

Philosophy @X

Number 3 Spring 2006



Faculty 2005-06

(standing) Jay Cook, James Mensch,
William Sweet, Ed Carty and Louis Groarke
(seated) Laura Byrne and Christopher Byrne



The StFX Philosophy Department is recognised for its excellence in teaching and research, as well as the active role played by the professors in the life of the University. Dr. Steven Baldner received the University's Distinguished Teaching Award in 2004, and Dr. William Sweet received its Research Award in 2001.

Inside this newsletter you'll see some of the reasons why, in its last external assessment, the reviewers wrote that StFX Philosophy "is almost certainly the best small [Philosophy] department in the country."

This year, the Department welcomed Dr. Jay Cook as a tenure-track Assistant Professor. In addition to teaching courses in logic, the philosophy of science, and the philosophy of law, Dr. Cook enlivened our student philosophy society, *The Socratic Circle*, with a presentation on philosophical paradoxes (see page 3).

The Department has been host to a record number of guest speakers and social events this year (see pages 6 and 7), and visiting lecturers from Wilfrid Laurier University, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, Trent University, Dalhousie University, and Mount Allison University provided students and members of the university community as a whole with an opportunity to explore a number of sometimes controversial contemporary issues. Next year also promises to bring a number of stimulating speakers to campus.

The Department continues to design new courses that will be of interest to all students.

One of our **new courses for 2006-07** is "Aesthetics" (281). This 3-credit course focuses on such questions as: Is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Is it possible to define art? What is an artistic experience? Philosophy 450 (**Seminar in Ethics, Politics and the Philosophy of Law**) will also be offered, and courses in *Philosophy and Feminism* and *Critical Thinking* are now going through the approval process.

For more information on our courses and degree options, check our website. The Department faculty and philosophy honours and major students are looking forward to another exciting year in 2006-07!

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During the past year, two former philosophy professors passed away. Although Fr. Howard Shea and Dr. George Sanderson retired some years ago, both left their mark on the Department and the University, and they will be greatly missed.

For more about them, see the tributes to them:

- www.stfx.ca/academic/philosophy/Shea-obit.html
- www.stfx.ca/academic/philosophy/Sanderson-obit.html



Louis Groarke studied at Colorado State University (B.A.) and at the University of Waterloo (M.A., Ph.D.). He has taught at York, Trent, and UPEI, and is finishing his third year of teaching at StFX.

His article "Why Christianity and Theoretical Liberalism Cannot Be Reconciled" will soon appear in *The Heythrop Journal*; Professor Groarke has also contributed a paper (on Blaise Pascal's literary method of inspiration) to a special edition of *Poetics Today* on "genres of philosophy." He is currently writing an ethics textbook for Oxford University Press, and Fairleigh Dickinson University Press has expressed interest in an anthology on *Genres of Philosophy* that he will edit, together with Dr. Jonathan Lavery of Wilfrid Laurier University.

In 2006-07 Professor Groarke will be teaching **Introductory Philosophy** (100), **Ethics in Health and Medicine** (336), **Aesthetics** (281), and **Social and Political Philosophy** (371).

Steven Baldner was educated at the University of Michigan (B.A.), the University of Louvain, at the University of Toronto (M.A., Ph.D.); while at Toronto, he received a Licentiate degree from the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. His primary academic interests are in 13th century philosophy, especially in natural philosophy and the problem of creation.

During the past year, Dr. Baldner has been on sabbatical leave, spending most of the year in Ottawa at the Dominican University College, where he has been doing research on St. Albert the Great. He has given lectures at the University of Ottawa and the Dominican University College, and from April to June will teach an undergraduate course on Albert's philosophy of nature at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford.

In 2006-07 Professor Baldner will be teaching **Introductory Philosophy** (100), **Ethics** (330) and two, 3-credit courses on **Mediaeval Philosophy** (361/2).

