Greetings!

All is well at Trinity. As always, my colleagues are doing impressive scholarship. I am still thinking about the nature of persons (I think we are animals, by the way), the concept of well-being, the interests of animals, epistemology, and the philosophy of life and death. I just published an essay concerning nonexistence, in which I argued that coming into existence is neither good nor bad for us. I also published a brief piece defending euthanasia and assisted suicide under certain circumstances.

Our majors are an impressive group. The winner of the 2017 Hemlock Award for best philosophical essay was Daniel Conrad ‘18 who wrote "The Compatibility of Artworks and Games." The second place winner was Katie Jones ‘18, who wrote "Marx on Justice." Kathy Schnare ‘89 and her husband have again funded this award, and we are grateful. Our Philosophy Club, led this year by Daniel Conrad ‘18, is thriving and the students’ active interest in philosophy is on the rise. Again, the department brought in several great speakers, and, as always, they were impressed with Trinity students’ scholarship and enthusiasm about philosophy.

Actually, I am writing from my house near Kendalia, which is north of San Antonio. It has been an unusually dry May, but I am still trying to grow tomatoes, asparagus, and garlic. (Cherokee Purple tomatoes are my favorites). I also tried to grow plums, pears and apricots, but I had only a few this season, and the critters got all of those while they were still green. The squirrels are even robbing my hummingbird feeders—drinking the syrup—but I’m going to thwart them by repositioning it. They’d be eating my tomatoes too, but I’ve built squirrel-proof cages to keep them out. For me, this is also the year for repairs and replacements: I’ve repainted the house and gates, replaced the pumps in my well, and re-sealed my deck. Another crop of birds has raised a family on my back porch. This time it was swallows. Often it is phoebes. Both kinds of birds make a similar mud nest.

I hope you will all consider emailing me with your news or coming by to visit us on campus. Check our Facebook page for our class schedules and upcoming Philosophy events. https://www.facebook.com/trinityuniversityCAVE/
This felt like a transitional year for me; I am starting a new direction with my research. As much as I have enjoyed working in 19th century philosophy (and will certainly continue to do so, to an extent), I am shifting my scholarly focus to a new area: philosophy for children.

There have been organized and thoughtful efforts for decades to introduce philosophy into primary and secondary education (grades K – 12). In the past decade or so these efforts have really accelerated and there is now an impressive set of resources and curricula for teaching philosophy to children.

I have wanted to do this for years, and with my husband have held occasional philosophy classes at some of the local public elementary schools. Teaching philosophy at the elementary level is most appealing to me, because it often not structured around a text or received theory that the students first learn and then debate. Rather, it begins with a problem, task, or question that the students explore together. For instance, we might ask them to think about the difference between the mind and the brain, or whether numbers are real. These are open-ended questions in which there is no right answer – the kids are not mastering some orthodoxy or accumulating information in a conventional way. However, there are better and worse ways of exploring these problems, considerations that are more or less relevant to an understanding of the issue.

This helps build critical thinking skills, but it also helps reinforce notions that learning is collective, that knowledge emerges through dialogue, that a diversity of perspectives is useful for exploring these questions. These ideas and skills can help mitigate against some of the divisive effects of testing culture in the schools, and can hopefully help support models of collective inquiry in an inclusive environment.

This past year, I was able to pilot a program teaching philosophy to a group of 3rd – 5th graders at a local public school with the help of an extraordinary philosophy / education student, Beverly Chatfield. Bev designed lesson plans, facilitated discussions, and shared her tremendous wealth of pedagogical insight with me through the course of the semester. For instance, in one lesson, she had the kids doing “reality scavenger hunts” (“name an object that you know is real; name an object that is not real but you wish it was; name an object that cannot be real; name an object that you are glad is not real; etc….”).

I’m hoping to eventually build a strong and sustainable program in which Trinity students work with public schools to lead philosophy discussions. I’m currently trying to figure out what that will look like, but I’m becoming more committed and interested the more I investigate. It strikes me as both interesting and worthwhile. Goodness knows that the public schools need our support these days, and that critical thinking and compassionate listening can’t be taught too early.
How does the philosophy degree transition to the non-academic workplace? How does one articulate the benefits of philosophical study to an employer? What superpowers bond philosophers together to avenge the status quo?

