

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2015



Gary Comstock, who has won an outstanding teacher award, and Barbara Levenbook, who has been approved for promotion to Professor.

FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

One of the Department's faculty has received an outstanding teacher award; another has been approved for promotion.

TEACHING AWARD

Gary L. Comstock, Professor of Philosophy, was presented with an Alumni Association Outstanding Teacher Award at the Alumni Association Faculty Awards Ceremony in April 2015, becoming a member of the NC State Academy of Outstanding Teachers.

Seven of the Department's twenty permanent faculty are now members of the Academy of Outstanding Teachers.

Formerly at Iowa State, Gary joined NC State as Director of the Research Ethics Program in 2002. He assumed regular faculty status in the Department in 2007.

Every semester, Gary teaches an interdisciplinary seminar for the University Honors Program and a one-credit course on research ethics, a topic on which he published an Oxford University Press textbook in 2013. Gary also teaches a course on biomedical ethics each spring.

In his honors seminar, *On the Human*, students actively explore human singularity. The course draws on philosophy, biology, and psychology to tackle questions such as the following: What is human nature? Is there such a thing? How do we differ, if at all, from other

animals and machines? What are the ethical implications of these differences? If technology allows us to change our natures, should we shape public policy to allow or disallow such changes?

An innovative teacher who is happy to test new instruments and techniques, Gary is a great fan of the argument-mapping software *Rationale* and uses it in all his undergraduate classes.

Gary's students describe him as "a very passionate, informed, and intelligent teacher," "very effective at communicating ideas," "good at provoking thought and stimulating discussion," and "an amazing and responsive teacher both inside and outside of class."

PROMOTION

Barbara B. Levenbook, Associate Professor of Philosophy, has been approved for promotion to Professor in Fall 2015.

A specialist in the philosophy of law, Barbara has a PhD from the University of Arizona. She joined NC State as an Assistant Professor in 1980 and was promoted to Associate Professor in 1986.

Barbara was instrumental in introducing the BA in Philosophy with a Concentration in Philosophy of Law in 1984, and still serves as the primary academic adviser to students in this program.

KEN PETERS LEAVES

Ken Peters, the Department's Student Services Assistant for almost eight years, has left NC State University.

Ken joined us in April 2007. He immediately set about updating and improving the Department's student-records system and quickly learned his way around the University's Registration and Records website and its complex rules and requirements for academic programs.

Both faculty and students soon came to depend heavily on Ken's expertise. Faculty serving as academic advisers or program coordinators discovered not only that Ken knew much more about their programs than they did, but also that he was a superstar at getting appropriate exceptions approved. And many students and former students are very grateful to Ken for saving them from missing essential requirements needed to graduate in good time.

At the end of January 2015, Ken left the Department in order to explore new opportunities and pursue his lifelong dream of being a full-time visual artist. He is excited about several new art opportunities that have come his way this year and hopes to build on those in the future. Ken's paintings can be viewed online at <http://www.kennetheugenepeters.com>.

Ken will be fondly remembered not only for his expertise, but also for excellence in service, his calm and friendly presence, his thoughtfulness, and his kindness.

The Department's new Student Services Assistant is Stephanie Wilson. Stephanie joined the Department in March, after two years as an Academic Advisor in the Department of Psychology at Texas A&M and a short stint in the private sector.

In addition to her well-known scholarly work in the philosophy of law, Barbara has published influential articles on the possibility of harming a person after his or her death.

The external evaluators who were consulted in Barbara's promotion-review process gave high praise to her scholarly publications. One described her as "one of the most able scholars working in legal philosophy." Others characterized her publications as "impressive," "of great significance," "of the highest quality," and "a very significant contribution to philosophy and jurisprudence."

Department News

WORK IN PROGRESS: BYKOVA ON SUBJECTIVITY IN GERMAN IDEALISM

In this article, Dr. Marina F. Bykova, Professor of Philosophy, describes her current work on the concept of subjectivity in German Idealism.

