

The Dialectic

Classics & Philosophy Newsletter
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Dear Philosophers and Classicists,

Have you studied the deepest questions of human existence *today*? No? Would you care to fake it? If so, then it is fortunate that you have in your hands the single greatest newsletter that the most brilliant undergraduate minds in the Philosophy Department at UTA can produce. Absolutely stuffed to the brim with in-depth and hard-hitting exposés of all the great work that has been done since last spring, this newsletter may change your life. If not, it's still a fun read.

Lukas Szrot
President
Philosophy Club at UTA

p.s. Thanks go to Mitch Hodge and Thomas O'Mara for their help on the newsletter.

Another Home-town Boy Makes Good!

UTA philosophy alumnus Travis Foster (BA, 1999) has nearly completed his Ph.D. in philosophy. He is currently at work finishing a dissertation on Hegel's modal semantics in the Greater Logic. "I am tracing the development of the conception of metaphysics as a holistic and deductive science from Kant through Fichte and Schelling and ending with Hegel. I am also considering contemporary challenges to the modal semantics at work in such a conception of philosophical science, including the deconstructive approaches of Derrida," said Travis.



Travis Foster ponders the mysteries of existence on the campus of Oglethorpe University!

Travis is currently living in Atlanta. On the teaching side, he is conducting a variety of courses at Clayton College and State University in Morrow, Georgia, as well as at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta. "I teach critical thinking, intro to philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, and a humanities class called 'narratives of the self,'" he said.



Philosophy in Progress: Travis fields a question

Travis's dissertation committee includes the luminaries Donald Verene, Rudolf Makkreel, and Geof Bennington. "I look to finish the dissertation by the end of summer '05 and to go on the job market the following winter," he said.

Departmental "Pizza Feed" Deemed Huge Success

The first of what will no doubt become an annual *pizza lunch extravaganza* was held this fall in the Philosophy Department. It was deemed a rousing success, drawing hordes of Philosophy and Classics majors both young and not. The crowds began to pour into 305 Carlisle shortly before noon on 15 September 2004 and patiently awaited the arrival of the first of twenty piping hot pies from Mr. Jim's Pizza. Those students who arrived after the chairs filled up spilled out into the hall to swap stories of metaphysical and epistemological glory over slices of pepperoni and vegetarian style pizza.

In attendance were such iconic figures as the enigmatic reigning president of the Philosophy Club, Lukas Szrot, as well as the ever affable—some would say comical—vice president, Brian King. Newly appointed *Phi*

Sigma Tau officers Jason Peeler and Richard Herling made an appearance, as did Mitch Hodge and Bill Baldwin of Philosophy Reading Group fame.



Philosophy majors Bill Baldwin and Felicia Criner lunch on pizza as they discuss Gustav Bergmann's enigmatic pronouncement, "I have learned to use a long spoon when supping with the mathematicians!"

Of course, several members of the faculty managed to navigate the sea of ravenous collegians to get their slice of the pie. Professors Charles Nussbaum, Harry Reeder, and Denny Bradshaw all managed to snag a piece or two. Charlie Chiasson and David Hoot arrived with an entourage of budding classicists just in time to secure their fair share of the fare.

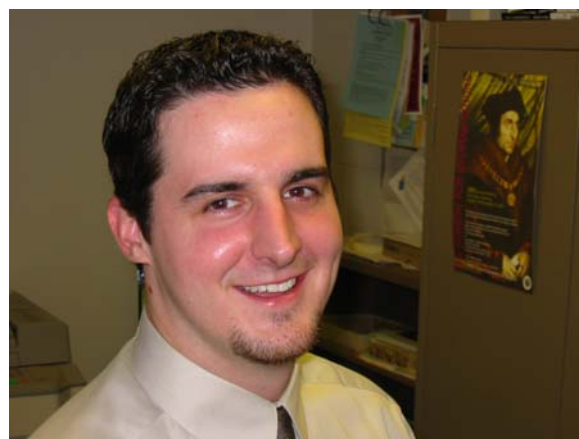


Thanks to all who showed up to make it a most successful Pizza Lunch Extravaganza. See you next Fall!

Road Trip Manages Not To Turn Rowdy!