This spring, due in large part to their enthusiasm for the philosophy degree, a group of philosophy alumni volunteered to participate in a panel discussion themed around the benefits of philosophical study for non-academic careers. Representing a variety of current careers and work histories, our alumni shared inspiring, real-world career experiences with our majors and others who were curious about how the degree prepares students for non-academic careers.

The panelists concurred that philosophical study had provided them with a combination of advanced career skills and a fresh perspective on the sort of career they wanted to pursue.

The panelists noted a real advantage in their writing, discussion, and analytical skills over co-workers with no philosophical training, including the co-workers with more work experience.

All hands down, the alumni credited the rigors of philosophical training, in particular, as the basis for a strong sense of confidence when interacting with colleagues and clients and for the ability set a clear framework for working through complex projects.

Panelists also shared reasons they decided to major in philosophy and the role Trinity’s philosophy community played in that decision.

This first-time event was a collaboration between the Department of Philosophy and the Office of Career Services | Center for Experiential Learning and Career Success. Many thanks to Katie Ramirez and Twyla Hough for making this part of the Spring Careers Event line-up.

See a video of the panel discussion at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKzJJ6Z7cZI

Special thanks go to our alumni panelists pictured above: Sean Caporaletti ’06 (Trinity Mineral Management, Ltd.), Eliza Grady ’16 (Ron Nirenberg mayoral campaign 2017), Mason Stark ’16 (Rivard Report), Austen Hall ’16 (Trinity University Community Service Specialist / Americorps Public Ally / Yale University). Also, hats off to our gifted moderator, philosophy major / Philosophy Club President / Distinguished Trinity University Scholar, Daniel Conrad ’18.
This coming year I will be on academic leave, during which I hope to complete the majority of a textbook I am writing, introducing readers to the philosophy of Western music. But as much as I am looking forward to that opportunity to focus on my research, I have had such an enjoyable year teaching that I feel some regret at leaving the classroom behind, albeit temporarily.

In Fall 2016 I enjoyed teaching philosophy of film, which included a visit from University of Houston professor Cynthia Freeland, who discussed multisensory cinema and the changing role of color in the visual arts as part of the Stieren Arts Enrichment Series. This Spring, I taught a wonderful group of students in Metaphysics, who rose to the challenge of some of the most abstract philosophical topics: the problem of universals, the new riddle of induction, the nature of time, and so on. But I was most surprised by the students in my Introduction to Philosophy class. Having taught this class numerous times at Trinity, I thought I knew what to expect, but this class was off the charts, achieving the highest average grades I have ever given at this level.

Another teaching highlight was working with Junior Daniel Conrad. Last summer, Daniel and I worked on a Mellon Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship on the aesthetics of videogames. Daniel’s resulting paper, on the possibility of games’ being artworks, was accepted in a blind-review process for presentation at a professional philosophy conference in the Fall, where Daniel was co-awarded the “Emerging Scholar in the Philosophy of Games” prize, which he shared with a late-stage Ph.D. candidate. This Spring, I supervised the first semester of Daniel’s Honors thesis, on the ethics of videogame play. I look forward to seeing how Daniel’s work develops, and hopefully to seeing his Mellon essay into print in a scholarly journal.

In my own research, I’ve been working on a couple of papers on the philosophy of videogames (with less success than Daniel!) and a couple on the metaphysics of music – one on musical spaces & places and the other on the temporal experience of music. I’ve also started the textbook I mentioned above, a process that is alternately humbling and inspiring.

On the home front, I’ve been inspired by someone else’s book, *The Rye Baker* by Stanley Ginsberg, to experiment with a range of rye breads, which I had no idea were so diverse and delicious. You can see (and, if Cynthia Freeland’s arguments are correct, perhaps you can even taste!) some of the results below and on the following page. 

Munster Country Boule
“There is an old saying that philosophy bakes no bread. It is perhaps equally true that no bread would ever have been baked without philosophy. For the act of baking implies a decision on the philosophical issue of whether life is worthwhile at all. Bakers may not have often asked themselves the question in so many words. But philosophy traditionally has been nothing less than the attempt to ask and answer, in a formal and disciplined way, the great questions of life that ordinary men might put to themselves in reflective moments.”

– Excerpt from *Time* magazine essay, July 1966

“If thou tastest a crust of bread, thou tastest all the stars and all the heavens.”