My area of specialization is classic German philosophy, with a special emphasis on Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, commonly referred to as German idealists. As a historian of ideas, I am interested in how some of the most elaborate philosophical ideas and concepts – central to contemporary philosophical discourse – evolve over time, and how they change and acquire a new interpretation in the process of this development.

My current research focuses on the concept of subjectivity and how it takes shape in works by the German idealists. I hope to accomplish two goals: first, to prove that, despite a strong objective (or realist) tendency in German idealism, a defining characteristic of German idealist thought is its commitment to subjectivity; and, second, to show that German idealists develop an essentially new approach to the subject and subjectivity that points to a break with the Cartesian tradition and other modern views on the subject. In fact, a systematic inquiry into subjectivity, conceived here in a radically new way, becomes one of the main philosophical concerns of classic German philosophy from Kant through Hegel.

Subjectivity is a complex notion, which makes it difficult to define. At its core, it is related to such notions as consciousness, human agency, and the self. Roughly, it means “sense of oneself,” or self-awareness. But subjectivity covers not only the individual’s sense of self. It also embraces the significance of a social dimension of the self: my self-awareness and self-presentation depends, in some way, on my interactions with others and our joint activity upon the world. My work deals with the development of this position in German idealism.

The centrality of the concept of subjectivity was secured by Kant’s anti-Cartesianism. Rather than follow Descartes in assuming that we are aware of and know our own thoughts and trying to refute skepticism on this basis, Kant probed the more fundamental problem of how we are capable of such awareness and knowledge at all. It is only on the basis of a philosophical account of human subjectivity that we can understand our capacity to know our own thoughts and determine whether the standard skeptical predicament is the human predicament.

Post-Kantian German idealists not only pursue this line, but expand it into a theory of subjectivity that accommodates the integration of cognition and action (or practical agency, which includes moral agency), the integration of mind and body, and the integration of individual subjects with their natural and social environments. More positively, a theory of subjectivity permits a focus on the active nature of human subjectivity, which Kant had emphasized in his account of the dependence of self-consciousness on perceptual and judgmental syntheses.

Kant held that both cognition and action are normatively governed; they cannot be explained merely causally and are thus “spontaneous.” These innovations are central to the German

idealists, who argued that an understanding of human subjectivity requires an examination of its development in and through an individual’s interactions with his or her natural and social surroundings. This marks a radical break with the Cartesian picture of the subject. The German idealists view subjectivity not merely as active, but as consisting entirely in activity. Thus

the relevant conception of subjectivity is not ontological, but rather functional: the key features of subjectivity are revealed by what it does and how it does it, not by what it is made of.

My work aims to show how a subject’s active engagement with the world and activity of self-development becomes the focus of philosophical analysis of subjectivity in German idealism.



Ken Peters, the Department’s former Student Services Assistant, on campus in April 2015 with his successor, Stephanie Wilson (see page 1)

NEWSBITES

MAJOR ANNIVERSARIES: Four of the Department’s faculty and staff celebrate significant long-term service anniversaries in 2015: John W. Carroll (Philosophy), 20 years; Barbara B. Levenbook (Philosophy) and Ann P. Rives (Executive Assistant), 35 years; and David D. Auerbach (Philosophy), 40 years.

SCHOLARLY REASSIGNMENT AND FELLOWSHIP: William Adler, Distinguished University Professor of Religious Studies, was awarded an NC State scholarly reassignment for Spring 2015 to enable him to serve as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Freie Universität Berlin. Bill was a member of a group of distinguished international scholars from different disciplines who worked together studying the systematic connection between space and knowledge structures in the cultures of the Near East and Mediterranean from early civilizations to late antiquity and the early medieval period.

COLLABORATION WITH CHINESE UNIVERSITY: In March 2015, Marina Bykova, Professor of Philosophy, took up an invitation from China Jiliang University to spend ten days in China. During her visit, Marina gave research presentations at Jiao Tong University in Shanghai and at Zhejiang University and China Jiliang University in Hangzhou. At Jiliang, she also participated in discussions about philosophy programs and the teaching of the history of philosophy to engineering students. Marina is expecting to return to Jiliang later in 2015 to take this collaboration further.