On 27 September 2004, a small but hardy band of eight philosophy students, faculty, and philosophy club members took a road trip to Southern Methodist University in Dallas to hear an ethics lecture presented by Professor J. B. Schneewind, retiring chair of the Department of Philosophy at the Johns Hopkins University. His fascinating lecture entitled "Modernity and Moral Authority, or Why Study the History of Ethics Anyway?" was sponsored by the SMU Philosophy Department and the Cary M. Maguire Center for Ethics and Public Responsibility. By the time we arrived, the packed lecture hall was quickly becoming a standing-room-only situation.

Schneewind's thesis was that, in the recent history of philosophy, moral discussions have had a tremendous impact on social and political concerns. In the present, however, philosophical moral discussions lack such punch. His question, with which he left the audience, was whether philosophical discussions could play such a role again, and what that might look like. Schneewind's main concern throughout the course of the lecture was with the shift which took place in modern philosophy from the emphasis on moral authorities to the Equal Moral Abilities Thesis. He argued that the latter thesis loomed large in much contemporary moral thought, but that it is also undergoing numerous challenges that could once again herald a different kind of ethical discussion.



Rascally wag Richard Herling mentally prepares himself for the grueling road trip to Dallas

All participants of the "road trip" enjoyed the lecture and the comradery shared with the other philosophical enthusiasts. Stay tuned for more upcoming philosophical road trips. Next stop, Plato's Heaven?

Lecturer DeBellis Sings Different Tune

On 12 November 2004, faculty and students of the UTA philosophy department, as

well as numerous philosophy and music aficionados, gathered to enjoy an interactive, multimedia presentation entitled "What is Musical Content?" by visiting lecturer Professor Mark DeBellis of the Music Department at Columbia University. Professor DeBellis was brought to campus under the auspices of UTA's Philosophy Lecture Series. During his lecture, Professor DeBellis enticed those in attendance with selected pieces of music which he would then examine and discuss, using various philosophical approaches to understanding music such as cognitivism, aestheticism, formalism, and arousal theory.



Professor Mark DeBellis entertains a question from our own Professor Charles Nussbaum

Currently, he argued, formalism rules the day and influences much of what is taught about musical representation in courses such as "Music Appreciation." But if, as some have argued, awareness of large-scale form in a musical composition is irrelevant to the listener, then a great deal of what is being taught is also irrelevant when it comes to appreciating and understanding music. This is the question with which DeBellis left his audience.

The lecture was followed by a rousing question-and-answer session which covered a broad spectrum of topics, such as mental representation, the vehicles of musical content, and applications for teaching music given the latest philosophical discussions of musical content. Everyone present had a fine time, and we anxiously await the next installment of the Philosophy Lecture Series.

***Phi Sigma Tau* Colloquia Continue To Draw Crowds**

As part of the *Phi Sigma Tau* Faculty Colloquium Series, Associate Professor and Chair of the UTA Philosophy Department Denny Bradshaw left students and professors awestruck with his defense of David Lewis's Humeanism on 4 October 2004. In his lecture, entitled "David Lewis and the Humean Supervenience Thesis," Professor Bradshaw explained how we can make sense of Lewis's claims that the laws of nature are important to us given Lewis's "reductionist re-definitions of the relevant modal and nomic concepts." Those of us who have been concerned with this topic for some time slept better that night knowing that Lewis was no worse off than his non-Humean opponents.

On 5 November 2004, professors, students, and philosophy enthusiasts gathered to hear alumnus Lukas Szrot deliver a *Phi Sigma Tau* Student Colloquium based on his senior thesis entitled "Friendly Atheism." In his lecture, Szrot argued for a kinder, gentler, more compassionate atheism—one that allows for a rational justification of the position with which the atheist disagrees, namely theism. His theme, gleaned from William Rowe, famed philosopher of religion, sought to dissolve the hostility between theists and atheists by putting the onus on the atheist, appealing to both his reason and his humanity. Szrot argued for several different approaches to this problem, including epistemic friendliness (acknowledging that the theist has some degree of rational justification for his position) and moral friendliness.



Once the lecture concluded, Szrot opened the room to questions and found the audience to be both interested and passionate about the topic. The exchanges brought understanding and the reconciliation of positions on all sides.

Feeling grateful...nostalgic...generous?

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