Hello from San Antonio, where another summer is under way.

In May, we said farewell to a fine group of Philosophy seniors, one of the most active and enthusiastic groups of majors and minors we have had. The seminar room and the Philosophy office became a sort of home base for many philosophical discussions among a regular group of students. We already miss them and their enthusiasm for philosophy.

This fall, the Philosophy Club will be under new leadership, since Dominic Pierce ’16 is off to Baylor Law School. We congratulate Dominic on the outstanding job he did leading the club for the past two years. That makes nearly 60 club meetings with enthusiastic agendas set by Dominic, who also managed to create weekly full-page call-to-action emails to rally students to the Friday afternoon meetings. This year, three very capable students, Daniel Conrad ’18, Sasha Faust ’18, and John Croxton ’18, will lead the club and we know they will do an excellent job.

We are grateful to Kathy Schnare ’89 and her husband for again funding for the Hemlock Award for Best Philosophical Essay. This year the faculty agreed on a tie, and the awards went to Austen Hall ’16 and Le Quyen Pham ’16. In addition to winning the essay competition, both students crossed the stage in May with summa cum laude honors. Quyen also earned Philosophy Honors, as conferred by members of the department and upon fulfilling the Philosophy Honors Program requirements.

The department hosted and co-hosted several speakers on campus again this year. These

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I have had a very pleasant year, and an easy one as far as teaching duties are concerned. I had an academic leave during the spring semester, relieving me of teaching duties for that semester. I have been working intensively on a project on truth in fiction, especially literary fiction. In some ways this is a recent interest for me, but it has also turned out to have extensive connections with prior interests in the philosophy of language, metaphysics, and even logic. I originally thought I would dash off something quickly and then turn to other topics, but that was foolish, especially for an area that's fairly new for me: the issues quickly turned out to be more complex, and the literature more extensive, than I had realized at first. But that's not a bad thing -- the subject also turned out to be even more interesting than I expected! I have now completed a draft of a paper, and after getting some feedback from colleagues I hope to be able to revise and publish it.

I recently returned from my annual trip to visit my family in Montana. I enjoyed the cool weather and beautiful scenery. On a hike near Whitefish, my sister and I surprised a Sandhill crane and got to watch it take flight from very close to us. It was a huge, ungainly-looking bird, and the noises it made sounded prehistoric! (If you are interested, there is a video of some sandhill cranes calling here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbn8yIq7LM, or just search YouTube for "Sandhill Cranes Calling.") On the same hike we also watched a loon family on a small lake that we had entirely to ourselves. Next fall I will be teaching Philosophy of Science for the first time in a few years, and I'm looking forward to that. I will also teach Symbolic Logic I, which I always enjoy. So it should be a good semester!

I had taught a version of this course a decade or more ago, but it has been a long time. It will be fun to return to these great works of literature, history, and philosophy. I will also teach Symbolic Logic I, which I always enjoy. So it should be a good semester!

Looking through some books my wife got from her family, I ran across some mysteries from the 1940's, and for the first time I read one novel each by Ngaio Marsh and Margerie Allingham. They were both very good -- I may have to read more books by these authors! The best book I've read recently, though, is George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss. In addition to being a good story, the novel has a lot to say about different approaches to moral decision making, and the sorts of personalities to which they appeal. Every time I read a novel by George Eliot, I find myself in awe of her intelligence and wisdom. This is the fifth novel I have read of the seven she wrote; I still have Silas Marner and Felix Holt, the Radical to look forward to!
from JUDITH NORMAN. . .

Hello from sunny Tuscany!

I am writing this in Italy, in the countryside outside of Siena. I am spending a few weeks here for a combination of work and pleasure. Today I gave a lecture at the Center for Anthropology in the Ancient World at the University of Siena on 19th century receptions of the (antique) Laocoon sculpture group. This is an issue that has interested me for a long time, combining my interests in German philosophy, philosophy of art, and classical studies. I will be in Rome next week where I will be able to view the Laocoon itself, at the Vatican museum, and attend a conference on the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who I am currently researching for a paper I have been commissioned to write. Then back to Texas where I will prepare to teach two First Year seminars on the philosophy of art. It will be an exhausting but hopefully intellectually invigorating summer.

