



# DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY NEWSLETTER SPRING 2022, No. 55

## FROM THE CHAIR'S DESK

Toddler: Is it over yet?

Parent: Not yet.

Toddler (attempting to wriggle out of the moving Ferris wheel car): I'm getting out now!

Parent (holding on tight): We need to wait until we're on the ground, when it's safe.

...

Two years ago, the thought of being trapped in a pandemic for more than a few weeks was almost unthinkable. Surely it would be over soon, and it would be safe to move about. Two years on, it is not over, but it is safer, and books about Stoic endurance top the self-help bestseller lists.

Having just come through a mild bout of Covid infection myself, I'm finding it hard to assess whether my endurance is back to where it was. Since when do I feel tired after a 12-hour workday? I honestly do not know, though I did recently recall the remarks by mentors in college and graduate school that gave me to understand that philosophers do *not* take evenings off. I now believe that some do on some occasions, and that it is a good idea. We endure

what we must in a pandemic, but it is not a bad time to reflect on the "musts" and "mays" and recalibrate.

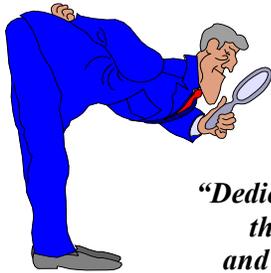
We have all suffered a bit of whiplash this year as pandemic protocols and modes of instruction changed in response to Omicron case spikes in January and April. Learning was undoubtedly disrupted by these changes and by student illness, and conversations have repeatedly turned to the question of whether Covid accommodations have gone on so long and in such a way as to now be undermining students' progress. I have no answer to this question, but it is not unlike the first-personal question of whether we are pushing *ourselves* hard enough.

Growing numbers of students were struggling even before the pandemic, and faculty have often responded by trying to provide, or direct students to, needed support. This longer-term trend is not likely to reverse itself, even as Covid disruptions abate, and some artistry in combining student support with high expectations will be required.

The good news for our graduating class this year is that they are facing the best job market in years.

Let me conclude by congratulating them all and wishing them every success in the years ahead.

Randall Curren



*“Dedicated to the Truth,  
the Half-Truth  
and the Occasional  
Bald-Faced Lie”*

## FACULTY NEWS

### PAUL AUDI

It was nice to have a few in-person talks this year, with meals and everything! Maybe next year we can have old-fashioned receptions again.

But enough about food. I suppose I should say a bit about philosophy. In Fall, I taught a seminar on dispositions, and it turns out they're important for a number of different things I've been thinking about (reduction and elimination, causal functionalism, how to understand physicalism, laws of nature, and even the nature of funniness!). My students were kind and patient enough to discuss some of my work in progress with me, which was immensely gratifying for one party at least.

Stay tuned for some wacky stuff about tropes, change, laws, and determinable essences!

### EARL CONEE

This academic year my activities included the usual combination of teaching, research, and service. Also as usual I am mentioning my newsletter entry in my newsletter entry. Unusually and unfortunately, pandemic repercussions have become altogether too usual.

### RANDALL CURREN

Shortly after our May 2021 Diploma Ceremony I travelled by air for the first time since before the pandemic, to present a 4-day seminar for university faculty on “The Future of Higher Education,” in Provo, Utah. This was a fantastically stimulating experience, followed by two days in and around Capitol Reef National Park. I took a couple more steps toward a resumption of normal academic life by giving the response to Jessica Moss’s keynote on Aristotle’s epistemology at a conference outside of Chicago in October, and by presenting commentaries on two papers about prison education in San Jose in March. In April I made my first overseas trip since before the pandemic, traveling to Iceland as an external “opponent” for a dissertation defense ceremony, presenting a seminar on global citizenship, and touring the lava fields and geothermal pools with my wonderful hosts. I am now enjoying some other advantages of being triple vaccinated, as I quarantine, barely sick, and U of R daily cases hit new records.

