Greetings to all of you former students of the philosophy department at Trinity University!

It has been a very dry and hot summer, unusually so. Even the frost week has withered. It has a big tuber underground, so it will come back, but it is cooking in the heat right now. Given the dry weather, I’m thinking I’ll plant more drought-tolerant plants, like irises and crinums. I used to have lots of bluebonnets in the Spring. No longer.

Strange to say, the hummingbirds were very scarce this season. I found a way to stop the squirrels from drinking the syrup (they eat the green pears instead), but the hummers disappeared. We usually have a cloud of them around our feeders. Not this year. I’m guessing they moved on quickly, heading north, where there are flowers and cooler temperatures.

Trinity is going through some changes, one of which is that Chapman soon will be renovated. This is pretty hard to believe for me, as I’ve been at Trinity since 1882, oops I meant 1982, and while some departments have had renovations, the philosophy department never has. I’ll believe it when I see it, but it seems to be happening. I just hope the philosophy department doesn’t end up deep under the earth.

As usual, my colleagues are doing amazing scholarship. Curtis Brown is thinking about the nature of computation and fictional truth. Judith Norman is working on doing philosophy with children; Andrew Kania is writing a text on the philosophy of music (but did that in New Zealand, so in a way he was vacationing); Damian Caluori was working on Plotinus and Damascius (while in Switzerland, climbing around in the alps); and Rachel Johnson is working on what counts as reasons for action. I’m still trying to figure out what I am and why it matters. I mentioned some of my ideas a few days ago to Jonathan Frost ’05 and Livia Rodriguez ’04, and they thought I was nuts, so I think I must be on the wrong track.

Here is the link to a recent online article based in some part on an interview with me.


The numbers of majors are up, and they are very interesting people. We continue to attract good essays with the Hemlock competition. This year’s winners were Carlos Coronado ’20 and Mary Elizabeth Herring ‘20. Kathy Schnare ’89 and her husband have again funded this award, and we are grateful to them and to the students who submitted work.

I hope you will all consider emailing me some time, and letting me know what you are up to. I’d be happy to hear from you.
As usual, it’s hard to believe that another year has gone by. I enjoyed teaching all my classes; I guess I was the most adventurous in Philosophy of Mind, for which I had students read several books I had not used before, including Daniel Dennett’s latest book, *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds*, and a text by Kristin Andrews on animal cognition, *The Animal Mind*. I haven’t previously included animal cognition as a topic in my philosophy of mind classes, but it fits in very naturally. Thinking about what it would take for nonhuman animals to be conscious, or to have beliefs and desires about the natural world, or about their own or others’ mental states, is a great way to gain insight into these topics in the human case. Introducing this material into the course has gotten me more interested in the subject, and I’ve read some popular books in the area. I found Peter Godfrey-Smith’s book *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness* a little more random and superficial than I had hoped, but it was still interesting, and Jennifer Ackerman’s *The Genius of Birds* (recommended by my wife Karen) was terrific, going far beyond anecdotes and stories to discuss a wide variety of research on topics including some species’ remarkable problem-solving abilities, the relation of birdsong to language, and the similarities and differences between bird and human brains.

My literary reading has been fairly random recently, including some John Updike short stories, W. S. Merwin’s poetry collection *The Shadow of Sirius*, and a couple of English mystery novels from the 1930s and 40s by Margery Allingham. When Philip Roth died in May, I realized that I had somehow managed never to have read one of his books. I read the first one, *Goodbye, Columbus*, and really enjoyed it—I will have to read some more!

Overall, it was a great trip—we did some hiking and plenty of visiting with my sister and her boyfriend. My sister is a retired second-grade teacher who now owns and manages several rental properties. Her boyfriend builds houses. In the past he has built homes that are a kind of wild cross between a log cabin and a mansion (here is one example: https://www.zillow.com/homedetails/2515-Smith-Creek-Rd-Condon-MT-59826/3137777_zpid/), but his most recent project involves constructing several smaller, energy-efficient homes using sustainable materials.

