

THE STETSON GADFLY

Editor: Ronald L. Hall



DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

"I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you." - Socrates

A VIRTUAL YEAR: ADIEU



From the Editor: Yes, this academic year was a challenge. Not that any of us wanted to wish our lives away, but I am inclined to say: Good Riddance! However, it is not that we did not make the most of a bad situation. We did. But I cannot contain my excitement in seeing the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel. As the fall term opens we will be moving from a virtual "being with each other in the department and with our students, to an actual face-to-face being" with at least ontologically speaking. (I note that ontologically, "virtual" is an antonym to 'actual.' And this makes me want to embrace a version of Aristotle's famous claim that "actuality precedes potentiality." But while I resist sharing his sense of temporal precedence, I find it right to think that the actual is axiologically prior to the virtual. So, I say to my colleagues and to our new and returning students, "Welcome back to actuality!"

I am especially glad to welcome Josh Rust back after a year-long sabbatical. (See his remarks about this in the Faculty Notes section.) This brings me to say thanks to the Adjuncts who filled in during Josh's actual (but not virtual) absence. These Adjuncts were a godsend. So, thanks go to David DiQuattro, James C. Olsen, and Jay Spitzley.

I am equally grateful to Melinda Hall, who served her first year as Chair of the philosophy department during these adverse circumstances. The department faced multiple, unprecedented challenges, all of which she handled with the dignity of a seasoned professional.

And while I am at the "thank you bar" I would like to extend a big thank you to our prize student Rachael Ryan. She played an important part in the life of our department during these trying times. First and foremost, she was an exemplary philosophy major. She served as the President of the Philosophy Club, served as our Work-Study Student Assistant in the Department Office, wrote a splendid senior thesis on the work of Albert Camus, and finally and fittingly, she was the 2021 recipient of the Hall Award, the Department's highest honor given to the most outstanding graduating senior.

Rachel, we wish you all the best in your post-Stetson life which, we believe, holds great promise for you. With mixed emotions we say - *Adieu to Rachael*.



ALUMNI NEWS



Kelsey Maglio (Class of 2019) will be attending Baylor University this fall to pursue a PhD in Philosophy. She plans to focus on issues in ethics, political philosophy, and philosophy of religion. She graduated from Stetson Spring 2019, completing a senior project on the relationship between conspiracy theories and healthy democratic discourse. After graduating, she served a term with AmeriCorps VISTA's Stetson's Center for Community Engagement. This, along with her experience in the Bonner Program as an undergraduate, has shaped her interest in pursuing public philosophy opportunities as a graduate student and beyond. She hopes to continue researching conspiracy theories from a philosophical perspective, while also doing work on meta-ethics and moral grounding, applied ethics (especially on bio-medical and environmental policy ethics), moral epistemology and conscience, and questions of political equality and freedom. Kelsey truly appreciates the department's support and encouragement to continue pursuing her philosophical interests at the graduate level.



Amanda McMullen (Class of 2012) is Assistant Professor at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, graduating from Stetson in 2012. She was awarded a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Miami in 2019. Her dissertation was on offensive uses of language with a focus on slurs. Dr. McMullen is especially interested in topics at the intersection of philosophy of language and social and political philosophy. In addition to teaching courses in philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, ethics, history of ancient philosophy, and feminist philosophy, she has taught a graduate seminar on the relationship between speech and power. She is scheduled to teach a class on expressivist theories of meaning this Fall.

She recently published a paper in *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* on synecdochial utterances targeting women. Currently, she is working on several projects ranging from the kind of speech-act a standard use of a slur constitutes, whether nouns have a derogatory illocutionary potential, and whether utterances can function covertly as warnings. In her spare time she enjoys reading science fiction (preferably while nestled beside her fur-baby "Frodo"), watching documentaries, and competitive puzzle solving. Her email address is akmcmull@uark.edu.

Shannon Abelson (Class of 2013) is finishing her PhD at the University of Indiana, expected graduation 2021.

Brad Hewitt (Class of 2008) writes: I graduated from the MA program at Virginia Tech in 2010 but decided not to pursue academic Philosophy any further. I moved to Boston while my fiancé (we're now married) went to grad school at BU. While there I worked for a green tech start-up and moved into a career as a Data Analyst. That job title is a bit vague – specifically I work on creating forecast models, data collection and analysis to support business decisions, and creating reporting infrastructure. I'm currently working as an analyst at Scholastic Book Fairs in Lake Mary. We have a 3 year old daughter named Lyra.

Matt Hoffman (Class of 2011) will attend Indiana University Bloomington the fall of 2021 in a return to his graduate studies in philosophy. He seeks his Ph.D.

Dan Quattrone (Class of 2003) finished his PhD from Georgetown. Immediately after graduation he was hired by a computer company in Texas to do good old-fashioned ontology. He is excited to be doing metaphysics in a practical capacity.