### WILLIAM FITZPATRICK

Our return from Zoom-land this past fall made me resolve never again to take for granted the privilege of being able to talk face-to-face with students and colleagues in our shared physical spaces on campus. It was wonderful to be back in person; may it continue! This past year my new book for Cambridge University Press, *Ethical Realism*, came out, along with a chapter on negligence and moral responsibility (for a volume also with CUP), an article on moral phenomenology and ethical realism (for *ETMP*), a piece for *Nautilus Magazine* on evolution and the idea of a universal morality, and a review, for *Phil Review*, of Cailin O’Connor’s recent book using evolutionary game-theoretic modeling to explore the origins of social categories and the dynamics through which they can give rise to inequities. I also wrote another piece (again for a CUP volume) on the trolley problem, since obviously far too little has been written on that topic to date. I’m looking forward to spending much of the

summer writing two chapters for the new and expanded edition of the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, one on ethical non-naturalism and one on morality and evolutionary biology. In other activities, I'm co-chairing a University-wide committee charged with finding a replacement for the discontinued Wilson Commons 'flag court', to highlight and celebrate the University's global engagement, impact, and representation on campus. (Please contribute any ideas you might have to the feedback portal that will soon be announced for this!)

### **JENS KIPPER**

In the Fall, I was promoted to being a student: I spent a Bridging Fellowship in the Computer Science department, which meant that, among other things, I got to take Computer Science classes and learn a lot. Since I was on leave in the Spring semester, this means that I haven't taught in a year! I am looking forward to getting back to it, but I have to warn potential prospective students that I might be rusty.

I have been trying to fill the teaching-free time writing a textbook on the philosophy of AI, and a monograph on intentionality. I am also working on a project that involves using language models to study the complexity of concepts.

### **MARK POVICH**

It's been another strange year! But, again, I think things went almost as well as they could have, given the circumstances. I was pretty happy with all of my classes, and I got a lot of things done. One paper was accepted for publication in *Mind*; another is still under review (the one I presented at my colloquium), but I'm optimistic that it will be accepted soon. I'm working on another paper with a colleague from Tulane that we're hoping to submit by June. Finally, my book proposal for Oxford University Press was approved! The tentative title is *Rules to Infinity: The Expressive Role of Mathematics in Scientific Explanation*.

### **ZEYNEP SOYSAL**

In the Fall I taught Probability, Inference and Decision for the first time and I really enjoyed it. Now I keep calculating odds and utilities. My friend the journalist and writer Maurice Chammah visited the Humanities Center and gave a great talk on his new book on the death penalty. I learned a lot from Maurice and got more inspiration for my project on the social epistemology of journalism, which I'll have the opportunity to pursue as an Internal Fellow in the Humanities Center next year. In the Spring I was on junior leave, which was very nice. I did some physical and virtual traveling, finished some papers, made progress on some older projects, and started some new ones.

## **GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS**

### **2021 PAYNE FIRST-YEAR OUTSTANDING ESSAY AWARD**

Zachary Click, "*Proportionate Punishment*"

### **2021 OUTSTANDING ESSAY AWARD**

Zachary Barber, "*Mindfulness and Mental Autonomy*"

### **2021/22 TEACHING ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR AWARD**

Yusuke Satake

### **2021/22 MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE AWARDED**

Rafael Perez

## **2022 EDWARD PECK CURTIS AWARD**

Eleven University students have been selected as recipients of the [Edward Peck Curtis Award for Excellence in Teaching by a Graduate Student](#). This award was established by former life trustee Edward Peck Curtis in 1984 and recognizes graduate students who excel in advancing the teaching mission of the University by providing highly skilled and innovative instruction to Rochester's undergraduates. Congratulations to Zach Barber (philosophy) who was one of the recipients of this award! 🙌

## **2021/22 PH.D. DEGREES AWARDED**

**Yansel Garcia**, *“A Physicalist Solution to the Explanatory Gap”*  
(Earl Conee, advisor)

**Matthew Lamb**, *“The Epistemic Condition of Blemeworthiness, reasonable Expectations, and Revisionary Implications”*  
(William FitzPatrick, advisor)