Visiting Montana again has convinced me of something I have thought about now and then for decades, namely that I would really like to move there when I retire. For many years that prospect seemed too distant to think about very seriously. But I have been getting perilously close to the beginning of the procession at commencement ceremonies, a symptom of having taught at Trinity for 36 years, and I find that I am now taking retirement very seriously indeed! I am looking forward to returning to the mountains, lakes, and pine, fir, and spruce trees that I remember from childhood. ☀️
I have had a good year – teaching philosophy and general humanities classes and continuing to develop a program on Philosophy for Children. This year, I brought several groups of Trinity students to a couple of public schools in downtown San Antonio where we met biweekly to do philosophy with a group of bemused but happy and eager 4th graders. When I started doing philosophy with children I thought of it as a remote corner or application of more traditional philosophy. Now, however, I’m increasingly convinced that it gets to the core of philosophy, and is helping me renew my sense of what philosophy is all about. For one thing, it really does start in wonder – we begin by posing open-ended questions to the students (“how can you tell whether or not you are dreaming?”; “are you the same person now that you were as a baby?”). The students are generally startled and engaged by the questions, and eager to discuss them. These are often questions that they have been pondering on their own, and it is empowering to have them discussed in a formal setting, with guidance and support. The students appreciate the fact that the questions can be approached from different perspectives, and that the discussion is enriched by the diversity – in contrast to the more accustomed procedure of questions that have definite and correct answers. I am interested in some of the political, intellectual and moral aspects of doing philosophy with children (it isn’t really teaching philosophy to children, since I don’t know the answers to the questions I pose!). One of the political aspects involves the nature of the community that forms around the philosophy discussions. The kids all know who the ‘good’ students are in the class, the ones who reach the right answers the most quickly, who have a stronger intellectual background or better test scores. Traditional classrooms are competitive and hierarchical. Philosophy discussion on the other hand resists this sort of categorization: since knowledge is advanced through conversation, students need to work together rather than struggle to get ahead of each other. And since there is no single ‘correct’ answer, the intellectual landscape is much flatter – all the kids (not just the ones who there are test well) find that their perspectives are useful in advancing discussion. Philosophy for children is a genuinely collaborative and inclusive enterprise. Our philosophy discussions bring together a very diverse community which consists not only of elementary school children who are at different places intellectually, but also students and professors from Trinity and UTSA. One of the great surprises that I (and the college students) encounter is that we really do learn from the children. Formal education in philosophy advances our abilities to generate certain sorts of responses to questions – but it also disables other approaches. As we advance through our educations, we tend to dissociate creativity from cognition in a way that children do not (yet) do – so children are amazing at brainstorming. For instance, in the course of one discussion we asked the kids what the opposite of ‘real’ is – and got an impressively long list of suggestions – more than I could have ever generated on my own. There are interesting and important moral gains as well. The literature on philosophy for children discusses some of the philosophical virtues that the practice helps to cultivate. Too often philosophy discussions in college classrooms (and professional meetings) become a contest where participants try to one-up each other and show off how smart they are. I have been struck and impressed by the fact that our discussions in elementary school, by focusing on and emphasizing the collaborative nature of seeking knowledge, and explicitly fostering and valuing curiosity and wonder, guards against these sort of self-seeking or exhibitionist displays - displays which don’t, at the end of the day, contribute to the putative goal of building knowledge. This strikes me as healthy – and the kids say that the conversations are fun (“not like normal school”). For me as well, it is – if not quite a rediscovery, certainly a renewed attention to the ways in which philosophy can be both salutary and, yes, fun.
I write my note this year from Auckland, New Zealand, where I have enjoyed a wonderful full year’s academic leave. My main project has been a book-length introduction to the philosophy of music for Routledge’s series “Contemporary Introductions to Philosophy.” My original plan was to write eight chapters totaling about 80,000 words. As work progressed, three chapters split into two each, so now the book should comprise eleven chapters. I’ve drafted almost six of those this year, totally around 90,000 words. So either the book will be a lot longer than I planned, or I’ll have to do some serious cutting!

Most of the topics of the book will be familiar to those who’ve taken a philosophy of music course with me: the nature and value of both emotions (in music and listener) and purely musical features, such as pitch, rhythm, and harmony; the nature of musical works, performances, and recordings; and the definition of music. Two chapters, however, are on topics that I have never written about before. I begin the book with the puzzle of Bob Dylan’s winning the Nobel Prize for literature, when most people think of Dylan as a musician. If songs are literature because they include artistic words, are films (say) music because they include soundtracks? On the other hand, if songs are not literature (because they’re substantially musical), shouldn’t they be excluded from the realm of music, too (because they’re substantially literary)? Near the end of the book I turn to the intersection of musical and moral value. Can instrumental music contribute to the oppression of women? Can white people play authentic blues? These are very complicated questions and hence a real challenge to present in an introductory setting. I’m looking forward to testing the book out on my students in Philosophy of Music in the Fall.

As you might have guessed, I haven’t spent every waking hour in New Zealand doing philosophy. We’ve travelled around the country with several visitors from the States, including colleagues from Trinity. I’ve also had several great musical opportunities, performing some choral works I’ve never sung before, including Schubert’s *Mass in A-flat*, Puccini’s *Messa di Gloria*, and Saint-Saëns’s *Requiem*. The highlight, however, was being invited to conduct a local choir, The Souls, in an all-Beatles program, for which I arranged several Beatles songs myself.

As always, I’d love to hear what you’ve been up to, so drop me a line if you have the chance. 🎶
While I have given the lecture on Plato’s *Symposium* for the First Year Experience Huma for many years now, last Fall was my first time teaching a section of this course. We read the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, some tragedies, *Symposium*, some lyric texts, Vergil, and Apuleius. Teaching literature is quite different from teaching philosophy. (Achilles, Aeneas, Lucius and friends are not so much into arguments.) It was a fascinating experience for me. Reading all these wonderful works again was also helpful to me for refreshing my memory concerning the cultural context of Plato. As every year, I taught Classical Greek Philosophy and a couple of sections of Intro. Moreover, I taught a seminar on Forms in ancient metaphysics. We focused on Plato’s theory of Forms, its critique in Plato’s later work and in the early Aristotle, before we turned to forms in Aristotle’s physics and metaphysics. It became very clear that Aristotle’s forms (that he needs for his hylemorphism, *i.e.* his idea that natural substances consist of form and matter) is very much a further development of Plato’s forms. While Aristotle’s forms are not transcendent, they are, like Plato’s forms, immaterial essences. We also looked at the question, hotly debated in Aristotle scholarship, whether Aristotle’s forms are individuals or universals.