– Robert Browning
My academic leave has been wonderful. I have been spending it back home in Switzerland for most of the time. The project I have been working on since the leave began last summer is on Plotinus’ metaphysics. With a friend here in Zurich, I have translated two of his treatises, *Ennead* VI.1 and *Ennead* VI.2, in which Plotinus deals with Aristotle’s *Categories* and Plato’s *Sophist*. My next task will be to hone the translation and to write commentaries on both treatises.

This is a long-term project that will take me a few years to complete. Being a Platonist, Plotinus develops his philosophical views against the background of Plato’s work. While he criticizes Aristotle in several respects, his ontological views on the world of our experience are nevertheless deeply indebted to Aristotle, in particular to the *Categories*. The critical and the constructive engagement with Aristotle are very illuminating, not only for our understanding of Plotinus and late ancient philosophy more generally but also for the study of Aristotle. I hope that our project will help convince Aristotle scholars that it is worthwhile to study Plotinus in order to better understand Aristotle.

In addition to sitting in the (beautiful!) library of the Classics department in Zurich, I gave talks at Cornell, in Vienna, Berne, Zurich, and at the APA conference in Seattle. Next week, I’ll be off to a workshop in Delphi, Greece. We will discuss the historiography of philosophy, what precisely the enterprise is that one is engaged in when one is studying the history of philosophy. While it is true that scholars work when they study the history of philosophy, it is presumably a good idea to also sometimes reflect on this activity and to try to determine what its principles and methods are. It is in any case something I’m very interested in.

I also had time to visit friends in NYC and in Oslo and to spend a few days in Rome where I visited the Vatican Museums, the Sistine Chapel, Saint Peter’s Basilica, the Colosseum, and the awesome Palazzo Massimo alle Terme. Of course, I also spent some time in the mountains, in particular at my favorite spot, Scuol, a picture of which I share with you below.

![Scuol, Switzerland](image-url)
This was my fourth year teaching at Trinity. In the fall, I taught Environmental Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy. The political philosophy course was particularly interesting this fall because it coincided with the presidential election. Environmental ethics was lively as always. I added some new material to that course this year. In addition to our usual discussion of which beings have rights and how the burdens of addressing environmental problems should be distributed, we also discussed what obligations we have to future generations, whether it makes sense to attribute interests to living systems like ecosystems or species (as opposed to the individual organisms that comprise them), and whether our attitudes towards the natural world can constitute good or bad character traits. I very much enjoyed teaching this new material.

I took my pre-tenure leave during the spring semester of this year. I spent part of this time in Minnesota (where I grew up) and enjoyed my first Minnesota winter in 15 years. (Unfortunately, there wasn’t much snow.) I am spending the remainder of my leave in Los Angeles. It has been nice to have some time to focus on my research, but I look forward to returning to teaching in the fall.

I have been working on a new paper and have presented drafts at several conferences in the past year. I presented at the annual meeting of the Iowa Philosophical Society in November, at the annual meeting of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association in March and at the St. Louis Annual Conference on Reasons and Rationality in May. I have received much helpful feedback from audiences at these conferences. I have also enjoyed learning more about the work others have been doing in my area of research in the past few years.

I also attended the annual meeting of the Southwestern Philosophical Society in November and gave comments on an interesting paper about how theories of reasoning should take into account diversity in thought. So, it has been a busy year. I am now done with conference travel for the summer and look forward to revising the paper I’ve presented in light of all of the feedback I have received. I am also excited to begin figuring out my next project.

The Department of Philosophy thanks Kathy L. Schnare ’89 and husband, William Reid, for their generous support of the Hemlock Award.
2016-2017 SPEAKERS

Dr. Cynthia Freeland  
Philosophy Chair,  
University of Houston  
Trinity Stieren Arts Enrichment Series

Dr. Janneke Stegeman  
*De Nieuwe Liefde* (The New Love)  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Dr. JASON MORROW ’89  
University of Texas Health Science Center  
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Dr. Sheridan Hough ’83  
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Keep Calm  
and  
Take the Philosophy Alumni Survey at  
https://inside.trinity.edu/Philosophy  
Thank you!
Upcoming Events

November 15, 2017
Stieren Arts Enrichment Series Lecture:
Contact Warhol: Performance and Photography Once More
Dr. Peggy Phelan
Chair, Department of Philosophy, Stanford University
Chapman Great Hall, CGC 142, 7:00 p.m.
Reception to Follow

2017 Alumni Weekend
October 13-15
https://new.trinity.edu/alumni/alumni-weekend