Wesley Sun (Class of 2004) is a Chaplain working at the Lily Foundation in Chicago. Wes was ordained after completing his Master of Divinity at Chicago.

Rob Van Kaam (Class of 2004) completed an M.A. in Religious Studies at the University of Chicago.

Pedro del Valle (Class of 2021) has been accepted for the fall at Florida A and M. He's also on the wait list for Stetson Law School.

PHILOSOPHY CLUB HAPPENINGS

Notes from the Club President Jake Simmons

This year for Stetson's Philosophy Club, instead of gathering around the table, meetings occurred across virtual spaces, i.e. Zoom. Students found themselves engaging and discussing concepts such as identity, political action and discourse, moral responsibility, technology, and honesty. Despite covering a multitude of topics, the virtual medium of the meeting invariably presented itself within the conversations; as one of the earlier meetings emphasized, *the medium is the message*, and it was far too apropos not to be discussed. One of the unique occurrences identified throughout the academic year was the simultaneous development of the meetings alongside political happenings of the world. Since the Philosophy Club meetings coincided with the controversial 2020 election and subsequent Capitol riot January 6 2021, students were able to see and evaluate those events before, during, and after they occurred. Moving forward, the Philosophy Club has found a new tool to access speakers who would not be otherwise able to join us due to travel restrictions and time constraints. The convenience and easy access of virtual meetings has forever altered the medium of communication. As for the Philosophy Club, we will certainly continue to reflect and ruminate on the events of 2020 and 2021 as we look forward to continuing our discussions in the Fall semester of 2021.

Fall Term 2020

- Speaker: David DiQuattro, Adjunct, Stetson University
Topic: "Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*"
Date: August 28th
- Speaker: Louis Columbo, Past Adjunct, Stetson University and Daytona State College
Topic: "Hannah Arendt's Thinking Without a Banister"
Date: September 24th
- Speaker: Jared Rothstein, Faculty, Daytona State College
Topic: "Surfing, Sharks, and the Limits of Reason"
Date: October 28th

Spring Term 2021

- Speaker: Scott Kimbrough, Professor of Philosophy, Jacksonville University
Topic: "I Can't Help the Way that I Am: Identity as an Excuse"
Date: January 27th
- Speaker: Josh Rayman, Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of South Florida
Topic: "Nietzsche and Heraclitus"
Date: February 24th
- Speaker: Brook Sadler, Associate Professor of Humanities and Cultural Studies and Philosophy, University of South Florida
Topic: "Honesty: Social Practice or Moral Imperative?"
Date: March 26th

From the Editor – A Historical Note: When I joined the Philosophy Department in the Fall of 2000, the Chair at that time, Rob Brady and I initiated what we called our "Philosophy Table." We invited students to join Rob and me for lunch and informal conversations on Wednesdays in the Commons. Early on in our discussions I suggested we start a Philosophy Club. This suggestion was met with great enthusiasm. And so we launched our first meeting. We discussed meeting places and finally decided to meet at my home across from Fraternity Row on the first Thursday of each month at 4PM. Our first meeting was held on Thursday, October 5th, 2000 at 4PM. My wife, Maggi, always spoiled us with refreshments or a full blown meal. We also decided to begin each meeting with a discussion of the topic for the next meeting. We appointed a convener whose responsibility was to set the agenda, distribute texts, etc. for the next meeting. Having a Club President would come later. Our first convener was Paul Vogel. He decided to make the topic a discussion of Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Well, of course history does not repeat itself, but as Mark Twain once said, history rhymes.

So, as we began our 21st continuous year of Club meeting, we asked a faithful adjunct, David DiQuattro, to be our speaker and discussion leader. He agreed and without knowing the history just recounted, David chose as his topic, Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

THE DEPARTMENT SEMINAR

Like our long tradition of Philosophy Club meetings, we have an equally old and ongoing tradition of holding what we call our Department Seminar. This concept was hatched by Rob Brady and me in the same Fall term of 2000 when the Philosophy Club was started. The idea was that we would require of our Philosophy majors a capstone seminar where all of the members of the department would participate with the majors. This seminar would be offered once a year and would have one member of the Department serve as the teacher of record for the seminar. The leader would choose a topic and the texts for the course. Rob led the first of these using the work of Herbert Marcuse on the topic of individual and social freedom.

As it is easy to imagine the faculty members would dominate the seminar conversation. We worried about this but hearing from the students we found that they learned much from the faculty exchanges. But we resolved that we should make a concerted effort to insure students were included in the discussions. Our seminars have proven to be a way that our faculty can share ideas with each other and with the students. This tradition has proven to be an important part of the philosophy major and a spur to extra-curricular intramural faculty conversations.

It was my privilege to lead the Seminar this spring: The Topic *"Hannah Arendt: The Highest Human Calling."* We also worked through one of my favorite books, Arendt's *The Human Condition*.



