical essay went to Mason Stark ‘16 who wrote an essay entitled "Fiction and Knowledge: Can We Learn From Literature." The second-place winner was Sam Taylor ‘14, whose essay was entitled "A Revolution in Art: DJs and Dancers in Electronic Dance Music." Alumnus Kathy Schnare ‘89 and her husband again funded this award, and we are grateful. We are very proud of our students and their achievements, and, likewise, we appreciate our alumni for their willingness to stay connected to the department and the university.

We hosted some great speakers this year, including Stieren lecturer and aesthetics scholar, Dr. Susan Feagin. Following Dr. Feagin’s visit, we sponsored Dr. Marc Ellis and Dr. Luke Peterson, each speaking on a variety of issues around the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Our speaker series concluded with a talk by Dr. Jorge Valadez on the role of social and political philosophy in current times.

I hope you will all consider emailing me sometime and letting me know what you are up to. I’d be happy to hear from you.
Hard to believe it has already been a year or so since the last newsletter! It has been a busy but good year. It was the last of my three years as a faculty advisor for the Honor Council, the student-run organization that deals with alleged violations of the Honor Code. That has been a lot of work, and the hearings can be stressful, but working with the terrific students on the Honor Council has been rewarding and inspiring.

As others may have written about also, the Philosophy Department spent a good deal of time last year preparing for the change to a new curriculum that takes effect this coming fall. Most of our upper-division classes will now be four credit hours instead of three, and we are optimistic that this will enable students to gain a more in-depth understanding of the topics of their philosophy classes. The down side is that students will not be able to take quite as many different classes as they have in the past, but we think that this will be more than offset by the more intensive coverage of the revised classes.

In the summer of 2014 I was fortunate to be able to work on a Mellon Foundation-funded undergraduate research project on the philosophy of computation with Seth Fogarty, a computer science professor, and three students, including Austen Hall, a philosophy major. This was a great experience, and will feed into my project for my upcoming academic leave in the spring of 2016. This past summer I have been working on another Mellon project with Le Quyen Pham, this one on the semantics of intensional transitive verbs. Quyen has been great to work with, and I have learned a lot!

This past month my most unlikely publication appeared: Nicholas S. Andrade, Carol M. Ashton, Nelda P. Wray, Curtis Brown, and Viktor Bartanusz, “Systematic review of observational studies reveals no association between low back pain and lumbar spondylolysis with or without isthmic spondylolisthesis,” *European Spine Journal* 24.6 (June 2015): 1289-1295. This article questions a belief that is very widely accepted in the medical community, namely that a certain condition of the spine, when found together with back pain, is the likely cause of the back pain. This belief has been used as a justification for surgery to correct the condition in question. But it turns out that scientific studies provide no support for a causal link between the condition and back pain. My contribution to this paper was modest; I would be listed as the last author except that in medical publications the “corresponding author” is listed last. Nevertheless I think this is important work and I'm glad to be associated with it, in however small a way!

I can recommend a recent book by Patricia Churchland, *Touching a Nerve: Our Brains, Our Selves*. I'll be using this one in my Philosophy of Mind class in the fall. It's about the relations between philosophy and neuroscience, but it combines philosophical discussion with some of the characteristics of a memoir, making it more readable than some of her other books on similar topics. As for fun reading, I am currently about halfway through a rereading of Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*. I don't know that I can recommend this, exactly -- it's not as beautifully written as my favorite Nabokov books (*Pale Fire*, *Pnin*, *Speak, Memory*, *Lolita*), and it's difficult reading, full of puzzles on every page. I do find it fascinating, though; once I'm done I may read Brian Boyd's book about *Ada* to find out some of what I missed!
Hello all,

Another year has passed with its share of drama and triumphs. On the drama side, the university has been undergoing curricular restructuring and Philosophy has been fairly proactive in this endeavor. We have been rethinking our class offerings and trying to play an active role in the conversations on campus about the relevance of liberal arts and the enduring importance of philosophy. The university is changing in so many ways, both because of new technologies and also because of increased anxieties on the part of students about future employment prospects, anxieties that are entirely reasonable. The sort of slow, open-ended, focused (distraction-free!), abstract reflection that typifies philosophy (and that attracted so much of us into the discipline) now seems obsolete.