RETURN TO DEPARTMENT: Karey A. Harwood, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, returned to the Department in January 2015 after serving as Executive Director of Public Schools First North Carolina for eighteen months while on unpaid leave from NC State.

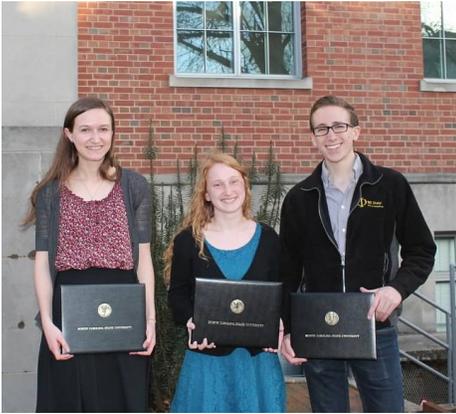
OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS AWARD: Vansana (“Van”) Nolintha, who graduated with a BS in Chemistry and a Minor in Religious Studies in 2009, was recognized as an Outstanding Young Alumnus at the NC State Alumni Association’s Evening of Stars Gala in September 2014. Van and his sister own and operate Bida Manda, a popular Laotian restaurant and bar in Raleigh.

LULU EGAMES PRIZEWINNER: Every year NC State’s Entrepreneurship Initiative runs the Lulu eGames, a startup competition that celebrates student innovation and entrepreneurship. In this year’s competition, a senior majoring in Religious Studies, Mike Hillis, won third prize in the Arts Feasibility Study Challenge. Mike’s entry, Royal Falcon Arts, turns the reflections of everyday people into extraordinary, three dimensional art.

BOWLING SMACKDOWN: The religious studies team came from behind to defeat the philosophy team in our annual Bowling Smackdown in April 2014. The overall record in the Smackdown series is: Religious Studies 7, Philosophy 7.

Department News

STUDENT AWARD WINNERS



Student award winners (left to right): Sarah M. Adcock (Religious Studies Prize in Honor of Professor W. Curtis Fitzgerald); Melodi T. Charles (Philosophy Prize in Honor of Professor Robert S. Bryan); Christopher Becker (Logic and Cognitive Science Initiative Award)

The Department celebrated the achievements of its top seniors at its annual Student Awards Reception on March 4. Three awards were presented by the faculty members who had worked most closely with the award winners.

The Religious Studies Prize in Honor of Professor W. Curtis Fitzgerald was presented by Jason Sturdevant, Teaching Assistant Professor of Religious Studies. The winner was Sarah M. Adcock. Sarah graduated *magna cum laude* with a BA in Religious Studies in May. She will begin the MDiv at Campbell University Divinity School in Fall 2015.

The Logic and Cognitive Science Initiative Award – which goes to the top senior in the BS in Philosophy with a Concentration in Logic, Representation, and Reasoning – was presented by John Carroll, Professor of Philosophy. The winner was Christopher Becker. Chris will be graduating in December 2015, after which he plans to take a semester off and then go on to graduate school in Philosophy.

FEATURE EMERITUS: DR. HAROLD D. LEVIN

In 1971, Harold D. Levin joined the Department as an Instructor in Philosophy, after two years as a Research Associate in the Department of Philosophy at the Rockefeller University in New York. Hal received his PhD in Philosophy from MIT in 1975 and became an Assistant Professor. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 1981. He had a half-time appointment on the faculty in Computer Science from 1982 to 1993.

Hal served as Assistant Head of Department for two years beginning in 1997, and then was Interim Head between 1999 and 2003. He retired in Summer 2006.

During his 35 years at NC State, Hal taught well over 5,000 students in 173 course-sections. His courses included Logic, Symbolic Logic, Introduction to Philosophy (previously Problems and Types of Philosophy), Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Science, and courses in Computer Science.