John (Jay) Cook studied at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and the University of Toronto (Ph.D.), and is just completing his first year of teaching at StFX. He continues his research in the philosophy of language, and is currently investigating the concepts of 'joint attention' and 'mindreading' in accounts of language acquisition. He presented a paper at the Canadian Philosophical Association meeting in London, entitled "Radically Interpreting Autistic Speakers," as well as a paper at the Atlantic Region Philosophical Association meeting in St. John's, entitled "Holism and Inferentialism". In November he presented a paper to the Phoenix Colloquium at Mount Allison University on "Mindblindness and Radical Interpretation" which will be published in the online journal, *Analecta Hermeneutica*.

In 2006-07 Professor Cook will teach **Introductory Philosophy** (100), **Philosophy of Science** (210) and two 3-credit courses in **Contemporary Anglo-American Philosophy** (391/2).

Edward Carty has been at StFX since 1966. He studied at the University of Louvain, in Belgium, and is a graduate of the University of Glasgow, Scotland. While officially retired in 2003, Professor Carty continues to teach courses in introductory philosophy and in Classics.

When not in his office, pouring over Roberts Rules of Order, he is likely to be found with StFX University Rugby Club, where he has been the Coach since 1967. He has also served on most of the senior academic committees of the University.

James Mensch studied at St. John's College in Maryland, at the Pontifical Institute, at the University of Washington (MBA) and at the University of Toronto (Ph.D.). He has been at StFX since 1989. His main areas of research are phenomenology and contemporary continental philosophy and is currently interested in political theory. His book *Hiddenness and Alterity* was published in 2005, and he has published a number of philosophical papers in such places as: *Symposium, Phänomenologie und Postmoderne; Husserl Studies*; and *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*.

In 2006-07 Professor Mensch will teach **Introductory Philosophy** (100), **Philosophy of Human Nature** (230) and **Modern Philosophy** (310).

(continued on p. 4)

Philosophy Awards and Prizes

The Father Charles R. MacDonald Medal

The Father Charles R. MacDonald Memorial Medal is the Department's highest award to a graduating student, and is normally awarded at convocation. It honours Fr. MacDonald, who taught at StFX from the 1940s until shortly before his death in 1975. Last year's recipient was Martin Capstick (B.A. '05) who is currently completing an MA in Philosophy at Memorial University.

The Father Edo Gatto Award

The Father Edo Gatto Memorial Award is presented to a student who shows excellence in mediaeval philosophy, particularly in Department's courses in that area. It was established in honour of Fr. Gatto (B.A. '52), who died tragically in a motor vehicle accident in December 1991. The most recent recipient (2004) was Dan McCulloch (B.A. '05)

The Socratic Circle Student Philosophy Society



Members of The Socratic Circle
(Student Philosophy Society)

Front Row: Therese Tisseverasinghe (*President*), Louis Groarke (*Faculty Advisor*), and Dary Jessome (*Vice-President*)

Philosophy Student Socials

The importance of doing nothing

On November 17, UNESCO World Philosophy Day, the Department together with 'The Socratic Circle' sponsored an evening on 'the importance of doing nothing.' The event took place in the causal atmosphere of the 3rd floor lounge outside of Jack's Bar (Bloomfield Centre). Professors and students of Philosophy provided brief (and humorous) comments on this important, philosophical subject.

Do you believe in magic?

On October 5, the Philosophy Society sponsored "The Philosophy of Magic - the Magic of Philosophy" with Jeremy Bennett (*below*) introducing us to magic, and Dr. Jay Cook commenting on Philosophy and Puzzles.



Jeremy Bennett demonstrating the 'magic' of one hand clapping



Honours Theses - 2006

Therese Tisseverasinghe

My thesis is in moral philosophy, and is specifically on the privatization of the health care system in Canada. I argue that privatization of health care will lead inevitably to the deterioration of the current public health care sector. I then propose a kind of "social egalitarianism" on the basis of which I show the unfairness of having a health care system that caters to the wealthiest members of society at the cost of the majority. I use utilitarianism to show how privatization would be harmful to society if it fails to provide adequate health care to all its members. But I also use Thomas Aquinas' concepts of natural law and the common good, which assert that human life and health should be preserved, to show that the state has an obligation to provide adequate health care. Finally, I adopt Edith Stein's analysis of human empathy to maintain that a vital part of a *humane* society should be to express compassion towards its sick.