We have met these challenges in several ways. In part, we have learned to use these new changes to enrich philosophy: if philosophy is a sort of conversation, new technologies and social media help extend our abilities to converse. In part, we have argued for the continuing relevance of traditional philosophy within the new paradigm, showing for instance, that philosophy has resources for addressing novel questions (is it moral to clone humans? Can video games be art?) — and also, that philosophical training can provide valuable and transferable skills (philosophy majors do well in law school, for instance). But also, and most importantly I think, we have tried to influence the terms of the debate to recognize that a liberal arts education is not (merely) a means to add value to a future salary, not simply career training, but is instead a path to a more fulfilling, or at least more interesting life. The ability to think critically and the propensity to think abstractly about foundational problems shouldn’t be instrumentalized into potential career skills but should instead be appreciated as ways of thriving as a human being. The challenge for liberal arts in general, and philosophy in particular, is to argue for these sorts of values in what can often seem an increasingly myopic and cynical time.

These are among the bigger issues I’ve been concerned with! I’ve taken on much more practical tasks in terms of curricular development, working with Andrew Kania to develop a new, team-taught, interdisciplinary class for incoming first-year students on the philosophy of art. It is called “arts and ideas”, and students will read and worry about theoretical issues in the arts (including the question of whether video games can be art!). It has been a fun class to plan, in many ways. We are coordinating faculty from nine different disciplines, and it is great to share ideas. We use many of the same texts and sets of cultural references in our teaching and research, but approach them in vastly different ways. If the students learn half as much as I will, the class will be a crashing success.

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!
Dual highlights of my year came in the Fall semester when I had the opportunity to integrate a professional aesthetics conference with a course I was teaching. The American Society for Aesthetics (ASA) is arguably the leading professional organization for philosophers of art in the English-speaking world. Last October & November, the ASA held its Annual Meeting in San Antonio. I was “local arrangements chair,” which basically means that I got to recommend local restaurants, bars, and activities to my fellow philosophers of art from around the world. However, it also gave me an opportunity to introduce my students to the world of professional philosophy. I was teaching a seminar on the philosophy of the performing arts, and I required my students to attend several research presentations at the conference. Then, the students put together their own conference on campus, at which they presented their own research in aesthetics to the campus community. They did a great job, defending philosophical views about the cognitive value of literature, the nature of musical rehearsals, and what the work of art might be in traditions of popular music such as rock and EDM (electronic dance music).

I’m looking forward next year to teaching one of Trinity’s new First-Year Experiences (FYE). Modeled on HUMA, these courses integrate a seminar with a writing workshop as an introduction to college-level study. I’m participating in Arts & Ideas, an FYE devoted to theoretical study of the arts. It’s been great to get together with faculty from across the university who are all theorizing about the arts in various ways. I’m rather nervous about teaching the course, having taught neither a First-Year Seminar nor HUMA before, but I’m really looking forward to being able to devote a whole semester to working with students on writing – not just improving their skills, but seriously discussing the nature, purpose, and value of good writing.

I continue to work on my own art-philosophical projects, of course. I finished an essay on the nature of 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?), which will be appearing in the British Journal of Aesthetics soon, and I’ve begun work on a new project on the nature of videogames. Though I haven’t had much experience with them since the days of Donkey Kong, I’ve been intrigued by some recent work likening videogames to interactive film and gameplay to musical performance. I think these analogies have been taken too far, but it turns out (I suppose unsurprisingly) to be not so easy to explain what is going on when one plays a videogame. This summer I’ll be traveling to Ireland, in part to present some of my work on videogames to the European Society of Aesthetics. (It’s just possible I’ll manage to fit in a pub or two while I’m there.)

