



PHI SIGMA TAU BULLETIN

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

FALL 2018, ISSUE 31

WELCOME HOME PHILOSOPHERS!

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FALL 2018

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

Some thoughts on the value of being ill-at-ease

The start of the fall semester, the passage onto our academic new year, is a time with a palpable sense of renewal and possibility. One of the challenges for we philosophers and religionists is that in the midst of such excitement we are ill-at-ease. Such is our lot, for reasons that even we might not fully understand – we are, after all, drawn to this work for varied and complex reasons. To be a philosopher or a religionist is to be both in the present moment and not fully of it. When the philosopher, or the religionist, is fully at home, the philosopher as such (or religionist as such) disappears. If we continue as scholars, we become apologists, or if we do not, we are persons who merely happen to know a good deal about philosophy or religion.

At the start of this fall semester the project of being a religionist or a philosopher faces challenges. Again, it has always been thus, those who ask foundational questions, who investigate systematically the meanings of existence, the nature of knowledge and reality, and the origins, grounding, functioning's and importance of values, have always been outliers. As we all know, Socrates was brought to trial and sentenced to death for the practice of philosophy and questioning the gods of ancient Athens. And, it is certainly the case that in our current moment many social factors make the systematic and careful study of fundamental questions seem old-fashioned, quaint even, and irrelevant. But, in this autumn of 2018 the challenges to what we do have a new dimension.

When William James published his *Principles of Psychology* over 100 years ago, he argued for several claims that were then not testable. Notably, for my purposes here, he developed the claim that the physiology of human cognition is shaped by experience, that what we do and experience changes the physical structures of our brain just as exercise can change musculature. James did not have access to neural imaging technologies, but it is not that he had no reasons for the positions he took and the account of human psychology that he developed. Rather, the whole project was built on his Radical Empiricism, nondualism, and the concomitant view of humans as always already embodied and embedded. Based on these starting points, for which he provides reasons throughout his work, he argues for the position that John Dewey maintains in *Art as Experience*, “[n]o creature lives merely under its skin.” One of the upshots of this idea is that we become who we are through the sorts of interactions (what James called relations) we have with every aspect of our experience, and this “who we are” includes physical structures of brain and body as much as it does friendships, social and historical context, hopes and fears, culinary and musical preferences.

If factors such as fear, inertia, self-interest, and ignorance have long stood against thoughtful reflection, what has changed? Certainly we find our times every bit as resistant to the search for wisdom and virtue as Socrates found his. And, yet, something is different, and that something is contributing to changing identities, changing forms of sociality, and changing brain structures. When thinkers such as José Ortega y Gasset, Jacques Ellul, Hans Jonas, Ivan Illich, or John Dewey suggested that new forms of technology not only mediate our activities and experiences, but change who we are, they were sometimes derided for making unsupportable ontological and epistemological claims. Recent work in cognitive science and social psychology suggests they were all too correct. In two books, *Alone Together* (2011), *Reclaiming Conversation* (2015), Sherry Turkle (MIT) traces the ways that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are driving fundamental transformations of how we understand privacy, intimacy, and community. Technologies, such as video conferencing, that were initially thought of as “better than nothing” (if we can’t talk face-to-face a video chat will do, better than not meeting at all) have become preferred modes of interacting, “better than anything.” Along the way, as ICTs become ever more central to our everyday lives, we not only voluntarily submit to new forms of surveillance and influence and experience diminished solitude and FOMO, we are also losing capacities for conversation, self-reflection, and empathy. Beyond changing identities and forms of sociality, we are changing the physical structures of who we are. In *Reader Come Home: The Reading Brain in the Digital World* (2018), Maryanne Wolf (UCLA) outlines the compelling research that describes how our increased use of ICTs is changing how we read, how we process information, our capacities for critical and reflective thinking, and the processes and structures of our brains. As Wolf describes things, “The quality of our reading is not only an index of the quality of our thought, it is our best-known path to developing whole new path-ways in the cerebral evolution of our species.” The ways we mediate experience not only change the experience, they change the experiencer – in this James was right.

What does this have to do with us, students of philosophy and religious studies? In these times, under these conditions, the ways of being we have chosen and the work we pursue is ever more important, while also ever more difficult. The forms of experience increasingly dominant structure our experiences, or thoughts, and our bodies in ways that are conducive to shallow and not critical thinking, to control and not freedom, to the sorts of instrumental relations Martin Buber called I-It relations and not to substantial open loving I-Thou relations. Through the practice of deliberate careful and detailed reading and examination of complex texts we transform who we are and our relations to the world we inhabit. To be a philosopher or religionist is to be out-of-step, to exist in conscious tension with ourselves and the world around us. To be a philosopher or religionist is thus to be ill-at-ease in the world, a status we celebrate at our annual banquet and throughout this department. The work we do, and ways of being we chose, embody (literally – our bodies would be different if we did not follow these practices) alternative possibilities for human existence and human meaning.

