



---

# PHI SIGMA TAU BULLETIN

---

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

FALL 2017, ISSUE 30

WELCOME HOME PHILOSOPHERS!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| DIALOGUE SERIES        | 3  |
| NEW FACE IN THE DEPT.  | 4  |
| STUDENTS IN PHILOSOPHY | 6  |
| BOBCAT BUILD           | 12 |

## OFFICERS FALL 2017

- **President:**  
**Sean Daniel Johnson**
- **Faculty Advisors:**  
**Amelie Benedikt and Rebekah Ross**



## WORDS FROM THE CHAIR

Dr. Craig Hanks, Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy

Utopian Projects – some thoughts on the importance of philosophy and religious studies in times like these

I have long thought of philosophy as a utopian project. That it is, and always will be a project, captures the ongoing and always unfinished nature of philosophy. There may not be eternal and universal human questions (although I am inclined to think there might be some), but the matter of asking questions, of querying our own existence, nonetheless continues. But “utopian?” And, is a utopian project a good thing? Utopia, as a project and an idea, has fallen on hard times, connected as it is with failed socio-political-cultural-aesthetic projects of 20th Century.

Certainly the efforts, characteristic of philosophy, to understand such notions as truth, beauty, and goodness might be understood as utopian, both in the laudatory sense of utopian when people grapple with fundamental concepts and strive to increase understanding; and in the negative sense when people take their understanding of these concepts dogmatically and impose it (sometimes violently) on others. Religion also partakes of this two-pronged sense of utopia, in the positive longing for a better world and negatively in the imposition of particular dogmas, beliefs, and values on others.

There are two other ways in which philosophy is utopian, and these I think less problematic – in fact, these can help us distinguish the positive and negative uses of the search for truth (and beauty, and goodness, etc.). Philosophy is utopian in method (or, in at least one of its methods) and in foundational assumptions. Consider one of our ur-figures, Socrates. While we can take Socrates and his practice as ironic and sometimes quite biting in his questions, we can also focus on the fact of questioning, the continued belief that asking questions is worthy because people might thereby learn. I find in the Socratic dialogues the hopes that although we are all-too-easily given to ignorance and pomposity, we are also capable of learning, changing, humility and movement toward a better situation, or knowing more, of better understanding of self and other, and of living more fully. And, this movement takes place, and is catalyzed, by dialogue. It is not solipsistic reflection, although self-knowledge and a vital inner life are part of the process, nor is it debate for the sake of winning or activity for self-enrichment, but dialogue that opens the possibility to a better situation. Dialogue is the utopian method at the heart of philosophy, opening participants to the possibilities of crafting new situations as individuals and communities, situations that result from greater understanding- or, in old- fashioned terms, in movement toward truth and beauty and goodness.

Religious studies is similarly utopian, starting with the notion that it is possible (and desirable) to examine one's own religious beliefs and to enter into dialogue across religious differences, with a goal of fostering greater understanding.

This emphasis on dialogue, on speaking clearly, on careful and attentive listening, on holding each other accountable, on openness to growth and change, on active critical engagement with context and other, and on self-critique and intellectual humility has always been an outlier practice, one subject to sanctions (Hypatia's murder, Socrates' death, Galileo's trial, Spinoza's excommunication, ML King, Jr's assassination, and countless others). And, we live in times when thoughtfulness risks being lost in the noise and flash of instant communication, when change can be seen as a weakness, and when aggressive and violent responses to ideas we do not like are thought appropriate. At a time when a quest for increased understanding is made more likely by certain structural conditions it is actively resisted by others. Times like these call for the dialogue we practice and encourage in our students. We are fortunate to have some part in an academic department that places dialogue at the center of its practice and curriculum, and to be associated with a university that not only values and supports dialogue, but increasingly makes it a point of pride. Continuing the dialogue is a utopian act, orienting us to the possibility that we might play some role in healing the world.

