

# The Dialectic

Classics & Philosophy Newsletter  
Volume 7, Issue 1

Philosophy & Humanities, UTA  
Fall, 2004

## Dear Philosophers and Classicists,

Is the Light of Reason making your head hurt? Are you no longer sure that *you* exist? Time for a break—a chance to read about those who are bold enough, wise enough, or just plain crazy enough to confront the timeless questions posed by the human condition. Enjoy!

Lukas Szrot  
President  
Philosophy Club at UTA

p.s. Thanks go to Mitch Hodge and Jon Olson for their time helping on the newsletter.

## Robert (Bob) Brandom Wows UTA

In black shirt and slacks, quiet voice, and a beard out of this world, Robert Brandom came to the UTA Philosophy Department and proved philosophy has something to say. He lectured on hermeneutic practices and the reciprocal impact on the theory of meaning that the meanings of sentences and the meanings of texts have on each other. Hermeneutics supply some of the criteria that any theory of meaning must satisfy and theories of meaning must be able to supply the raw materials for hermeneutic interpretation.



Professor Brandom lectures to a rapt audience

The basic problem stems from Quine: How can we separate meaning from context? Is a text an attempt by an author to impart a pure, self-contained meaning to linguistic form—which a reader either understands correctly or not? Or does the author simply write words to which readers will impart their own meaning? Professor Brandom believes a middle ground is achievable. “Meaning emerges in a process,” says Brandom. “It is never independent of its context.” Brandom makes inferential abilities do the brunt of the work in interpretation. “Our ability, as competent language users, to make inferences places us in a web of meaning from which to grasp the meaning of an individual text or sentence when we are able to place it in context.”

What about the more mundane details? Professor Brandom’s visit was Friday 12 March 2004. His lecture, entitled “Hermeneutic Practice and Theories of Meaning,” was well attended by faculty and students—with plenty of questions for Professor Brandom at the end of the talk. The lecture was presented at 3:30 pm, preceded by an informal reception in the Philosophy Department main office, 305 Carlisle Hall.

Visiting alumnus Marge Duneheew and others afterwards retreated to the Blue Mesa Grill in Fort Worth for a spectacular evening of wit and entertainment with Professor Brandom.

Our lecturer hailed from the University of Pittsburgh where he is Distinguished Service Professor of Philosophy. On the Saturday evening following the lecture, faculty entertained Professor Brandom at an informal gathering at the home of Professor Charles Nussbaum.

## Graduating Senior Chad Kidd Sweeps Spring Philosophy Awards

Chad Kidd, always a strong contender, received last spring both of the new awards now given to philosophy students: Undergraduate philosophy majors with records of superior academic accomplishment in philosophy are eligible for The Joel Feinberg Award for the Outstanding UTA Philosophy Major. Each year, the department will award \$200 to the outstanding philosophy major.

In order to be considered for this award, one must: (1) be a declared philosophy (PHIL)

major, with a minimum of 60 hours completed overall; (2) have completed at least 12 student credit hours in residence at UTA, including 6 hours of philosophy courses in residence; (3) have an overall GPA at UTA of at least 3.00, with a minimum GPA of 3.50 in one's UTA philosophy courses; and (4) not have won the award in a previous year.



**Chad Kidd: Justifiably proud of his accomplishments!**

This award honors Joel Feinberg, who was Regents' Professor of Philosophy at The University of Arizona. Professor Feinberg, a past president of The American Philosophical Association, was a preeminent moral, social, political, and legal philosopher. His work ranges from the theory of responsibility (1970) to rights and justice (1980) to the moral limits of the criminal law (1984-1988) to freedom and fulfillment (1992) to problems at the roots of law (2003).



**Joel Feinberg (1926-2004)**

But Chad wasn't content with wresting the Feinberg Award from the grasp of other philosophy majors; he managed to win the Wilfrid Sellars Prize in Philosophy, too! Each spring, current UTA philosophy majors are invited to submit papers in philosophy in competition for the Wilfrid Sellars Prize. The author of the winning paper receives a cash prize of \$200.

The prize is named in honor of Wilfrid Sellars (1912-1989), whose published work includes significant contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of science. During his long career, Professor Sellars held academic appointments at the University of Iowa, the University of Minnesota, Yale University, and the University of Pittsburgh. He is best known as a critic of foundationalist epistemology and was one of the first contemporary functionalists. His classic 1956 essay "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" played a major role in the postwar rejection of Cartesianism.