More of *Who's who*

(continued from page 2)

William Sweet is Chair of the Philosophy Department and holds graduate degrees in philosophy, political science, and theology. He has studied (among other places) at the Universities of Ottawa, Saint Paul, Manitoba, Carleton, Paris, Vienna, and Berlin. Before coming to StFX, he taught in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Québec, and in France. He has been a visiting professor in China, India, Australia, and Belgium, has lectured in over 50 countries, and serves on the executive of a number of international philosophical organisations.

Professor Sweet has recently received another Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Grant, his fifth, to assist in organising a conference on "Migrating Texts and Traditions."

Over the past year, his research and committee work has led him to participate in meetings in Rome (of the International Jacques Maritain Institute), Helsinki (Finland); Nivelles (Belgium), London and Oxford (England); Ottawa, and St. John's (Newfoundland). This spring and summer, Dr. Sweet has been invited to present papers this summer in Salzburg, Austria; Bandung, Indonesia; Moscow, Russia (to the Russian Academy of Sciences); Taipei, Taiwan (to Soochow University); Hanoi (Vietnam) and Daegu, Korea (to the Korean Philosophical Association).

Professor Sweet's teaching interests include political and legal philosophy, the philosophy of religion, ethics, and cross-cultural philosophy. Recently, a new (paperback) edition of his book *Idealism and Rights and Politics* appeared, as well as *Ethics, and the Challenges to Democracy in the 'New Independent States'*, which he co-edited with Tinatin Bochorishvili (of the Georgian Academy of Sciences), and Daniel Ahern (of the University of New Brunswick). Books on *Bernard Bosanquet and the Legacy of British Idealism* (University of Toronto Press), *The Moral, Social, and Political Philosophy of the British Idealists* (Imprint Academic); *Religion and the Challenges of Science* (Ashgate Publishers) and *Philosophy of Religion, Volume 4 of The Proceedings of the XXI World Congress of Philosophy (Istanbul 2003)*; and a 3-volume set of *Philosophical Lectures and Remains of Arthur Ritchie Lord*, are forthcoming this spring/summer.

In 2006-07 Professor Sweet will be teaching **Introductory Philosophy** (100), **Philosophy of Religion** (240) and the seminar in **Ethics, Politics and the Philosophy of Law** (450).

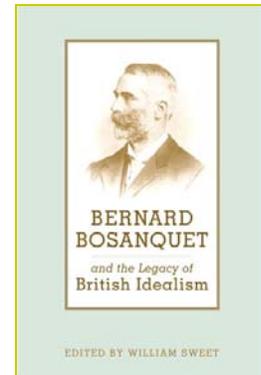
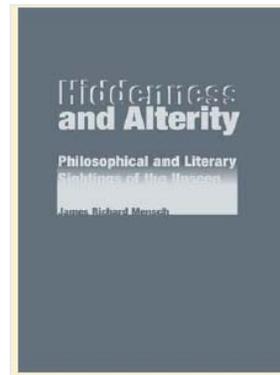
Christopher Byrne studied at the University of Toronto (B.A.; Ph.D.) and the University of Heidelberg (M.A.), majoring in Philosophy, Political Science, and Ancient Greek. He has been a member of the StFX Philosophy Department since 1985, teaching courses in ancient Greek Philosophy, logic, and ethics.

Professor Byrne will be on sabbatical for the 2006-07 academic year. He plans to complete his book on Aristotle's physics.

Laura Byrne studied at McGill University (B.A.), the University of Nice, France, and the University of Toronto (M.A., Ph.D.). She has taught previously at the University of Toronto, Dalhousie University, and the University of King's College, Halifax.

Dr. Byrne has just completed an article on Spinoza's use of the geometrical method in his work, *The Ethics*. In 2006-07, she will be in Ottawa, where she will continue to pursue her interests in Early Modern philosophy and the philosophy of mind.

Recent Department Publications



Professor William Sweet's most recent book, *Bernard Bosanquet and the Legacy of British Idealism*, will appear from the University of Toronto Press in April, 2006. This book provides a comprehensive account of the work and influences of one of the leading figures of early 20th century British philosophy.