PHILOSOPHY  
DIALOGUE  
SERIES



TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
PHILOSOPHY DIALOGUE SERIES

The Texas State Philosophy Department, in conjunction with *The American Democracy Project*, is proud to present **The Fall Dialogue Series at Texas State**. The Series is a platform for open, critical discussion of a number of topics and is returning for its 22nd year, kicking off on Monday September 11, 2017 in our spacious Dialogue Room in the Comal Building.

For more information on the series, and to pick up your own copy of the full Dialogue Calendar, come by the Philosophy Main Office (Comal 102.) \*The San Marcos Public Library portion of the Dialogue Series is sponsored by the Philosophy Dialogue Series, San Marcos Public Library, Texas State Common Experience, and National Endowment for the Humanities. Located at 625 E. Hopkins Street.

## PHILOSOPHY ALUMNI BANQUET

Our annual **Alumni Banquet** will be on Friday, October 27th 2017 from 6—9:00PM. This is a catered event, with dinner options for both omnivorian and vegetarian diets. Donations this year will \$20.00 for attendees. It is being held at the Price Center, 222 W. San Antonio Street San Marcos, Texas 78666. Please contact Camrie Pippet at [cp1292@txstate.edu](mailto:cp1292@txstate.edu) for more information.

## NEW FACES IN THE PHILOSOPHY DEPT.

### Full Time M.A. Lecturers

**Jonathan Lollar,**  
M.A., Applied Philosophy &  
Ethics  
Texas State University

In my free time, I enjoy playing video games while the books on my shelf stare at me with disapproval. Otherwise you may find me playing board games, talking about cars, enjoying the greatest sport in the world (soccer, for you uninitiated), or unironically watching "Golden Girls". I have few weaknesses, but one of them my affinity for musicals. I can most commonly be found in one of the many theaters in Wimberly or Austin during play season, which is always. Life is a cabaret, ol' chum.

### Gary Fields

M.A. Applied Philosophy & Ethics  
Texas State University

Music keeps me alive. I find my life in literature. Philosophy is my way of life. I love playing soccer and ping pong. Let's play sometime.

**Nicholas Cantu,**  
M.A., Applied Philosophy &  
Ethics  
Texas State University

I am interested in philosophy because it is therapeutic. I am a musician, which was my first love before philosophy. I also have an interest in linguistics, etymology, and studying various languages.

### Administrative Assistant II

**Michelle Villalpando**  
M.Ed., Texas State University

I was locally born and raised in the beautiful San Marcos. As a member of the community, I enjoy donating my time to SMCISD and to select charities. I enjoy attending and watching sporting events with my favorite teams being the San Antonio Spurs, Dallas Cowboys, Notre Dame, and as an alum, the TXST Bobcats. I also enjoy music events with my daughter, twirling around the dance floor with my amigos, 9-pin bowling, baking and creating cupcake masterpieces, and binge-watching a good criminal show on Netflix with Lia, my yellow lab. I look forward to meeting you all and assisting with all travel and budget needs.

### Full-Time Ph.D. Lecturers

**Natasha Mikles,**  
Ph.D., Religious Studies  
University of Virginia

Natasha Mikles is a new full-time faculty researching and teaching Tibetan and Chinese religions at Texas State University. Her work examines the presentation of Buddhist hells in Chinese and Tibetan popular literature. She believes that studying how humans have simultaneously understood and formed their surrounding culture through religious ideas, beliefs, and practices is an important way for students to think about their own ways of making meaning. Outside of her time in the classroom, Dr. Mikles is a dedicated foodie, constantly seeking out, cooking, and tasting new foods; her most recent conquest was bone marrow mousse, which she says was delicious, but very filling!