I was busy with a couple of projects over the course of the year. One of the more exciting has been working on an edited collection on the philosophy of early German romanticism. The early German romantic movement was prominent at the end of the 18th century, predating English romanticism and in essence quite distinct from it. It was strongly influenced by Kant, and the theorists of German romanticism tried to explore Kantian themes in literary form. This exploration wasn’t particularly conventional – they didn’t write literary works that illustrate philosophical themes (such as the existentialist writers did, for instance). Rather, they thought that literature itself could resolve some of the specifically philosophical problems that Kant raised. I am writing a paper on how their notion of literary criticism makes use of the Kantian conception of criticism (Kant’s philosophy is called critical philosophy because his texts called things like the “Critique of Pure Reason”). This paper will be part of an edited collection I am co-editing with a colleague, Elizabeth Millan at DePaul University in Chicago. The plan of the volume is to explore the early German romantic contribution to philosophy in different fields – philosophy of nature, political philosophy, etc. We held a workshop in Chicago last March to allow the various contributors to the collection to exchange ideas. It was highly intellectually invigorating! I am glad to be working on a collaborative project like this. 🌳
It’s been a busy year on the teaching front, as we – both the Philosophy Department and Trinity as a whole – implement our new curricula. At the university level, for me that meant contributing to one of our new “First-Year Experiences,” a kind of cross between a first year seminar and HUMA. I was involved in the design and teaching of “Arts and Ideas” an introduction to theoretical approaches to the arts. Taught not just by philosophers, but by faculty from the English, Modern Languages, Music, Theatre, and even Math Departments, the course was invigorating, if also a lot of work. At the department level, I taught new versions of Aesthetics, Philosophy of Music, and Philosophy of Gender. The latter are two of my favorite courses, and these iterations were no exception. They are now 4-credit courses, enabling us to go into the material in a little more depth (i.e. they’re even harder than they were when you took them, if you did!). My aesthetics course was a quite different kettle of fish, however. It’s now a 4-credit lower-division course, meaning that it has no prerequisites, so it’s an introduction to aesthetics, but also philosophical thinking in general. I’m not sure I got the balance quite right, but I’m looking forward to teaching it again.

On the research front, my work on videogames is beginning to bear fruit: At a conference in Ireland last summer, I presented a paper on why I think gamers are not narrators of stories incorporating their (fictional) actions, even when they play games that might naturally be described as narrative. I’ve also had some interest from a journal in another paper arguing that gamers are not performers of the games they play, despite superficial similarities between what they do and what, say, musicians or dancers do when they perform a musical or dance work. I’m also thrilled this summer to be working with a rising junior, Daniel Conrad, on a Mellon Summer Undergraduate Research project on the aesthetics of videogames.

I was pleased to bring some philosophy to people outside Trinity this past spring. I led a workshop introducing artistic high-school students to philosophy of music at the annual Arts Festival of the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest, and led a similar workshop with the Middle-School Strings Ensemble at Saint Mary’s Hall, here in San Antonio. I was also guest conductor for one of this group’s rehearsals, letting me flex my conducting muscles – both literally and figuratively – for the first time in many years!

I mentioned it in last year’s newsletter, and I’ll say it again here: I’ve had so many great students by now 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.


“In the case of all other sciences, arts, skills, and crafts, everyone is convinced that a complex and laborious programme of learning and practice is necessary for competence. Yet when it comes to philosophy, there seems to be a currently prevailing prejudice to the effect that, although not everyone who has eyes and fingers, and is given leather and last, is at once in a position to make shoes, everyone nevertheless immediately understands how to philosophize, and how to evaluate philosophy, since he possesses the criterion for doing so in his natural reason – as if he did not likewise possess the measure for a shoe in his own foot” (Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit, §67).

“We must learn to honor excellence in every socially accepted human activity, however humble the activity, and to scorn shoddiness, however exalted the activity. An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society that scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.”

John W. Gardner, author
Next to my monograph, *Plotinus on the Soul* (Cambridge University Press), I published one article last year—for the Italian journal *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*. One of the fun things about late antiquity is that it is not only relevant for scholars working in ancient philosophy but also for those in the field of medieval philosophy. In this paper, I discuss the problem whether God, in order to create the world, needs to be able to think, not only theoretically, but also practically. I argue, against the standard interpretation, that according to Plotinus practical thinking is necessary.

The standard interpretation is the view that our world somehow emanates from the Platonic world of Forms, whose image our world is according to the Platonists. This is thought to be crucially different from the Christian view according to which God created the world. The Christians, so the standard story goes, are creationists (in this sense) while Plotinus (just as other pagan Platonists) is an emanationist. Against this, I argue that the Plotinian God creates the world just as the Christian God does. Moreover, I argue that for Plotinus, creation implies practical thinking in the following sense. An image of the world of Platonic Forms could be created in various ways. So God has to decide which image (which possible world) to create. Furthermore, creation or production of something (of a world, for example), is not just a matter of mapping the paradigm onto some matter.