Professor James Mensch's latest book, *Hiddenness and Alterity: Philosophical and Literary Sightings of the Unseen*, was published in 2005 by Duquesne University Press. In this book, Dr. Mensch "seeks to define how the hidden shows itself" and raises the question of "the nature and origin of our self-concealment."



Our Grads Write Home

...from Waterloo (*Teri Pecoskie '05*)

After graduating last May, I headed back to Ontario to start my Master's at the University of Waterloo. While exciting, it was also a little scary to start all over again at a new (not to mention enormous) school where I didn't know a single person. But everyone has been very welcoming, making the transition seamless. Most of my time here is spent reading, writing, preparing talks, and working as a TA. It continues to amaze me that I am being trusted to mark the papers and exams of hundreds of first and second year students. Yikes.

Waterloo is home now, but I still think about StFX every day. I truly miss the company of the friends and teachers who constantly inspired my academic views. They continue to influence both my work and me, personally, from a distance. What I miss the most, however, is chatting about philosophy over a couple of pitchers at the Inn! The ability to develop this type of relationship with other students and faculty members is unique to StFX. Enjoy it while you can!



...from St John's (*Martin Capstick '05*)

I'm a Masters student at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I'm also a graduate assistant for an Introductory Philosophy course and, as a part of my assistant duties, I hold a mini tutorial to help students with writing philosophical papers (which is a task I still struggle with myself). I am studying with Dr. David Thompson on the importance of subjectivity and first person perspectives in the philosophy of mind. I am doing this particularly through a phenomenological perspective as a counter to third-person absolutism and how this approach can combine elements of phenomenology and cognitive science. I've applied to a number of doctoral programs in Canada and the US beginning in the fall of 2006. I am currently awaiting the results.

... from Ottawa (*Paul Curry '05*)

In September I began my Master's degree at the University of Ottawa. I chose to do a course-based degree which consists of 8 graduate courses. I'm also employed by the department as a teaching assistant for a course called Reasoning and Critical Thinking. This involves administering and correcting all the exams as well as holding office hours for students who need help.

While my main interests are in political philosophy, I've taken graduate seminars on topics such as skepticism, postmodernism and philosophy of science. Next year I plan to start my PhD, focusing on Canada's involvement in the availability of generic drugs for third world countries – a mix of applied ethics and political philosophy.



... from Korea (*Vanessa MacPherson '92*)

Since leaving StFX, I did MA studies at Waterloo and in Newfoundland. For the past 5 years, I have been teaching English as a second language in Seoul, Korea. It's not philosophy, but I have been traveling, learning, living, painting, and taking photographs. I consider the notion of writing, every now and then... and then I get busy.

Korean education is based on centuries of Confucian training which is mostly memorization. The students - elementary, middle school and high school - do not learn critical thinking skills or skills of analysis. A lot of what I do in teaching English is essay writing, which involves introducing some of the methods of logic and analysis that I learned at X.

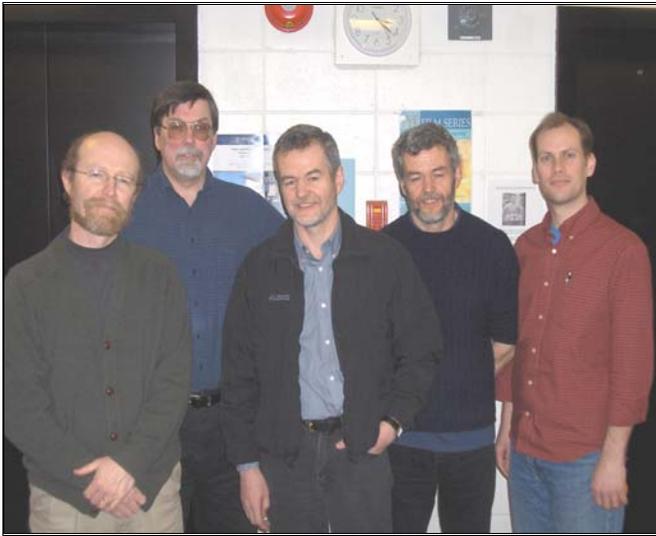
Koreans have an interesting spin on the word "original." There are, of course, different senses of the word. We in the West tend to focus on the "new", the different, making something now. In Korea, the emphasis is entirely the opposite, where "original" means: first, as in, the one before, the one we go back to and don't change.