## UPCOMING CONFERENCES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

**Ethics and Political, Social and Legal Annual Conference**

Submission Deadline: October, 1, 2017

Conference Dates: November 16–17, 2017

This annual conference will bring together scholars and researchers from all areas whose work concerns important issues involving the ethic, social, political and legal theory. Submissions may concern topics such as justice, fairness, rights, virtue theory, moral epistemology, responsibility, punishment, moral and ethical reasoning, and philosophy of mind; topics may have a theoretical, practical or historical focus. We welcome submissions from a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, the social sciences, critical studies (including gender and sexuality studies, disability studies, race studies, and critical legal theory...), law, education, linguistics, the neurosciences, and the pharmaceutical and medical sciences as well as other relevant disciplines and fields. Each paper session will have 20 minutes for presentation followed by a 20 minutes Q/A session. Please submit an abstract of no more than 500 words excluding bibliography. Abstracts should be submitted electronically:

<http://cognethic.org/events/2017/11/16/ethics-and-political-social-and-legal-annual-conference>

**Philosophy and Humanities TwinStar Conference on Global Values**

Submission Deadline: November 17, 2017

Conference Dates: February 16–17, 2018

Abstracts of approximately 700-1000 words should be submitted to [papers@twinstarconference.com](mailto:papers@twinstarconference.com) by November 17th, 2017. When sending abstracts to the student conference, make sure to list the name of your school, your rank, your name, and the topic. Topic areas: Western Philosophy; Philosophy of Action, Philosophy of Language; Philosophy of Mind; Philosophical Traditions; Aesthetics; Meta-Ethics; Philosophy of Law; Social and Political Philosophy, and Value Theory.

<http://twinstarconference.com/>

**Call for Papers: Lost Voices at the Foundation of Ethics**

Submission Deadline: December 15, 2017

Conference Dates: August 22–23, 2018

This conference aims to introduce overlooked ideas and perspectives into contemporary metaethics. We are particularly (but not exclusively) interested in thinkers from outside the mainstream European philosophical tradition, including thinkers who did not identify themselves as philosophers. To help facilitate discussion, all papers should engage in some way with the framework of contemporary metaethics (as described in, e.g., the Routledge Handbook of Metaethics), though this engagement can be critical.

The conference will take place in August 2018 at the University of Washington, Seattle. Abstracts of around 500 words should be sent to Colin Marshall ([crmarsh@uw.edu](mailto:crmarsh@uw.edu)) no later than December 15, 2017. Invitations to join the conference will be made by late January 2018. We are currently able to award two travel grants of \$750 for non-tenured speakers, though we hope to secure more funding in Spring 2018 (please indicate in your submission if you are interested in these grants).

**Call for Papers: Hegel, Tragedy, and Comedy****The 25th Biennial Meeting of the Hegel Society of America**Submission Deadline: January 31, 2018 Email Submission: [m-alznauer@northwestern.edu](mailto:m-alznauer@northwestern.edu)

Conference Dates: October 26–28, 2018

The Hegel Society's 2018 Biennial Meeting will examine tragedy and comedy in Hegel's philosophy. Discussions that are pertinent to the issues of tragedy and comedy can be found throughout Hegel's thought, from his early writings and the Jena Phenomenology of Spirit, to his later work on history, aesthetics, and religion, as well as in his practical philosophy. Papers are welcome that address any of Hegel's treatments of these topics or indeed any of the philosophical or historical issues these discussions give rise to.

Submissions are limited to 6,000 words. Later adjustments must remain within this limit. Submissions must be formatted for blind review and accompanied by an abstract of no more than 300 words. They must be complete essays; draft proposals are not acceptable. All papers should be in English.

# STUDENTS IN PHILOSOPHY

## TXST SYMPOSIUM & TEXAS PHILOSOPHICAL CALL FOR PAPERS

### **21st Annual Texas State Philosophy Symposium**

Hosted in April 2018. Undergraduate or graduate papers on any philosophical topic are welcome.

Papers should be suitable for a 20-minute presentation, submitted for blind review (author's name on cover page only), and are due in February 2018. Send by email (.doc or .docx file) to Amelie Benedikt, ab53@txstate.edu

### **Texas Philosophical**

This journal is open to any philosophical essays written by Texan undergraduate students during the FY17-18 school year. Deadline for consideration is noon on 31st May 2018. Please check [TexasPhilosophical.com](http://TexasPhilosophical.com) for information regarding submission. Papers are to be emailed as a word document or in rich text format to [TXPHIL@txstate.edu](mailto:TXPHIL@txstate.edu).