**John Kwak**, *“Bachelor” vs. “Water”: Defending Variable Epistemic Standards for Linguistic Competence”*  
(Zeynep Soysal and Jens Kipper, advisors)

**Micah Richey**, *“Human Dignity: The Importance of Being Human”*  
(William FitzPatrick, advisor)

## **KELLEY ANNESLEY**

Happily, I have accepted a tenure-track position at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, starting in the upcoming fall semester. Less happily, this means I will be leaving Rochester this summer. I wanted to take this opportunity to say a sincere thank you to all of the members of the department who have been incredibly supportive of me over the last

seven years. It's been a delight to be able to learn from all of you, and I can't express how grateful I am, at least not in this short format. I'm excited to bring the generous, helpfully demanding, and of course highly analytic spirit of Rochester philosophers to some unsuspecting liberal arts undergraduates.

## **KEVIN GAUSSELIN**

I had not presented at a conference during my first two years here. I guess this was the year to fix that. I had the opportunity to present papers at grad conferences at the University of Miami, Brown University, and the University of Calgary. Locally, I presented a poster on social epistemology at the AS&E Graduate Research Symposium, and a paper on echo chambers at the Humanists in Conversation on Conspiracy conference. I also had the opportunity to help with our own epistemology graduate conference and attended the wonderful Evidentialist conference. Tons of fun! Things have stayed busy, but extremely enjoyable. Shout out to Yusuke Satake for being awesome and Vincent Tanzil for becoming a dad!

## **VINCENT TANZIL**

The most interesting thing that happened in my life the past year is, of course, the birth of my son, Rembrandt! Also, it is refreshing to have more class with less Zoom and more physical interaction. Other than that, things have been as interesting as philosophy can be.

## GRADUATE ALUMNI NEWS

### CHARLES CARDWELL (PHD 1971)

My first “post-retirement” year started off nicely with a return to the classroom. Face to face – or should I say, *mask to mask?* – interaction and a reduced load brought the joy back to teaching. A bit of a turn, however, came on December 6, 2021. That was the day before finals started and the day that the cyber-network at Pellissippi State became victim to a ransomware attack. The system shut down completely. The LMS and Outlook survived; everything else was gone. Not good!

Starting from scratch, the college has since very slowly been rebuilding. Much has been lost forever. Among other things, the rebuild necessitated a complete scrub of all workstation hard drives and the consequent destruction of all faculty work product stored on them. (Fortunately, following a habit I developed back in the days when computers frequently crashed. I had all my personal work independently backed up.)

The attack also took down the Tennessee Philosophical Association Website (which the college hosts). I still serve the TPA as its Secretary/Webmaster and have backup files so that the site can be restored when the college finally gets around to it (this summer?). There was no backup for the association’s 350-person mail/membership list however, and so I spent a couple of intense weeks recreating it as best I could. Not fun!

Before the attack, cyber security was a top priority at Pellissippi State. Even so, the attack happened. Evidently, cyber vulnerability is much greater than we might think. Is general cyber warfare much more likely than we imagine? In the greater scheme of things, the Pellissippi attack amounted to a minor disaster. Cyber war would surely bring disaster beyond present comprehension.

Anyway, back to my year. I survived the cyber-attack and the alpha-variant surge. Like everyone, I lived with empty shelves at Wal-Mart (and elsewhere), inflation, and stock-market volatility. I wept for Ukraine and the victims of Putin’s “military action.”

Except for a “Syllabus Showcase” (<https://blog.apaonline.org/category/syllabus-showcase/>) piece that is to come out in June, I have no new publications. I opted not to teach in the spring semester but look forward to teaching three face-to-face classes in the fall. I hope that my “post-retirement” status will give me the time to work out some ideas that I have been pondering for years but have been too distracted to work out fully.