Hal's research in philosophy of language, logic, linguistics, and computer programming stands out as innovative and interdisciplinary. His book *Categorical Grammar and the Logical Form of Quantification* (Bibliopolis, 1982) was nominated for the prestigious Franklin J. Matchette prize. As co-author of *An Introduction to Object-Oriented Design in C++* (Addison-Wesley, 1996), Hal established himself as an authority on the C++ programming language.

Hal remembers with appreciation the departmental freedom and support that allowed for creativity and choice in teaching assignments and methods, and participation in wider scholarly and university affairs. He also has fond memories of the intellectual and social congeniality that made day-to-day life in the Department agreeable.

Since retiring and moving to Wrightsville Beach, Hal has indulged his penchant for life-long, low-stress learning, especially in mathematics and physics. He reads, audits edX courses, and repeatedly views Leonard Susskind's lectures on physics. He also enjoys pursuing idiosyncratic adventures in wholly unstructured leisure, and, when needed, devotes himself to family and home responsibilities.



Hal Levin in a selfie taken in May 2015

The Philosophy Prize in Honor of Professor Robert S. Bryan was presented by Stephen Puryear, Assistant Professor of Philosophy. The winner was Melodi T. Charles. Melodi graduated *summa cum laude* with a BS in Philosophy and a BS in Biological Sciences with Honors in May. She will be working as a tutor at the University Tutorial Center this summer and then plans to work as a technician in a biology lab until she goes on to graduate school in either Biology or Philosophy.

Asked how they have benefitted from their departmental majors, here's what our award winners said.

Sarah: "Having been exposed to many different religious traditions and cultures as a student majoring in Religious Studies at NC State,

I feel more inspired and better prepared to engage with people from diverse religious backgrounds in hopes of sparking meaningful dialogue about the role of religion in different areas of the world."

Chris: "Studying philosophy at NC State has developed within me the capacities to discern incongruity where others presume harmony, and to hypothesize peace where others assert discord. And it is for these humbling capacities that I will always be grateful."

Melodi: "Studying philosophy at NC State has integrated my scientific background with a deeper understanding of the historical and human elements that have led to our current view of the world and has made my technical studies more meaningful."

IN PRINT: Select Publications From the Past Three Years

William Adler (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Religions of the Ancient World*, Volume 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

William A. Bauer, "Dispositional Essentialism and the Nature of Powerful Properties," *Disputatio: International Journal of Philosophy* 5 (2013).

Anna B. Bigelow, "Muslim-Hindu Interreligious Dialogue," in Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Interreligious Dialogue* (Blackwell, 2013).

Jason C. Bivins, *Spirits Rejoice! Jazz and American Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

Marina F. Bykova, "Fichte: His Life and Political Calling," in Matthew Altman (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

John W. Carroll and students, *A Time Travel Dialogue* (Open Book Publishers, 2014).

Gary L. Comstock, *Research Ethics: A Philosophical Guide to the Responsible Conduct of Research* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Catherine Driscoll, "Neither Adaptive Thinking Nor Reverse Engineering: Methods in the Evolutionary Social Sciences," *Biology and Philosophy* 30 (2014).

Ronald P. Endicott, "Resolving Arguments by Different Conceptual Traditions of Realization," *Philosophical Studies* 159 (2012).

Karey A. Harwood, "Bad Habit or Considered Decision? The Need for a Closer Examination of Prospective Parents' Views," *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* 7 (2014).

Timothy Hinton, "Equality, Self-Ownership, and Individual Sovereignty," *Philosophical Forum* 44 (2013).

Barbara B. Levenbook, "Dworkin's Theoretical Disagreement Argument," *Philosophy Compass* 10 (2015).

Robert A. Mabrito, "Welfare and Paradox," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 38 (2013).

Levi McLaughlin and others (eds.), *Kōmeitō: Religion and Politics in Japan* (Institute of East Asian Studies, Berkeley, 2014).

Michael Pendlebury, "Reasons in Action," *Philosophical Papers* 42 (2013).