## ΦΣΤ ACTIVITIES

In addition to our regular dialogues, Phi Sigma Tau members will be coming together this fall for several fun activities. Members will join in movie nights, bowling at Sunset Lanes, participation in the Talk of the Times, and fundraising with our Book/Bake Sales.

## TALK OF THE TIMES

**Talk of the Times**, an activity of the *American Democracy Project* at TXST University, is a weekly open forum on current events and issues led by members of Phi Sigma Tau.

Discussions are held on Fridays in the Comal Building.

## INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CASE COMPETITION (IBECC)

Carrie Crisp & Jonathan Lollar

Once again, our International Business Case Competition (IBECC) Teams have achieved success and brought home trophies to Texas State! This year the teams traveled to Santa Monica, California, and participated in what was perhaps the most geographically diverse incarnation of the competition thus far, encountering teams from the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Australia, and Spain.

Our students excelled at competition and represented Texas State well with their professionalism and courtesy while winning the following awards:

- Graduate team members Cesar Bernal, Jonathan Lollar, and Shiniece Owens won first place in 90-second division, and second place in 10-minute division with their project entitled "Hit the Target: Analyzing the Ethics of Selling Lab Grown Plants".
- Undergraduates Samantha Coyle, Nathaniel Rodriguez Sosa, Carrington Tatum, and Tania Vera Borunda won second place in 90-second division for their case "Addressing Harassment, Exclusion, and Work-life Balance in Silicon Valley Culture to Facebook".
- The ethics competition was not the only aspect where we excelled as Samantha Coyle also won the women's division of IBECC's 4-mile biathlon run!

The students worked tirelessly on their cases, and coaches Coleen Watson and Carrie Crisp are immensely proud of the young ethicists' success and their behavior in representing Texas State! Congratulations to Cesar, Jonathan, Shiniece, Samantha, Nathaniel, Carrington, and Tania!

In addition to achieving this success, our students received advice from leaders in various industries and current and former public officials. We would like to specifically thank Former Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Mr. Steve Rhodes, and Former New York Judge Ruth Kroft for the time they put into privately mentoring our students. We look forward to seeing Ambassador Rhodes and Her Honor again next year.

Thank you to the Texas State community for the work and support of the administration, faculty, staff, and students that has allowed our Texas State teams to be successful in all four years that we have participated in IBECC. We extend a special thank you to Dr. Hanks and Camrie Pipper-Smith - we couldn't do it without you. With your continued support we expect our future teams to carry on our winning tradition!"



## YOU REALLY HAD TO BE THERE: THE 20TH ANNUAL STUDENT PHILOSOPHY SYMPOSIUM

### Notes on the Spring 2016 Annual Student Symposium

If you missed the 20th Annual Student Philosophy Symposium in April, better put that on your regrets list. We received more paper submissions in answer to the call for papers this year than in any previous year, and selected 13 excellent presentations, another record high number for the conference. Those in attendance were given presentations across a wide variety of philosophical areas, from the philosophy of gender, to the philosophy of religion, epistemology, political philosophy, ethics and philosophy of education.

Our presenters included 7 visitors from universities as nearby as San Antonio and as far away as Princeton: Barclay Wohlstetter, Marshall Naylor, Marcus Otte, Quintin Babaie, Heather Koenig, Myles Casey, and Nolan Grunski. Our own philosophy students comprised the other half of the presenters: Jonathan Lollar, Austin Sanders, Nathaniel Clapp, Travis Wright, Sean Daniel Johnson, and Nicholas Cantu. The task of responding to presenters was taken on by valiant Phi Sigma Tau members, Ivette Miranda, Blake Edwards, Nathaniel Clapp, Arun Raman, Sean Daniel Johnson, and Stefan Sanchez.

To see the complete schedule of presenters and topics last april, go to <http://www.txstate.edu/philosophy/other-programs/symposium.html>

Thanks again to our presenters, visitors and those in attendance for opening your minds and engaging with the thought of others, as Socrates directed us to do. And please spread the word about our 21st Annual Student Conference to be held in Spring 2018. The call for papers and date of the conference will be announced at the start of Spring 2018.