I have continued working on my commentary on Plotinus’ *Ennead* VI.1 and made good progress. I presented the current state of my work at a weeklong research seminar in Dublin this summer and gave a talk about one of its topics at the University of Oslo. After Dublin, I felt a certain measure of exhaustion, the best cure for which is hiking. So I spent a week at one of my favorite locations, Scuol in Switzerland. My hotel had a spa attached. After a hike, you can sit in the outdoor pool and enjoy the sunset in the mountains. I suspect Adam and Eve used to live here before they were driven out, though I did not see any snakes.

View from hiking trail, Scuol, Switzerland
This was my fifth year teaching at Trinity. In the fall, I taught Philosophy of Law and Existentialism. As usual, 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. I also revised Philosophy of Law this year so that it focuses more on the question of why we have an obligation to obey the law (when we do).

In the spring, I taught Environmental Ethics and Biomedical Ethics. Having now taught two sections of Environmental Ethics every year for the past five years, I am amazed and very pleased by how different the class is 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. Biomedical Ethics was a brand new course for me. It is always exciting to teach a new subject and I had a very hard-working, thoughtful, and enthusiastic group of students in this class who made it even more rewarding.

I also had the pleasure of speaking to a group of high school students in the Oil-land course at the International School of the Americas in San Antonio this spring. I was really impressed with their open-mindedness and their eagerness to learn new things. It was great fun to hear their thoughts about what a more environmentally sustainable society would look like and what problems it might face.

As for my research, I spent the year revising papers that I am submitting for publication. I’ve recently been considering branching out into new research areas. To that end, I participated in a workshop on environmental ethics at Texas State University in San Marcos this past January. It was one of the most collegial workshops I’ve ever attended and I learned a lot about current work in environmental ethics.

I am doing some traveling this summer. I’m visiting friends in Los Angeles, West Virginia, Boston, and Portland, Oregon. I have also spent some time with my family in Minnesota. One of my brothers works for a company that sells native grass seed. I’ve spent a couple of weeks tramping around in Minnesota’s swamps picking rare seed to sell to them.

The Department of Philosophy thanks Kathy L. Schnare ’89 and her husband, William Reid, for their generous support of the Hemlock Award.
2017-2018 Philosophy Events

Stieren Arts Enrichment Series Lecture

Peggy Phelan, Stanford University
Guggenheim Fellowship for Humanities, US & Canada
Public Talk: Contact Warhol: Performance and Photography Once More
Classroom Talk: Issues of Singularity and Multiples in Live Performance
Stieren Philosophy Department Host: Dr. Judith Norman

The Stieren Arts Enrichment Series is made possible by Jane and the late Arthur Stieren of San Antonio.

The department also hosted or was represented in the following campus events.

Veterans for Peace Panel: Tour of Palestine / Palestine-Israeli Conflict, Dr. Judith Norman, Coordinator

The Rohingya Crisis in Burma, Awareness-Raising Panel, Dr. Judith Norman, Coordinator

Confronting Our History of Fascism: A Discussion About Holocaust Education in Germany
Dr. Judith Norman, Panelist

Dr. Luke Peterson, Knowledge and Power in Middle Eastern Studies, Dr. Judith Norman, Coordinator

Dr. Jason Morrow ’89, Pallative Care, Meaning of Life class, Dr. Steven Luper

Dr. Jason Morrow ’89, Pallative Care, Biomedical Ethics class, Dr. Rachel Johnson

Dr. Emere Hatipoglu, Fulbright Scholar Peacebuilding Symposium Panelist / Faculty Reception

Philosophy Faculty

CURTIS BROWN, PROFESSOR
cbrown@trinity.edu

DAMIAN CALUORI, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
dcaluori@trinity.edu

RACHEL JOHNSON, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
rjohnso8@trinity.edu

ANDREW KANIA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
akania@trinity.edu

STEVEN LUPER, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR
super@trinity.edu

JUDITH NORMAN, PROFESSOR
jnorman2@trinity.edu

Thank you!

Keep Calm & Take the Philosophy Alumni Survey at https://inside.trinity.edu/Philosophy
Phone: 210-999-8305
Fax: 210-999-8353

Website: https://new.trinity.edu/academics/departments/philosophy
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/trinityuniversityCAVE/

Upcoming 2018-2019 Events

October 4 Oliver Sensen
5:30PM Northrup Hall 040

October 17 Remi Kanazi
7:00PM Northrup Hall 040

November 13 Kathleen Higgins
Stieren Arts Enrichment Series Philosophy Lecturer
7:00PM Chapman Great Hall

October 19-21 Alumni Weekend
https://new.trinity.edu/alumni/alumni-weekend