NEW FACES IN THE PHILOSOPHY DEPT.

Vince Bagnulo
Ph.D.,
University of
Notre Dame

I arrive in philosophy at Texas State via a roundabout path through physics and, more recently, political science (I swear that I got a degree in philosophy somewhere along the way). I am so pleased to be teaching philosophy because, through all these changes, it was an early and constant love. My primary philosophical interest is political thought and my research specialty is 19th-century analyses of democracy. Most of my free time is spent with my wife and three-year old daughter but what I have left I like to put into learning languages - quite slowly.

Justin Williams,
ABD Ph.D.,
University of North Texas

I am very pleased to be a part of the Department of Philosophy here at Texas State; while here, I will devote my efforts to uphold the highest standards of theory and practice. In my pursuit of philosophical inquiry, my scholastic journey has led me to specialize in Environmental Philosophy. I continue to cultivate a growing interest in transdisciplinarity-particularly at the intersection of ecology, complexity, and metaphysics. I am currently preparing to defend a dissertation focused on land ethics and the synthesis of orientation, conceptual autopoiesis, language culture, and contemporary metaphysics. In my free time you can find me spending time with the people I love the most-my lovely wife and my wonderful son-we play a lot. I also love snorkeling the San Marcos river and walking around the woods.

Joi Jones,
Master of Arts,
Texas State University

My foundation into philosophy began 6 years ago with a Carlos Castaneda novel titled "A Separate Reality," a book on the topic of shamanism in Mexico. This book inspired my journey to become a continuous learner in the field of Meta-ethics, Metaphysical Naturalism and Religious Studies. My other interests include Epidemiology, Tort Law, International Law, History of Legal Philosophy and Military History. I enjoy volunteering at the Inside Book Project, an organization that sends books to Texas prisoners. In addition to watching Indian Classical music performances, I like canoeing and crafting my clothing and jewelry by hand.

Of God and Monsters

4-6 April 2019

Texas State
University

San Marcos, TX

Judith Halberstam
famously claimed
that monsters are
“meaning machines”
that can be used to
represent a variety of
ideas, including

morality, gender, race, and nationalism (to name only a few). Monsters are always part of the project of making sense of the world and our place in it. As a tool through which human beings create worlds in which to meaningfully dwell, monsters are tightly bound with other systems of meaning-making like religion, culture, literature, and politics. Of Gods and Monsters will provide focused space to explore the definition of “monster,” the categorization of monsters as a basis of comparison across cultures, and the relationship of monsters to various systems of meaning-making with the goal of understanding how humans have used and continued to use these “meaning machines.”

The Religious Studies program at Texas State University, therefore, welcomes submissions for our upcoming conference on Monsters and Monster Theory. Through this conference, we hope to explore the complex intersections of monsters and meaning making from a variety of theoretical, academic, and intellectual angles. Because “monsters” are a category that appears across time and cultural milieus, this conference will foster conversations between scholars working in very different areas and is not limited in terms of cultural region, historical time, or religious tradition. Conference organizers anticipate inviting papers presented at this conference to submit their revised papers for an edited volume.

If interested, please submit an abstract with a maximum of 300-words to TexasStateMonsters@gmail.com by November 1st, 2018. Final decisions on conference participation will be sent out by the first week of December. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact conference organizers Natasha Mikles (n.mikles@txstate.edu) or Joseph Laycock (joseph.laycock@txstate.edu).



STUDENTS IN PHILOSOPHY

TXST SYMPOSIUM & TEXAS PHILOSOPHICAL CALL FOR PAPERS

22nd Annual Texas State Philosophy Symposium

Hosted in March 2019. 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 2019. 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 FY18-19 school year. Deadline for consideration is noon on 31st May 2019. Please check TexasPhilosophical.com for information regarding submission. Papers are to be emailed as a word document or in rich text format to 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. Phi Sigma Tau will meet Mondays at 6:30 in Comal 116 during fall 2018.

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 Ethics Case Competition (IBECC)

Carrie Crisp & Jonathan Lollar

Greetings! Our International Business Ethics Case Competition (IBECC) Teams have continued our winning tradition by returning to Texas State with more prestige! This year our graduate and undergraduate teams made their way to Boston, Massachusetts, to compete against thirty-nine teams from seven different countries (United States, Kuwait, China, Turkey, Australia, England, and Spain). This was the largest and most geographically diverse competition in the twenty-two year history of the competition.