I’m now finishing my tenth year at Trinity. I've had so many great students in that time that it’s hard to keep up with you all. So if you were a student in one of my courses, I hope you’ll drop me a line letting me know what you’ve been doing with yourself.
One of my favorite duties at the Trinity Philosophy Department is being faculty sponsor of the student run philosophy club. Dominic Pierce ’16, the current president of the club, is organizing regular meetings where he and his fellow students discuss various important issues from all areas of philosophy. Dominic is a great president. Majors and non-majors flock to the meetings he organizes and he keeps them engaged. Because the club is such a great success, our students have decided to write a constitution so that it can be registered as an official Trinity organization.

In the Spring, I taught Metaphysics for the first time. In particular David Lewis’ view that, metaphysically, it is possible to travel back in time led to fruitful discussion. If backward causation is possible (as Lewis argues it is) you can even influence the past in the sense that an event in the past can be caused by a time traveller coming from the future. So Brutus could have been a time traveller, going back to kill Caesar. The thing a time traveller cannot do, however, is change the past such that an event that occurred did not occur or that an event that did not occur, occurred. Caesar will always have been assassinated and the time traveller can do nothing to change that. If he travels back and tries to prevent Caesar’s murder, he will simply slip on a banana peel or perhaps rather stumble on a vase. Not everyone was convinced in class. Some students argued that if a whole army of highly trained soldiers travelled back to protect Caesar, how could they possibly all stumble on vases or slip on banana peels. Others replied that in any world in which this army succeeded, Caesar did survive. Our world is just not one of these worlds. It was a most enjoyable discussion.

My monograph, Plotinus on the Soul, has been published by Cambridge University Press this summer. It is a revised version of my dissertation and deals with Plotinus’ theory of the soul. Plotinus was a late ancient Platonist and is often called the founder of Neoplatonism. His theory of the soul is a Platonist response to Aristotelian and Stoic theories of the soul. While Aristotle attacks Plato’s dualism and while the Stoics argue against Plato’s idea that the soul is immaterial, Plotinus defends Plato against both, thereby paving the way for a new understanding of the soul in which consciousness becomes a key element. Augustine was influenced by Plotinus. Descartes in turn clearly depends in various ways on Augustine. So the father of the modern notion of the mind was indirectly influenced by Plotinus.

Annual Hemlock Award for Best Philosophical Essay . . .

2015 Winners

1st Place - Mason Stark ’16
"Fiction and Knowledge: Can We Learn From Literature"

2nd Place - Sam Taylor ’14
"A Revolution in Art: DJs and Dancers in Electronic Dance Music"

The Department of Philosophy wishes to thank Kathy L. Schnare ’89 for her generous support of the Hemlock Award.
This was my second year teaching at Trinity. I joined the philosophy department in the fall of 2013 having just completed my PhD at the University of California, Los Angeles. After these two short years, I feel very at home here. 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.

I was fortunate this year to teach several classes that I had taught last year. This enabled me to refine and focus them rather than starting from scratch. In the fall, I taught Professional Ethics and Ethical Theory. Ethical Theory was particularly enjoyable to teach. I had an exceptional group of students who were eager to discuss and argue about all of the issues we considered. We were often only able to scratch the surface of these issues, so I have proposed to divide the material that we have historically covered in Ethical Theory into two classes. A new class (“Metaethics”) will address the question of whether there are moral facts and “Ethical Theory” will now focus on the question of what we should do (regardless of whether there are objective answers to this question).

In the spring semester, I taught Environmental Ethics and Political Philosophy. Environmental Ethics aims to do more than just introduce students to the major environmental problems we currently face. We also consider the moral and philosophical issues that these problems raise. For example, many environmental issues raise questions about whether (and if so, why) we have moral obligations to future generations and to non-human entities like animals, species, or “Nature” as a whole. Environmental ethics was a new subject for me last year, so I enjoyed having the time and experience this year to make some changes to the class so that it more closely focused on this latter kind of issue.

Political Philosophy was a new class for me this year. It was a particularly interesting time to be teaching such material because current events provided ready examples of many of the basic conflicts between the competing theories of what a just society looks like.