# SPACE SETTLEMENT SYMPOSIUM

Notes of the Space Settlement Symposium by Dr. Eli Kanon

Our first annual symposium held in the Fall of 2016 asked two questions: Can we do this? And, should we do this? The Philosophy Department in cooperation with Aerospace Studies, Ingram School of Engineering and the LBJ Institute for STEM and Research planned and provided for the day's events. Our opening speaker Dynae Fullwood, Lead (Acting) Educator Professional Development Activities Manager at the NASA Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston, started the event with remarks emphasizing the importance of STEM education toward achieving the goal of space settlement. She further detailed student internship opportunities with NASA. This was followed by a panel of speakers—Andrew Brei, Isaac Wiegman and myself—addressing the question “should we?”. After providing the compelling need to consider human space settlement, concerns for doing it ethically and at what cost were addressed. The next two presenters were definitely addressing the technical aspects of “can we?”. Eric Malory, a NASA engineer, delivered a well-received analysis of current engineering advancements and challenges to our pursuit of attaining space settlements. The keynote address was delivered by a Texas State Alumni in Physics, Jacob Grimes of Southwest Research Institute. He pragmatically informed us that space settlement must be driven by the private sector and that some economic gain from such a pursuit is necessary for this to happen. There was very positive feedback from the 70 + attendees and all suggested that we should continue this discussion in future symposia.



We are currently working with 6 other departments for this year's symposium—Political Science, Anthropology, Sociology, English, Geology and Psychology. Our focus is “The nature of a space-going social structure”. The question we are addressing this year is “what kind of culture will result from space colonization?” Our opening speaker is William Duffy his remarks will address “Art in Space: Preservation and Loss of Culture in Multi-Generation Space Travel”. This year we opened up the event to student presenters and are employing break-out sessions, thereby allowing our audience more intimate, interactive participation. Our morning break-out session includes Maximillen Vis III's “An Examination of Artificial Intelligence, Mega- and/or Social-Structures in Halo: Contact Harvest”; Minakshi Das and Robert Robinson's brain-storming exercise “Let's Build a Space Colony” where participants will make suggestions and by the end of the day Robertson will produce an artwork based upon the ideas formulated in the session. Our afternoon break-out session will present John Manning's “Teaching Star Trek: An Analysis of the Themes of Star Trek: The Next Generation and Star Trek: Deep Space Nine for Practical Pedagogies” and Vanessa Johnson's “What Does It Take to be a Space Colonist: Creative Writing Exercise.” Other presenters throughout the day include Joseph Gottlieb discussing “In Search of a Bias-Free Reason for Space Colonization” and Eric Chelstrom addressing “The Unpredictability of Social Systems in Space Exploration and Colonization: Avoiding the Phantom Menace or Treating Humans like Clones.” This year we received University Lecturer Series funds to bring Dalhousie University Professor Emeritus Jerome Barkow, a distinguished sociocultural anthropologist, to be our keynote speaker. He will close the day with “Stable cultures for generation ships and deep space settlements are impossible: overcoming the challenge.”

I invite everyone to attend all or part of the events we have prepared for you this October 20th starting at 10 am and ending by 3 pm.

# CAPES and TOGAS and MASKS, oh, my! Superheroes and Philosophy

Notes on the Fall 2016 Philosophy Alumni Banquet by Dr. Amelie Benedikt

Last October, you probably noticed Camrie's artful poster in the foyer of Comal announcing the 2016 Philosophy Alumni Banquet. The poster depicted Simone de Beauvoir and Bertrand Russell attired in spandex tights and capes. If you were unable to attend, you still might be uncertain about the philosophical meaning of that puzzling image. Sure, many philosophers pick a favorite philosopher or two and think of them in superlative, even heroic, terms, but capes? Really?

