

THE STETSON GADFLY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY NEWSLETTER



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BIG CHANGES

Welcome to new Chair Dr. Melinda Hall



The Philosophy Faculty is happy to welcome Dr. Hall as the new Chair of our Department. She succeeds Dr. Josh Rust, who will be taking a yearlong sabbatical. Dr. Rust has done exemplary work over the past four years. Dr. Hall is well suited to her new position. She has proven her leadership as a scholar

specializing in disability studies and as a campus leader having taken a leadership role in the Honors Program and in Phi Kappa. Her work in the Department as our assessment Beta officer has prepared her well for her new post. Since 2013 she has learned and grown here as a faculty member; she credits her colleagues with expanding her teaching and research skills and being fun to work with, too.

The Philosophy Department is, for her, one of the most dynamic and community-minded departments on campus. Our strong impact belies our small size. Our strong faculty-to-faculty, faculty-to-student, and student-to-student mentorship and connections flow from the classroom to weekly chats and back again.

Each faculty member is deeply committed to Stetson's students and missions. Three of the four of us teach in Stetson's Community Education Project, which holds for-credit courses at Tomoka Correctional Institution. One of us is the editor of an international journal. Among many other accomplishments, we each pursue strong research agendas in unique areas, from philosophy of religion to bioethics to social ontology to feminism. The Philosophy Department, including our assistant Debbie Tate, is a fabulous place to work and learn. Dr. Hall will look for every opportunity to showcase our Department's strength and success.

Welcome to Our New President: Dr. Christopher F. Roellke



The Stetson University Board of Trustees has elected Christopher F. Roellke, currently Dean of the College Emeritus and Professor of Education at Vassar College, to become the 10th president of Stetson University effective July 1, 2020.

Roellke is widely regarded as an exceptionally effective and collaborative higher education leader who is past president for the Association of Education Finance and Policy, a 2014 Fulbright Scholar and the founder and fundraiser of Vassar College's Urban Education Initiative. Roellke succeeds Wendy B. Libby, who served as Stetson University's president since July 2009.

Teaching Changes

Covid 19 made us make some big changes. By the middle of March all classes were converted to an online format. This was quite a challenge. However, we have done well. We are prepared for a new normal.

"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

PHILOSOPHY CLUB HAPPENINGS

Many thanks go to Rachel Ryan who served admirably as the Club President this academic year. In addition, we welcome the incoming Club President Jake Simmons. He will begin his duties in the fall term.



September 26, 2019 - Nonsense and Senselessness

Dr. Ronald Hall's Food for Thought piece, published in last year's *Gadfly*, discussion Ludwig Wittgenstein's later work, focused on the distinction between nonsense and senselessness.



October 24, 2019 - Political Polarization

Dr. Steven Smallpage was the guest speaker for this Philosophy Club meeting and the topic of discussion was the question: "Is partisanship and political Polarization Destroying American Democracy?" focusing on the work of Chantel Moffue and her idea of agonism. This question seems especially important when considering our divisive current state of America.



November 11, 2019 - Children and Philosophy

Dr. Erik Kenyon, our speaker, is Director of Student and Faculty Engagement at Rollins College. Dr. Kenyon walked us through conversations he has with children in an attempt to capture their attention in a philosophical way. Students volunteered to be a part of a demonstration where depending on how they defined specific words in the thought experiment, they would lace themselves on either side of a "river" and explained their position. Through this demonstration we were able to observe how these types of questions can engage children in a deeper kind of thought, and have them create their own questions.



More Philosophy Club Happenings



February 19, 2020 – Persons of Risk

This month our guest speaker was a member of the department, Dr. Melinda Hall. She spoke to the group about how risk presents specific bioethical issues which may need to be re-evaluated in how we have been approaching them. Dr. Hall discussed the individualization of risk, noting that certain groups face alienation and this inherently increases their risk. She also discussed how we should transform risk into a community issue rather than placing responsibility on individuals themselves. Dr. Hall was walking us through a project she is currently working on and receiving feedback from the Philosophy Club was meant to give her some insight.



March 11, 2020 – Seeing is Believing

Dr. Ellen Armour, guest speaker, is Chair in Feminist Theology at Vanderbilt Divinity School and directs the Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender and Sexuality. A Stetson Alumni, her father taught at Stetson for many years. Dr. Armour spoke about the relationship with social media and photographs and how it shapes our lives. She discussed direct consequences with this due to people manipulating photos and their contexts. Using a philosophical framework, she has explored how people distort photographs and advised us to be attentive of how we interpret certain images. The need for caution when it comes to photograph stems from the fact that it is a powerful source that can manipulate what truth we perceive and believe.