### MATTHEW FRISE (PHD 2015)

Starting this Fall I’ll be an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Milwaukee School of Engineering. I plan to be the happiest person I know. It’s bittersweet to leave Santa Clara University after 5 years, but the sweet beats the bitter. I had the tremendous honor of returning to Rochester -- my first trip back in 7 years -- as the Distinguished Alumnus Speaker for the Graduate Epistemology Conference. It felt like returning home. (Y’all remain a formidable bunch.)

### YANSSEL GARCIA (PHD 2021)

The last year has been an exciting and chaotic series of events. I started my new job at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. This, of course, required that my fiancée and I drive our lives, contained in a U-Haul, to the heart of the country. We’ve settled in a lovely neighborhood that’s just a short walk from the university. In the short time we’ve lived in Omaha, we’ve created friendships with some wonderful people, experienced some great cuisine, and basked in the Omaha sun (which, by the way, shines brightly throughout the winter!).

Getting to teach philosophy to undergraduates has proven immensely rewarding; they're curious, motivated, and appreciative to be back on campus and away from Zoom. It has been borderline impossible to get any research done, but I've been reassured that this is normal for one's first year.

I do miss Rochester dearly. I hope you are all doing well, and I look forward to seeing you all every time I visit. I wish everyone the best.

### **JOHN KOMDAT (MA 2017)**

Since my retirement from graduate school in 2019, I have spent my newfound leisure time exploring various subfields of applied metaphysics. Specifically, in the subfield of applied personal identity, my partner and I had a baby in 2020, and in the subfield of applied mereology, I became a professional woodworker in 2021.

### **LORETTA KOPELMAN (PHD 1966)**

Hello friends,

Soon after I got my Ph.D. in Philosophy from The University of Rochester in 1966, I became interested in bioethics. I was cautioned that not only was bioethics a fad, but also a risky career path especially for women who tended to dropped out of their careers early. I am happy to report, however, that bioethics is thriving and I am still pretty active. I still am an adjunct professor at Georgetown University, a fellow of the Hastings Center and Kennedy Institute of Ethics, on an ethics committee of a large DC area hospital, occasionally give papers and publish and currently am teaching bioethics in the first- and second-year classes at GU medical school. This year I was asked to participate in the Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics Oral History Project which is conducting interviews of the founders of bioethics. My latest publication is about the establishment of The American Society of Bioethics and Humanities in 1997-8 when I was its founding president. In addition to an essay that I

wrote, it contains brief reflections from many of the key players in the birth of ASBH. So, I am glad I ignored the advice and predictions from some of the wise ones when I was starting out and had the fun helping to build an exciting, new field.

### **MATTHEW LAMB (PHD 2021)**

In the past year, I defended my dissertation and have continued to teach at a few different universities in the Philadelphia/New Jersey area. Hopefully, this is the last year of working as an adjunct though! The job market was kind this year. I have accepted a visiting assistant professor position at Washington & Lee University for the upcoming academic year. I look forward to having a more balanced teaching load, time to work on research, and to be near mountains once again. Lastly, I would like to share that previous news that I shared at our remote departmental party of 2020(2021?) has remained true. I have still avoided catching covid, despite the best efforts of coughing students.

### **JAMES HUNTER LESHER (PHD 1967)**

I can report that I am now two years into retirement and, except for facing the prospect of nuclear annihilation, I think I am doing well. I certainly never expected to have a paper accepted for publication in a reputable journal at the age of 82! Thanks to email and social media I am keeping in touch with a sizable number of former students, from my four decades at Maryland as well as the past thirteen years at UNC. The University of North Carolina administrators are just as inept as the State legislators who entrusted them with the well being of the institution, but there is nothing to be done about that until redistricting gives us a chance to have a different cast of characters in the State house. I have finished my Heraclitus and modern poetry project. Interested parties can check out the results on my web page (search for James Lesher Department of Philosophy and scroll down to Heraclitus' Legacy for Modern Poetry).