To explain: the study of comic book super heroes has been taken up in true earnest by some ethicists in the last decade. Yes, superheroes are being studied through the Aristotelean lens of virtue ethics, as guides, mentors, exemplars, as virtuous but fallible persons with skills that few, if any, possess. As Jeff Brenzel argues in "Why are Superheroes Good? Comics and The Ring of Gyges," super heroes would cause Glaucon and Socrates some of the same concerns they voice in book II of Plato's *Republic*. Afterall, what *would* become of a good person once they know how to evade detection, capture and punishment? Perhaps invisibility, masked identity, heightened powers of perception, and unusual strengths cannot remain faithful to the Good.

To consider this further, make that familiar leap from Plato's Athens to the 20th century. Brenzel's essay recounts the commercial success of Marvel comics despite, or perhaps as a result of, the 1954 U.S. Congressional hearings that authored a Comics Code that required that "in every instance, good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds." As comic book author, Stan Lee, once explained, ALL stories, whether literary or comic book, are essentially about "good guys versus bad guys," and after 1954, good guys took the lead, at least in comic books.

Like the rest of us "normals," superheroes must figure out "...what sort and manner of person they are, and what is the best kind of life for that person to lead... whether they have what it takes to realize their particular possibilities... how they fit in to the rest of the world... what they can offer to others and what they can receive from others in return." (Brenzel, "Why are Superheroes Good? Comics and The Ring of Gyges," from Morris, Matt and Tom, *Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth Justice and the Socratic Way*, Carus Publishing, 2005, p. 248)

So, aside from sharing ideas about character, virtue and superheroes at the Fall Alumni Banquet, the faculty, staff, students, alumni and other guests in attendance enjoyed an pleasant evening of live music, historical architecture, excellent Greek food, fine libations, bizarre costumes, party favors, and live "theater" in the form of Phi Sigma Tau members reading parts from the irreverent and funny Existential Comics. To conclude the evening, Rebekah Ross, Amelie Benedikt and Phi Sigma Tau president, Shaula Rocha, conducted the solemn (ok, not solemn) initiation and medal awards ceremony for the 2016 Phi Sigma Tau inductees: Bryant Billue, Jonathan Breaux, Nathaniel Clapp, Zakiya Juakali, Aaron Lewis, Ivette Miranda, Bradley Waldraff, Angelia Welch and Gerard Womack.

Alumni in attendance: Travis Stockton, Jason Brazil, Blake Edwards and Katherine (Rompel) Casarez and other friends and spouses. Faculty and Staff in attendance: Rebecca Farinas, Bob Fischer, Paul Wilson, Holly Lewis, Keisha Ray, Lori Gallegos, Colleen Watson, Robert O'Connor, Olga Gerhart, Beverly Pairett, Amelie Benedikt and Rebekah Ross.

If the 2016 Banquet sounded fun, it was, so please plan to attend the NEXT Philosophy Department Alumni Banquet, scheduled for the evening of October 27th, 2017 at the Price Center in downtown San Marcos. The 2017 Banquet theme will be announced by Phi Sigma Tau members in September, and you can get your tickets from Camrie Pippet in early October.



Above left:  
Shaula Rocha,  
Phi Sigma Tau  
President 2016-  
2017 and  
Rebekah Ross,  
Phi Sigma Tau  
faculty  
sponsor.

Above right:  
Shaula Rocha

Left:  
Phi Sigma Tau  
inductees for  
fall 2016.



# BOBCAT BUILD 2017

Rebekah Ross, Faculty

Phi Sigma Tau and The International Studies Club teamed up to participate in the 15th Annual Bobcat Build. On April 1, 2017, Texas State students, faculty, and staff gathered behind the stadium for the kick-off event and then scattered throughout the community to over 285 jobsites. This year, Congressman Lloyd Doggett participated in the send-off by congratulating and encouraging Bobcats for their day of service and community spirit. Phi Sigma Tau members did yard work for a San Marcos resident recovering from eye surgery.



## TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of Philosophy  
 Comal 102  
 601 University Dr.  
 San Marcos, Texas 78666  
 Phone: 512.245.2285  
 Fax: 512.245.8335  
 E-mail: [philosophy@txstate.edu](mailto:philosophy@txstate.edu)  
 Website: [www.txstate.edu/philosophy](http://www.txstate.edu/philosophy)