CHEERS TO OUR 2021 PHILOSOPHY GRADS



Spring 2021 concluded with Stetson's Philosophy Department proudly graduating two Philosophy majors. As is our policy and practice, each student is required to defend his or her thesis before the philosophy faculty, interested students, often interested faculty from other departments, and sometimes even parents.

This year was particularly challenging as we were forced to conduct the oral exams via zoom. Fortunately, it worked out fine. We can do what we have to do. And hopefully, next year we will return to face-to-face conversations.

The Graduates and their thesis titles:

- **Rachael Ryan:** *"Absurdity and Meaning Inspired by Albert Camus"*
- **Andrew Nadeau:** *"Aesthetic Rivalry and Application"*

FACULTY NOTES

Ronald L Hall (ronhall@stetson.edu)

Susan Peppers-Bates (speppers@stetson.edu)

Joshua Rust (jrust@stetson.edu)

Melinda Hall, Chair (mchall@stetson.edu)



Dr. Ronald Hall: I keep busy as Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. I also published two articles, “No Doubt About It: Revisiting Wittgenstein’s Concept of Certainty,” *The Philosophical Forum* Volume 51, Issue 3 Fall 2020 and “Compassionate Deism and the Grammar of Permission” (*Religions*, March 2021).



Dr. Susan Peppers-Bates: I had a strange Covid-driven academic year as so many of us did. Both my 5th and 10th grade daughters, Sophia and Anne-Marie, struggled with online learning and the isolation from friends and family. I am so relieved that Anne-Marie and I are vaccinated and hope that by the time the *Gadfly* is mailed, shots will be available for 6-11 year olds. Despite the odd zoom-driven classes, so antithetical to philosophical conversation, I was proud that I recruited a few majors and had many students from Fall 2020 take a second course with me spring 2021. I won a first-year advocate award at the end of the year, as well as being named by nine students as someone who made a difference for them on the 2020-2021 “Hatters Thanking Hatters” survey. I served on the hiring committee for the joint sociology/AFST position and I am thrilled to report that Dr. Nicole Banton will be joining Stetson in the fall and infusing much needed stability into our long underfunded but steadfast AFST program. I also reviewed papers for the Florida Philosophical Association in the fall and served as the department’s assessment coordinator this spring. This summer I will be working on my sabbatical application for 2022, focused on a joint paper with Dr. Joshua Rust on race and democracy that feels more relevant than ever, and a summer grant to work on another Malebranche paper.



Dr. Josh Rust: I spent my sabbatical year in Columbia, MO, as a result of Kim’s internship placement. She officially earns her PhD in clinical psychology on July 24th!! I’m so proud of her! Because my sabbatical happened to correspond with the year that so many of our classes and events were online, that made it possible for me to attend Dr. Hall’s Department Seminar on Hanna Arendt and numerous philosophy club events, all of which I enjoyed tremendously. The sabbatical has obviously been a boon for my scholarship (coincidentally, Columbia is in Boone County). I published one article (“Max Weber in Social Ontology”) in the *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* and had another article (“The University and Globalization as a New Medievalism”) accepted in an anthology on globalization. More generally, I’ve thrown myself into the philosophy of biology with the hope of being able to say something interesting about non-intentional, organismic agency and, ultimately, the sense in which some of our social institutions might also qualify as agents.



Dr. Melinda Hall: This year was tough, no question. Between childcare difficulties because of COVID and, well, the realities of the global pandemic, I am glad to see this year behind us. But I did manage to accomplish some exciting things, even while onboarding as the new Chair during one of the most difficult years of our department’s existence! This year, the Community Education Project, Stetson’s Higher Education in Prison program (I am a co-director), received a substantial grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to continue our work. That includes for-credit courses taught at Tomoka Correctional Institution, an on-site community garden, and expanding other areas of our work. I also received funding from the National Science Foundation as part of a larger grant directed by Lynn Kee (Biology), to create a toolkit on the ethics of gene editing via CRISPR. I continue to work on my book on risk, now acknowledging COVID and discussing troubling claims toward individual or personal risk “tolerance” or landscapes within a public health context. Meanwhile, I presented my ongoing work on this topic at an exciting virtual conference hosted by the Oxford University Blavatnik School on the topic of disability and social change. I also had the opportunity to present my work on transhumanism at the Moscow Garage Museum of Contemporary Art (I wish I had been able to go in person!). I am looking forward to re-connecting with students and my colleagues this fall.

STAY IN TOUCH

We'd love to hear from you. Send us your comments and let us know what you are involved in. To update personal information or to change your mailing address, Contact Administrative Assistant, Debbie Tate, dtate@stetson.edu

The *Stetson Gadfly* is the Newsletter of the Department of Philosophy, published annually each summer. To see previous editions of the *Gadfly* visit our website at <https://www.stetson.edu/artsci/philosophy/>

Stetson University
College of Arts and Sciences
Department of Philosophy
421 N. Woodland Blvd., Unit 8250
DeLand, FL 32723
386.822.7580