CHEERS TO OUR 2020 PHILOSOPHY GRADS



Spring 2020 concluded with Stetson's Philosophy Department proudly graduating seven Philosophy majors. As is our policy and practice each student is required to defend his or her thesis before the philosophy faculty, interested students, faculty in other departments and sometimes parents. This year was particularly challenging as we were forced to conduct the oral exams on line. Hopefully next year we can return to face-to-face conversations.

The graduates and their thesis titles are as follows:

Niklas R. Cotton

Philosophy Ends in Wonder

Matinicus Jay Csenger

Ontological Management: Strategies for Managing Complex Adaptive Systems

Drake Cunningham

An Observation of Societal Injustices Towards Antisocial Personalities

Pedro DelValle

The Role of Resentment Before, During, and After Involuntary Commitment

Kayla Murchison

Feminist Philosophy: Who Said God Was Gendered?

Nick Murphy

A Reasonable Romantic Love

Tiffany Oms

An Epistemic Dilemma for Disability Rights: The Social Construction of Disability





FACULTY NEWS



Dr. Ronald Hall is keeping busy as Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. He recently edited and contributed to a symposium on the book *Is a Good God Logically Possible?* by James Sterba (Norte Dame)



Dr. Susan Peppers-Bates like so many of us, has been thrown a big curve ball with Covid and the shift to online classes for both Stetson and for her 15 year old, Anne-Marie, and 10 year old, Sophia. She is also teaching a summer class, Gender Studies 100. She plans to spend the rest of the summer preparing for the possibility of a fall semester online and revising an article on Malebranche. Time permitting she would like to start an article on intersectional feminism for 1,000 word philosophy (and online journal).



Dr. Joshua Rust—see next page



Dr. Melinda Hall

This year Dr. Hall enjoyed sabbatical leave in the fall working on her new book, *Risking Ourselves*. Given the COVID-19 crisis, public interest in and academic attention to risk has exploded. She is hopeful that her work will eventually help lift marginalized and vulnerable people who tend to bear the burden of risks. She argues that risk must be radically, collectively shared. With the ongoing pandemic crisis, her research has become both more complicated and, to her mind, more crucial in the coming year. In September her entry on Critical Disability Theory was published in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.





Big news:

I'm not going to be living in DeLand or teaching at Stetson next year. Instead, I'll be living in Columbia, Missouri.

Why?

Long story short, five years ago, my very smart and capable partner, Kim, decided she needed to get a PhD in clinical psychology. She is a social worker, but thought that West Volusia county didn't have the resources to adequately help children with autism and ADD. She was going to fix that herself! Since then she's worked really hard and defended her dissertation. However, unlike philosophy, clinical psychology requires a year-long internship and she landed in Columbia.

Fortunately or rather by meticulous planning, her internship exactly corresponds with my sabbatical. So next year I'll be living in Columbia with my family!

How do you feel about Columbia, Missouri?

Actually, it seems like a pretty cool town. The University of Missouri is there along with farmers' markets, breweries, coffee shops, record stores, and little specialty shops along the lines of Rose Apothecary as featured in the TV show, *Schitt's Creek*. As far as I can tell, it's like a big DeLand but without the mosquitoes or hurricanes. And that works for me. But I'm going to miss Stetson and especially my colleagues and students in the philosophy department.

What are you going to work on during your Sabbatical?

As those of you who took my Spring 2019 department seminar, Nature and Normativity, know, I'm really interested in the question about whether some groups can count as individuals. What does that mean?

Everyone agrees that the single big fish on the right is a single organism/individual. But could a school of fish ever qualify as a single organism/individual?



Before you dismiss that thought, think about an ant colony. A number of biologists are tempted to treat the colony itself as a single, distributed individual or agent. Just like our cells sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the whole multicellular organism, ants routinely sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the colony.

So here's my question—if we can make sense of a distributed individual in the biological sphere (and I think we can)—are there any human institutions that might likewise qualify as a single distributed agent composed of lots of human agents? What's clear is that most institutions wouldn't so qualify. Rather, most institutions are tools that their users use to accomplish things that would be difficult or impossible to accomplish without the institution—think about the institution of money, for example. But maybe, for sufficiently long-standing and complex institutions, we might begin to think of them as having their own goals or purposes, which can't be reduced to the goals or purposes of those persons who participate in them. Think, for example, about Socrates' temptation to personify the Athenian law in the *Crito*.

Just before his death, Socrates' friend, Crito, invites him to escape prison. Instead of addressing Crito's proposal himself, he imagines what the Laws, now personified, would say: "Suppose we were about to run away from here— ...And suppose the Laws and the city community came and confronted us, and said, 'Tell us, Socrates, what do you intend to do? Do you intend anything else by this act you're attempting than to destroy our Laws, and the city as a whole, to the extent that you can?'" (50a-b)

Was Socrates's personification of the Laws of the city just a literary device? Or can we make ontological sense of the idea that some institutions are better approached, not just as tools, but as agents? ***That seems like a question worth spending a year thinking about.***