Stephen Puryear, "Leibniz on the Metaphysics of Color," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 86 (2013).

Sanem Soyarslan, "From Ordinary Life to Blessedness: The Power of Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics," in Matthew Kisner and Andrew Youpa (eds.), *Essays on Spinoza's Ethical Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Jason Sturdevant, "Incarnation as Psychagogy: The Purpose of the Word's Descent in John's Gospel," *Novum Testamentum* 56 (2014).

THE WAY IT WAS

Brian Collins, BA in Religious Studies '01, went on to earn his PhD from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Since 2013, Brian has held the Drs. Ram and Sushila Gawande Chair in Indian Religion and Philosophy at Ohio University. In 2014 he published his first book, The Head Beneath the Altar: Hindu Mythology and the Critique of Sacrifice (Michigan State University Press). Brian, who started our Bowling Smackdown in 2000, reminisces here about his time as a religious studies student at NC State.

When I was a Psychology major at NC State in Fall 1998, it took only one class to convince me to add religious studies as a second major, which turned out to be one of the most important decisions of my life. That class was Prof. Tony Stewart's "The Hindu Traditions." I took it to fulfill a humanities requirement (and a mild curiosity) and got more than I bargained for as I was introduced to the myths, rituals, and philosophies of India along with a rigorous approach to asking what I considered to be one of the "Big Questions," namely, "What does it mean to be a human being?" All the disciplines of the humanities address this question, but religious studies appealed to me because it was so wonderfully interdisciplinary, incorporating psychology, literary theory, history, anthropology, and sociology.

My time at NC State gave me the chance to work with instructors who were leading researchers in their fields as well as dedicated teachers, all of whom I still have a relationship with today. The department gave me the freedom to explore the broad scope of religious studies, taking course offerings on the Hebrew Bible, Buddhism, and American religions.

During my last year, I took an independent study with Prof. Jason Bivins, in which we read the seminal works of Derrida, Foucault, Gramsci, and Said, and wrote an honors thesis under the direction of Prof. Bivins, Prof. Stewart, and Prof. Natalie Dohrmann. Prof. Stewart also sent me outside of the department to study Hindi-Urdu and spend the summer before grad school doing a life-changing study abroad program in India.

When I graduated and went on to pursue my PhD, I was pleasantly surprised to find myself as well prepared with regard to religious studies theory and methodology as my peers who were coming from top-ranked private institutions. I will always be grateful to NC State's religious studies program for the role it has played in my life, preparing me for the rigors of graduate school and an incredibly rewarding career researching, writing, and teaching religious studies at a public university.

LOOKING BACK: Department News from the Past

2004/05: Patricia Ahearne-Kroll (PhD candidate, Chicago) is appointed as Instructor in Religious Studies, Catherine M. Driscoll (PhD, Rutgers) is appointed as Assistant Professor of Philosophy, and Karey A. Harwood (PhD, Emory) — who was previously in the Division of Multidisciplinary Studies — is appointed as Assistant Professor of Religious Studies. Ahearne-Kroll completes her PhD and becomes an Assistant Professor in 2005. She leaves in 2006 for a position at Ohio Wesleyan University. Driscoll becomes the Department's Director of Undergraduate Advising in 2008. Driscoll and Harwood are promoted to Associate Professor in 2010.

1994/95: Eighty-four students are signed up for the major in Philosophy and eleven for the new major in Religious Studies, which had been introduced in Spring 1994. Twenty-six students graduate with Bachelors degrees in Philosophy, four *summa cum laude*, three *magna cum laude*, and two *cum laude*. Richard M. Jaffe (PhD candidate, Yale) is appointed as Instructor in Religious Studies. After completing his PhD, he becomes an Assistant Professor in January 1996. He accepts a position at Duke University in 2001.

1984/85: William Adler, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, is a Fulbright Visiting Lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Barbara B. Levenbook, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, has a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities; and Tom Regan, Professor of Philosophy, has a fellowship at the National Humanities Center. A. Donald VanDeVeer, Professor of Philosophy, publishes his well-received monograph, *Paternalistic Intervention* (Princeton University Press, 1985).