I feel very happy and content thinking of you all in the place I call home. I hope it's as good to all of you as it was to me.

Events and Lectures

Law and Freedom of Religion

On February 17, Dr. Paul Groarke of the Canadian Human Rights tribunal gave a talk in the StFX Philosophy Department's annual lecture series. His presentation, "Law, Philosophy, and Freedom of Religion," drew on some of the recent cases in Canadian law concerning the freedom of religion, and raised the philosophical and legal issue of how religion can and ought to be defined in such a context. Definitions in law are sometimes more modest than those philosophers seek, but Dr Groarke suggested that philosophers could do well to emulate them.



l to r: Christopher Byrne, William Sweet, Paul Groarke, Louis Groarke, and Jay Cook

Ethics and "Bodyworlds"



l to r: Jay Cook, Laura Byrne, Christopher Byrne, Lawrence Burns, William Sweet, Edward Carty and Louis Groarke.

On February 10, Dr. Lawrence Burns, Post-doctoral Fellow in the Ethics of Health Research and Policy, Department of Bioethics, Dalhousie University, gave the third talk in the Philosophy Department's annual lecture series: "Bodyworlds or Body Works of Art?: Assessing the Educational Merits of the "Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies." Dr. Burns spoke on some of the ethical, artistic and educational issues that arise when we have exhibitions such as *Bodyworlds2*, a display of "plastinated" human bodies, then showing at the Ontario Science Centre in Toronto.

Vice, Virtue, and Insincerity

Professor Christine McKinnon of Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, and the author of *Character, Virtue Theories, and the Vices*, gave two lectures to the StFX Philosophy Department, on October 13 and 14.

Prof. McKinnon's first talk, on "Character and Virtue Ethics," focused on the importance of character in our evaluations of good human lives. Arguing for character development as a good for human beings, she also discussed some of the constraints involved in the process.

In "Varieties of Insincerity," Dr McKinnon spoke about the different ways in which people can be insincere in what they say or insincere in their decision to share the truth. Lying, cheating and plagiarism fall into this discussion.

Logic and Critical Thinking

Professor Leo Groarke, Professor of Philosophy and Dean of the Brantford campus of Wilfrid Laurier University spoke to the StFX Philosophy Department and the Socratic Circle on November 2 and 3.

The author of *Greek Scepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought.*, Dr Groarke's principal lecture was on "Do (formal or informal) logic courses improve our students' ability to think?" Today, many students are either required to, or opt for, enrolling in such courses, and it has been said that they serve as an ideal way to teach students how to think, reason and argue well. Dr Groarke asked: What is the evidence for this claim? After noting some positive benefits, he also posed some tough questions that need to be asked if logic is to be an important course for students outside of philosophy programs.

In "Aesop the Philosopher," a talk to *The Socratic Circle*, Dr Groarke spoke about the fables of Aesop, of Aesop as a sophist, and about the different ways in which we can understand these tales.

Dirty Hands and the Problem of Torture

Do extreme situations justify the use of torture? On March 10, Dr Richard Matthews, of the Department of Philosophy at Mount Allison University in Sackville, NB, spoke on some of the recent arguments for the use of torture by government officials dealing with terrorist suspects.

Civil libertarians seem to be divided on this issue; the American defence lawyer, Alan Dershowitz, for example, has argued that government officials are sometimes morally obligated to do that which is wrong, and that in extreme situations they may be morally required to use torture. Dr Matthews addressed several of the ethical, legal and social issues that arise in this discussion.

Does the Principle of Natural Selection as a Law Concerning Physical Systems Support the Explanatory Autonomy of Biology?