As for my research, I gave a talk about the problems it addresses at UTSA in the fall and enjoyed getting to know some of the members of the philosophy department there. I also spent the year developing my dissertation into a three papers to submit for publication (a continuation of work that I did last summer). I am looking forward to spending the rest of this summer starting something new.

I have also been asked to give the first lecture of the Social Justice First Year Experience that will be offered for the first time this fall as part of Trinity’s new Pathways curriculum. I am very pleased to be part of this new class and new way of introducing first year students to Trinity. I will be spending considerable time this summer trying to figure out how to present the main philosophical conceptions of justice in an hour—a rather daunting, but exciting task!
This past school year, the department sponsored and co-sponsored the following speaking events. These departmental events were designed to complement student coursework and give students the opportunity to meet the scholars and activists whose works are influential in the development of philosophical thought and in bringing to the forefront new dialogue regarding current social and political issues.

Dr. Judith Norman hosted two speakers with separate perspectives on the Israel/Palestine conflict. Dr. Peterson presented a talk entitled “Palestine-Israel in the 21st Century: Ending Endless War.” He earned his PhD in Middle Eastern Studies from King's College, University of Cambridge and is currently a visiting professor in Contemporary International Issues at the Global Studies Center at the University of Pittsburgh. He is the author of *Palestine-Israel in the Print News Media: Contending Discourses*, published in 2014 as part of the Routledge Studies on the Arab-Israeli Conflict series.

Marc H. Ellis presented a talk entitled “Jewish Prophetic Voices for Justice in Israel/Palestine.” Dr. Ellis is the author of over 100 articles and 20 books. His work deals with Jewish liberation theology, post-Holocaust ethics, Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations, the land of Israel/Palestine, and peace and justice studies. He is retired as director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Baylor University and is a visiting lecturer at universities around the world. Dr. Rachel Johnson hosted Dr. Jorge Valadez for a classroom talk in her Social and Political Philosophy class for discussion on human rights issues related to open borders immigration policies. Dr. Valadez received his Ph.D. at Yale University and currently teaches at Our Lady of The Lake University in San Antonio. His work is widely published in the areas of third-world philosophy and multiculturalism.

Sponsored by the late Arthur T. Stieren and Jane J. Stieren Foundation and hosted by Dr. Andrew Kania, Dr. Susan Feagin presented a talk entitled “Space and Place in the Theater.” Dr. Feagin is visiting research professor of philosophy at Temple University and formerly taught at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (1977-2003). She is also former editor of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and is the author of a number of texts and articles on philosophy of art and philosophy of mind.

Dr. Andrew Kania, Dr. Susan Feagin, Marc H. Ellis, Dr. Jorge Valadez, Dr. Rachel Johnson, Michele Maule, Chloe and Michele Maule. Courtesy Michele Maule.

**featured artist, Michele Maule . . .**

Michele Maule is a full-time artist working with oil paints and printmaking, collage and illustrations in gouache paint and ink. Her images are based on her personal and sometimes autobiographical connections, whether to an animal, a color or a texture. Michele is a graduate of Portland State University with a BA in Drawing, Painting and Printmaking and currently lives in Portland, Oregon, with her boyfriend and her Boston Terrier, Chloe.

We thank Michele for granting our request to publish examples of her art in this issue of *Philosophy News* and wish her continued success in all her artistic pursuits. Thank you, Michele! 😊

Find more information about artist Michele Maule and her work at these websites:
- http://www.michelemaule.etsy.com/
- http://www.michelemauleart.com/
- https://www.facebook.com/michelemauleart
Philosophy Department Home Page:
http://new.trinity.edu/academics/departments/philosophy

Upcoming Events

Stieren Arts Enrichment Series Lecture
September 28, 2015
Chapman Great Hall, CGC 142
“Expressing Emotions in Pictures”
Dr. Jenefer Robinson
University of Cincinnati
Former Editor, Journal of Aesthetics
and Art Criticism
Reception to Follow

Alumni Weekend
October 9-11, 2015
https://new.trinity.edu/alumni/alumni-weekend

"There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."
- Leonard Cohen, “Anthem"