You have to think about how to create or make or produce it (how to map it). In fact, there is not only one decision involved in the creation of the world but many, and logically later decisions depend on earlier ones. For example, if you decide to create such a subtle and vulnerable organ as the brain, you may need to create a head to protect it. So perhaps the decision to create a head is a consequence of the decision to create a brain (or to create a brain of such a sort). The thinking leading to such decisions is what I mean by practical thinking. But why practical? Isn’t practical thinking related to action rather than production? Plotinus rejects Aristotle’s distinction between action and production. Production is a form of action.

As always, I am spending my summer in Switzerland. In fact, because I got my first academic leave, I will spend a whole year in Europe. I’m going to work on a translation of, and commentary on, a couple of Plotinian treatises on metaphysics. I will also have time for some hiking. Earlier this summer, I spent a week in one of the most beautiful areas of Switzerland, the Engadin. Last weekend I did a tour from Wildhaus to Walenstadt. The picture is from this tour.

Photograph from Damian Caluori's tour from Wildhaus to Walenstadt near the Churfirsten mountain range in southeastern Switzerland.

from DAMIAN CALUORI . . .

The Department of Philosophy thanks Kathy L. Schnare ’89 and husband, William Reid, for their generous support of the Hemlock Award.
This was my third year teaching at Trinity. In the fall, I taught Philosophy of Law and Existentialism. I particularly enjoyed teaching Existentialism. Studying existentialism a bit in high school first got me interested in philosophy and I love seeing some of my students have the same experience. The existentialist writers tackle the most stereotypically philosophical of questions—do our lives have any purpose?—and their work is full of dramatic proclamations and metaphor, so they are a lot of fun to read and discuss. This was the first time we’ve offered the class without pre-requisites, so we had everything from senior philosophy majors to students in their first semester of college in the class. It made for some very thought-provoking discussions.

In the fall, I taught Environmental Ethics again, as usual, as well as Metaethics. Metaethics was technically a new course for me, but it covered material that we formerly included in Ethical Theory. Metaethics considers the question of whether there are objective moral truths. It was great to be able to spend a whole semester focused on that question and discuss it more thoroughly. I look forward to offering this class every other year in the future. Having now taught most of my courses two or three times, I am amazed and very pleased by how different they are from year to year as different groups of students approach the material with different perspectives and interests, raise very different kinds questions and objections, and take class discussions in very different directions.

As for my research, I spent the year revising papers that I am submitting for publication. This summer, I am continuing that work as well as beginning to prepare for the research project I will undertake during my leave in Spring 2017. I will be chairing a session at the UNC Metaethics Workshop in September and am looking forward to finding out more about what work others have been doing in my area of research in the past year.

I have done some traveling this year. I spent a much too short weekend in the Canadian Rockies in the fall. I will definitely be going back. I have spent some time with my family in Minnesota. A few years ago, my parents and one of my brothers began raising free-range Scottish Highland cattle. It has been fascinating to learn about that. (I imagine I may one day be able to use that knowledge in Environmental Ethics.) This summer I am also visiting my new niece in Louisiana and visiting friends in Los Angeles before returning to San Antonio to start the new school year. I will have the pleasure of teaching Political Philosophy during the presidential election this fall. It should be interesting.
A Washington, D.C., transplant, Rachel Bingaman is a professional artist living in Grovetown, Georgia. Her work can be seen in galleries, on the set of NBC’s "Save Me", and in the popular artwork book series, "The Custom Art Collection: Art for the Contemporary Home".

Rachel creates contemporary original oil paintings, thick with texture from impasto and palette knife work. We thank Rachel for allowing us to feature her art in this issue of Philosophy News and wish her continued success in all artistic pursuits and otherwise. Thank you, Rachel! 🎨

See more of Rachel’s work here: Google+: https://plus.google.com/u/0/+RachelBingaman/
Contact Rachel: rachbing@gmail.com
Upcoming Events

November 3, 2016
Stieren Arts Enrichment Series Lecture
The Changing Role of Color in Art
Dr. Cynthia Freeland
Moores Distinguished Professor of Philosophy
University of Houston
Chapman Great Hall, CGC 142, 7:30 p.m.
Reception to Follow

Alumni Weekend
October 7-9, 2016
https://new.trinity.edu/alumni/alumni-weekend