1974/75: J. Leonard Middleton retires as Associate Professor of Religion at the end of Spring 1975 after twenty-seven years of service at NC State. Middleton was a warm and enthusiastic teacher with a special interest in human values. He taught courses in both Religious Studies and Philosophy.

1964/65: Eleven students sign up for the new major in Philosophy approved in Spring 1964 and introduced in the new academic year. Including the 1964 Summer Sessions, total enrollment in the Department's courses is 1,320, an increase of 15% over 1963/64. Fifty years later, the corresponding number is 5,827.

ALUMNI NEWS

Ed Bremson, BA in Philosophy '80, had two books published in 2014: he edited a collection of Mongolian haiku, *The Nature of Feeling*; and also published a full-length collection of poems, *With Dreams of Summer Stars*. (Both are available from Amazon.) For 2015, Ed has a new poetry chapbook forthcoming from Finishing Line Press, *Like a Summer Night* (https://finishinglinepress.com/product_info.php?products_id=2375). Otherwise, he is retired, living in Raleigh, and working on more poetry books.

Dennis Earl, BS in Philosophy '92, is currently an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Coastal Carolina University in Conway, SC. He received a PhD from the University of Colorado, Boulder in 2002. He teaches courses in metaphysics, logic, philosophy of science, the history of philosophy, and business ethics. His research interests concern the nature of concepts and classical analysis, and he is currently investigating the possibility of analyzing both natural-kind concepts and social-kind concepts in terms of historical essences. He lives in Conway with his partner (also a philosopher at Coastal) and daughter (aged nine, with a variety of academic interests).

Saliha Baloch, BA in Philosophy and BA in History '04, went on to attend McGill University for a year and a half pursuing her MA in Islamic Studies. However, instead of completing her MA, she decided to switch gears and help people through healthcare instead of academia, so she became a nurse, graduating with her BS in Nursing at UNC-CH in 2008. She worked as a critical care nurse for over 5 years, before recently going back to school once again last August to become a family nurse practitioner. She will be beyond ecstatic to (maybe) be done with this last degree, an M.S. in Nursing at UNC-CH in May 2016. She may, however, eventually be convinced to do her Doctorate of Nursing Practice degree several years down the road, and can then tell her parents that she finally IS a doctor...a doctor of nursing practice that is!

Jennifer Young, BA in Religious Studies and BS in Animal Science '07, went to Iowa State after graduation to pursue her PhD in Genetics, focusing on swine. She successfully defended her dissertation, *The effect of selection for residual feed intake during the grow/finish phase of production on feeding behavior traits and sow reproduction and lactation efficiency in Yorkshire pigs*, in December 2011. She remained at Iowa State as a post-doctoral researcher, managing the residual feed intake project and assisting graduate students with their research. Jen then moved on to North Dakota State University to take up a position as a Swine Research Technician. She works mostly on pork quality research, but also does other research, extension, and teaching related to swine. Jen lives with her fiancée, Brian Penning, and their daughter, Theresa, who is almost 2, in the country just south of Moorhead in Sabin, MN.

Katie Kelsch (now Katie Dowell), BA in Philosophy '08 and BA in Political Science '08, received her Juris Doctor from Campbell Law School in May 2014. While at Campbell, she represented indigent clients in the Senior Law Clinic, clerked for the NC DOJ Appellate Division, and won the Thomas Anderson Award for Demonstrated Excellence in Client Counseling. As a member of the Campbell Law Moot Court Team, her appellate brief won second place at the National Energy and Sustainability Moot Court Competition. Recently, Katie and two colleagues formed their own law firm based in Raleigh, Capital City Law. The firm seeks to break with the traditional law firm model by leveraging technology to provide convenient, affordable, and efficient legal services. Katie focuses her personal practice on appellate advocacy, employment law, civil litigation, and family law.

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