## **JEELOO LIU (PHD 1993)**

After being named a Carnegie Fellow in 2019 for my *Confucian Robotic Ethics* project, I have been working on ethical AI and robot ethics. My latest endeavor is a collaborative work with a computer engineering professor on collecting human input for compiling training data for the ethical design of robots. The way to incorporate ethical dimensions into machine learning is exactly to begin with the proper set of training data that reflects *human ethical values*. Our study entitled “Human-in-the-Loop Ethical AI for Social Robots” aims to provide a crowd-sourcing platform to gather human opinions on what a social robot should do when facing certain challenging ethical dilemmas. For this survey, I have designed 60 scenarios that represent real-world situations our future autonomous social robots might face and must decide what to do. When human agents face these situations, they will have to make hard choices as well. However, when the agents are robots designed to serve people, do we give them a different set of consideration and action guidelines? This survey will test people’s responses when the ethical decisions are to be made by autonomous robots themselves. To capture possible cultural differences, we have designed English, Spanish, and Chinese versions of the survey. The survey was launched on March 9, but so far it has not gotten sufficient traction. I am appealing to all of you to please help me spread the word: fill out the survey, send it to your friends and family, post the link on your social media, etc. I hope that you will find the scenarios philosophically interesting and not a waste of your time. Here is the link to the main site:

<http://www.fullerton.edu/ethical-ai/>

## **JON MATHESON (PHD 2010)**

Hello from humid Florida. This past year I began working on a grant from the John Templeton Foundation (with James Beebe) on epistemic autonomy and its relation to intellectual humility. This included co-editing a volume, hosting a conference, and working on several papers. I also continued to be involved with ethics bowl, coaching UNF’s team and organizing the First Coast High School Ethics Bowl. Besides that, life is mostly chauffeuring kids from one activity to the next. I am eagerly looking forward to a return visit to Rochester in April.

## **ERIC MACK (PHD 1973)**

I failed to get entries into the newsletter last year due to my repeatedly sending material to the wrong email address. I hope I have done better this year. In our retirement Mary and I continue to work on a range of academic projects. During this past two plague years we spend a lot of time walking along the Mississippi Levee and a couple of bayou trails near Baton Rouge and spent most of the Summers and part of the Falls in the much less stressful, beautiful, mountain town of Durango, CO. We are hoping soon to get to our anticipated wild and carefree road trips.

## **KEVIN MCCAIN (PHD 2012)**

This past year has been unusual in many ways. Fortunately, some of those ways have been incredibly positive. In November 2021 my wife and I welcomed our third son into the world! Additionally, I was promoted to full Professor and authored two books. On the whole, it's been a very good year.

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## **JENS KIPPER**

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‘Knowledge and Presence in Early Greek Thought’ in R. Hahn and A. Herda, eds, ‘*Knowledge*’ in *Archaic Greece* (Center for Hellenic Studies / Harvard University Press), forthcoming.

‘Assertion and Argument in Xenophanes’, forthcoming in a special issue of *Archai* on Presocratic methodology.

## **ERIC MACK (PHD 1973)**

Essays published since my last report include:

“Rights, Morality, and Egoism in Individualist Anarchism,” in *The Routledge Handbook on Anarchism*.

“Individualism and Rights: Libertarianism in Academia,” *Dissident Philosophers* (Rowman and Littlefield).

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Apparently, a Turkish translation of my book, *Libertarianism*, is in the works. About a year ago, there was some discussion about a Russian translation. But I suspect that is now not too likely.

## **JON MATHESON (PHD 2010)**

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## **THIS YEAR'S EVENTS**

**Evidentialism: Themes in the Work of Earl Conee  
& Richard Feldman**

**11<sup>th</sup> Biennial Graduate Epistemology Conference**

### **2021/22 COLLOQUIUM SERIES**

**ROBERT AUDI**

(University of Notre Dame)

"Are There Two Free Will Problems? Determinism,  
Deliberation, and Responsibility"

**AGUSTIN RAYO**

(MIT)

"Transcendence and Triviality"

**AMIE THOMASSON**

(Dartmouth College)

"Starting a step back: Rethinking Metaphysics"

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