We are also excited to tell you that as of this summer IBECC has officially become a Student Organization here at Texas State! We would like to extend a very big thank you to the Student Involvement Office for your help in becoming recognized.

Texas State University continues to be the only university that utilizes their Philosophy or Ethics programs in order to compete. All other universities exclusively use their business colleges to compete! In light of this, we fielded our most intellectually diverse group of students ever to keep our competitive edge. The graduate team, whose topic was “Zara and the Ethics of Sustainability in Fast Fashion,” included our own Alana Chetlen and Alvaro Hrgic, from the MAAPE program, and Megan Mulroy from the Legal Studies Master’s program. The undergraduate team chose to decode the tech industry with their case “Tyler Technologies: Injustice within the Justice System.” This team included Leah Butterfield (English and Philosophy Major), Samantha Coyle (Computer Science Major and Philosophy Minor), Daniel Hancock (Biochemistry Major and Philosophy Minor), Gray Jameson (Chemical Engineering Major and Philosophy Minor), and Brent Redmon (Computer Science Major and Philosophy Minor).

Our students brought home the following awards while representing Texas State at the 22nd Annual International Business Ethics Case Competition:

- Undergraduate team members Leah Butterfield, Samantha Coyle, Daniel Hancock, Gray Jameson, and Brent Redmon won second place in the twenty-five minute presentation category.
- Graduate team members Alana Chetlen, Alvaro Hrgic, and Megan Mulroy won second place in the ten minute presentation category.
- Undergraduate team member Samantha Coyle won the women’s division of IBECC’s 4-mile run for the second year in a row, with a time of 28:23. She had the fastest time in both the male and female divisions.

For those of you who are not aware, our IBECC students spend at least five hours a week preparing for this event. In April that time commitment doubles. They do this in addition to attending their classes, keeping up with their coursework, and fulfilling other obligations (such as work). This is a large time commitment that they make for the Department and the University.

Thank you to the Texas State and the Philosophy Department for the continued support by our administration, faculty, staff, and students that make it possible for our students to continue to compete and win awards! We wish to give a special thank you to Dr. Craig Hanks, Camrie Pippet, and Michelle Villalpando. This opportunity would not exist without your support!

21st Annual Philosophy Student Symposium

Friday April 13th and Saturday April 14th, 2018

Report by Dr. Amelie Benedikt

Wow! Two days of idea exchange were great food for thought. The papers accepted for presentation at this year's Symposium were in several areas: ecology, animal rights, medical ethics, Confucianism, Philosophy of religion, existentialism and phenomenology. Those who gave presentations from our department were, Travis Wright, Chloe Diaz, Taylor Carr, Jessica Berry, Alvaro Hrgic, and Sean Daniel Johnson. Our guest presenters from other universities were Hal Koelsch from Baylor University, Drew Shotwell from Principia College, Jo Wood from Montana State University, Alexander Fetto from Montana State University, and Frank Brown from University of Idaho.

Those in attendance, including friends and family of our presenters, were very impressed by the dialogue-rich environment of the symposium. Indeed, our philosophy department is becoming well known for dialogue, on our campus and beyond.

Dr. Carson, who ran our Phi Sigma Tau chapter for 20 years, instituted the valuable practice of scheduling plenty of time during the symposium for respondents and audience discussion. True to that tradition, time was given for many thoughtful responses and exchanges. Respondents included Patrick Gonzalez, Nathaniel Rodriguez Sosa and Stefan Sanchez.

Afterwards, presenters feasted at the Root Cellar. Friendships were formed, networks build, and philo-sophia flourished. Thanks go to Camrie and Dr. Hanks, to Sean Daniel Johnson, Professor Ross and members of Phi Sigma Tau for their help again this year.

Join us next year !

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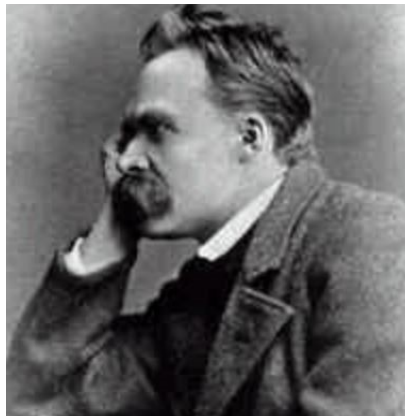
PHILOSOPHY AS PROTEST

“I do not know how to teach philosophy
without becoming a disturber of the peace.”