One of the most exciting areas in the philosophy of science is the philosophy of biology. Central to much of this discussion is the question of the relation of physicalism to reductionism – that is, whether the laws of physical systems (including those systems studied by biology) can be derived from other, more fundamental physical laws. Slobodan Perovic of the Department of Philosophy at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, introduced this view, and examined the proposal of Alex Rosenberg and D. M. Kaplan– that one can explain the autonomy of biology without violating the principles of reductive physicalism.

World Philosophy Day

Beginning in 2002, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has declared an annual World Philosophy Day. Taking place on the 3rd Thursday of November, this Day is celebrated in more than 50 countries around the world.

St FX joined in these celebrations, in 2005, with an evening devoted to the question of philosophy as 'doing nothing. (see page 3)'

World Philosophy Days are designed to involve not only philosophers and researchers, but the general public. Their aim is to recognize the role of philosophy in contemporary debates, to promote the study of philosophy, to

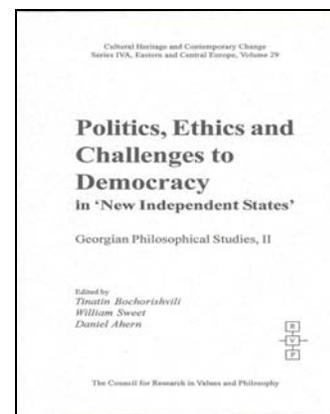
cultivate curiosity as well as the understanding of philosophy among students, and to show how philosophy has an important role to play for human civilization and social progress.

World Philosophy Day poster



Politics, Ethics, and the Challenges to Democracy in the 'New Independent States'

The 'new independent states' of Eastern Europe and Asia have been faced with many challenges since the collapse of Communism in 1991. Based on talks presented at the Georgian Academy of Sciences in Tbilisi, Dr William Sweet, and co-editors Tinatin Bochorishvili (of the Georgian Academy of Sciences), and Daniel Ahern (of UNB), note the relevance of philosophy to discussions of combating corruption and establishing or maintaining an ethical order in these countries.



This volume was published in the fall of 2005 by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy Press, in Washington, DC.

For student advising, declaration of major/minor/honours, and general questions concerning the philosophy programs, see the Chair, Dr. William Sweet (NH 518)

For other information on visiting speakers, professors' schedules, and information on specific courses, see the Secretary (NH 514) or the professor for the course.

Philosophy Courses for 2006-2007

PHIL 100 – Introductory Philosophy

... studies the major thinkers in the history of philosophy, and introduces students to logic and critical thinking

PHIL 210 – Philosophy of Science

... examines scientific method and the logic of science

PHIL 230 - Philosophy of Human Nature

... examines the nature of personal identity, how the mind is related to the body, and the possibility of survival after death

PHIL 240 – Philosophy of Religion

... looks at different concepts of, and proofs for, the existence of God

PHIL 281 – Aesthetics NEW for 2006-07

... examines philosophical themes as they occur in literature from around the world.

PHIL 310 – Modern Philosophy

... focuses on the key thinkers of modern philosophy.

PHIL 330 – Ethics / PHIL 331 - Ethical Theories / PHIL 332 - Contemporary Moral and Social Issues ... deal with the major ethical theories and their applications to contemporary problems.

PHIL 334 - Ethics Applied to the Professions ... deals with the application of ethical theories and values to contemporary problems in the professions, especially business, journalism, and government.

PHIL 336 - Ethics in Health and Medicine ... examines such issues as freedom, autonomy, and consent; death, dying, and euthanasia; reproductive technologies and

rights; and the concepts of health and well-being.

PHIL 361 - Early Medieval Philosophy / PHIL 362 – Philosophy in the High Middle Ages ... discuss some of the major writings of the founders of the western philosophical traditions

PHIL 371 - Social and Political Philosophy

...examines issues such as: What would an ideal society be like? Should there be limits on human freedom? Is it ever morally acceptable to disobey or rebel against the state?

PHIL 391 and 392 - Anglo-American Philosophy

... examine the central questions of 20th century philosophy in the English-speaking world.

PHIL 450 - Seminar in Ethics, Political Philosophy, and the Philosophy of Law NEW for 2006-07

... examines such topics as the state and society, rights and duties, justice and equality, freedom and punishment, the moral basis of political obligation, and the concept of law.

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