### **Homerathon 2004: Crowds Gathered and Fans Swooned!**

On Wednesday, 31 March 2004, the Classics Club held its annual Homerathon. The Homerathon has been a long standing tradition at UTA where faculty and students join together to present Homer's epic, *The Odyssey*. Beginning in the wee hours of the morning, and continuing well into the evening, those participating read 15-minute-long passages from the epic before curious and eager crowds.

But, the fun does not stop there! Participants anxious to make the epic come alive often find various ways to "spice up" the recitation: some wear funny hats, some read it in other languages, including the original Greek, and others read their passages in strange voices with marked enthusiasm. The purpose is to make this classic come alive and show why Homer's works are still relevant to us today.



**College of Liberal Arts Dean Beth Wright reads**

*The Odyssey* is the ancient Greek story of Odysseus's travels as he tries to make his way home to his lovely and loyal wife Penelope and his son Telemachus. The action picks up after the end of the Trojan War (described in Homer's other epic, *The Iliad*), when Odysseus begins his voyage home. But, since he has angered the god Poseidon, he is detoured to many strange and wondrous places filled with Cyclopeses, witches, cannibals and more. After Poseidon has had his fill of divine wrath, Odysseus returns home after being away for 20 years. Upon his return, he finds his home filled with ravenous suitors who have attempted to wed Penelope. Yet, vowing to await Odysseus's return and not giving up hope, Penelope keeps the suitors at bay. In the end, Odysseus and his son are reunited and together they slay the suitors, and Odysseus takes his place at ruler of Ithaca with his lovely and loyal wife at his side.

The Program in Classical Studies and the Classics Club at UTA would like to thank all that participated in this tradition. We'll see you next year!

### ***Phi Sigma Tau* Officers Party Hard!**

On March 5, 2004, *Phi Sigma Tau* officers and faculty sponsor gathered at Mac's Bar & Grill in Arlington for good conversation and good food. In attendance were Denny Bradshaw, Sarah McMichael, Jon Olson, and Mitch Hodge along with his son Jesse.

Officers discussed future plans for *Phi Sigma Tau* as well as their own academic futures. Conversation also turned to topics in philosophy and academia in general. All shared in great food and conversation, thus showing that *Phi Sigma Tau* is the where all the "kewl" philosophers hang out. For information on how you can join in the fun, visit the Philosophy Department main office at UTA!

### **BONUS PICS FROM THE SPRING PICNIC**



**UTA Classical Studies Lecturer David Hoot enjoys a burger at the Spring 2004 Philosophy and Classics Picnic**



**Jesse B. Hodge—Still naughty after all these years!**

### ***Phi Sigma Tau* Colloquia Draw Crowds**

On March 29, 2004, UTA lecturer and newly crowned Doctor of Philosophy, Mark Sadler gave a multimedia presentation entitled "God Knows: An Explication of Divine Omniscience" as part of the *Phi Sigma Tau* Faculty Colloquium Series. Dr. Sadler's lecture was given to an audience of approximately 50 people including UTA faculty, *Phi Sigma Tau* members, Philosophy Club members, philosophy majors, and philosophy enthusiasts.

The lecture covered Dr. Sadler's explanation of God's omniscience which seeks to overcome various problems in the philosophy of religion. The discussion afterward was lively, and both students and faculty were engaged in the conversation. *Phi Sigma Tau* would like to both thank Dr. Sadler for his participation in the Series and congratulate him on his recently received doctorate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

On May 3, 2004, Chad Kidd, UTA philosophy senior, presented a paper based on his senior thesis as part of the *Phi Sigma Tau* Student Colloquium Series. His lecture, entitled "A New Face for Realism: A Davidsonian Critique of Internal Realism and the Model-Theoretic Argument" was given to a crowd of about 20 philosophy students and enthusiasts, *Phi Sigma Tau* officers and members, as well as Philosophy Department faculty.

Chad discussed Hilary Putnam's attack on metaphysical realism, a defense of Putnam's own internal realism, and a critique of that position by Donald Davidson and his followers. His lecture covered many of the major topics in contemporary metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language. Discussion after the lecture was equally enthralling, and spilled over into the halls after the completion of the regular question and answer session.