- Baruch Spinoza

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND
THE 2018 ALUMNI BANQUET
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2018 at 6:30 p.m.

This is a catered event, with dinner options for both omnivorian and vegetarian diets. Donations this year will be \$20.00 for attendees. It is being held at the Price Center, 222 W. San Antonio Street San Marcos, Texas 78666. Please contact Camrie Pippert at cp1292@txstate.edu for more information.



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 23rd year, kicking off on Monday September 17, 2018 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.

Notes on the Fall The 2017 Annual Philosophy Alumni Banquet as reported Dr. Amelie Benedikt

At the San Marcos Price Center on Friday, October 27, 2017, faculty, staff, students, friends, family, and some recent alumni gathered. Members of the Honors Society, Phi Sigma Tau, and those inducted as members that night, donned Greek-style togas to emphasize the Delphic theme of the evening. Sean Daniel Johnson, President of Phi Sigma Tau, inducted the following new members: CiCi Barela, Marcelina Garcia, Patrick Gonzalez, Natalia Martinez, Sydney Perry, Nathaniel Rodriguez Sosa, Beaumont Sepaugh, Declan Ward, Travis Wright, and our Chair, Dr. Craig Hanks.

During the Banquet, I offered remarks on the legacy of the Oracle at Delphi and some of the possible influences on Greek philosophy. The Oracle at Delphi, circa 1400 BCE – the 4th century CE, was the most well known and trusted of many Oracles. Delphi served as the intellectual center of the Greek world. Delphi is 120 miles northwest of Athens, and the temple is built on Mount Parnassus at the site of a fresh water spring. (Kind of like San Marcos?) The Oracle housed a Priestess of Apollo, called a Pythian, who practiced divination, or prophetic predictions, based on communications she conducted with the god, Apollo.

The Oracle sat on a tripod inhaling “vapors” rising from the cracked rock on which the Delphic Temple was built. These vapors, once thought to be volcanic, have been identified, conclusively, as ethylene. Ethylene creates what toxicologist Henry A Spillar describes as “disembodied euphoria, an altered mental status and a pleasant sensation... The effects, however, are not long lasting.” (New York Times, March 19, 2002)

Although the Oracles were “high” on ethylene, they were also learned persons, older women, living at the center of exchange among travelers, politicians and scholars. Thus, the likelihood of getting good advice was better at Delphi than anywhere else in the Greek world, provided you could pay their high fees. Heads of State and the wealthy paid very well for individual attention in matters of statecraft.

King Croesus of Lydia learned just how tricky understanding the Oracle could be when he assumed that the Priestess had given him a favorable sign concerning whether to attack the neighboring Persian Empire. The Oracle told the King, “If you cross the river, a great empire will be destroyed.” A great empire WAS destroyed, but it was the Lydian Empire of King Croesus, NOT the Persian Empire.

All told, we know of 147 Delphic maxims, once inscribed on papyrus, or on stone. (Look them up, they rock!) These formed the core of Greek values for more than 1,500 years, until Christianity prohibited distribution of the maxims. The most famous of all the maxims was “Know Thyself.” This was inscribed on the columns at the front of the Temple to Apollo. Like all divine prophecy, this maxim, quite clear on first impression, requires work to interpret. What IS selfhood? What counts as knowledge? Is selfhood univocal and unchanging? Or if it changes, how can one measure that change? The lasting lesson for Greek Philosophy was that meaning is human, finite, and contextual. Socrates himself never went to Delphi, but his friend Chaerephon did and asked the Oracle, “Is there anyone wiser than Socrates?” The High Priestess of Apollo replied, “No one is wiser than Socrates.” Socrates spent years puzzling over this. As an informed member of Greek culture and religious practice, Socrates knew that pronouncements by the Oracle always required deeper scrutiny. So, Socrates’ puzzlement over the Oracle’s meaning would have been standard practice at the time. However, it was Socrates’ interpretation of the Oracle that was so remarkable. Socrates was keen to admit his ignorance instead of claiming unwarranted divine knowledge.



Right to left: Camrie Pippet, Benji Smith, Amanda Standlee, Kyla Hobbs-Darlick, Jenn Garcia, Nathaniel Rodriguez Sosa, Travis Wright, Patrick Gonzales, Hunter Chambers, Carolina Chambers, and Dr. Jo Ann Carson.





Phi Sigma Tau and the students, staff and faculty of the Philosophy Department, wish to express our gratitude to Dr. Audrey McKinney on the occasion of her retirement from teaching. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Dr. Audrey McKinney.



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