In Memory of Henry Alexander

By Cheyney Ryan, University of Oregon

The University of Oregon philosophical community was saddened by the passing of Professor Henry Alexander. Plans are being made for a department gathering to acknowledge Henry's incomparable contributions to our program in more than three decades of teaching and involvement in our community.

After serving in the Marine Corps in World War II, Henry graduated from Princeton and Berkeley, where he wrote his dissertation on the epistemology of Thomas Reid. His lifelong interests included ancient philosophy as well as metaphysics and epistemology; for many years he taught the undergraduate ancient philosophy course as well as upper-division and graduate seminars on a wide range of topics. His published work included essays on the logic of belief and the nature of truth. In his later years he became increasingly interested in the philosophy of literature and was instrumental in the efforts leading to the creation of the university's Judaic studies program.

Henry was an extraordinary teacher, but in ways that are hard to characterize. He was generous with his students, yet he was not the warm and cuddly type; quite the contrary, he could be sharp in his criticisms—yet always in the interest of philosophical clarity. Few have had such a lasting impact on so many students, few are remembered so fondly. He was a beacon of sanity in some of this department’s troubled times and a warm generous presence to all who knew him. At the time of his death Henry was still living in the home that he and his wife Patricia built when they first came to Eugene, surrounded by the lovely gardens to which he devoted so much care. Our hearts go out to his daughter Ruth, who survives him.
GREETINGS FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

After a brief and unintended hiatus, The Thinking Duck is once again migrating your way. A good deal has happened since our last issue. Thousands of students have taken philosophy classes; conferences have come and gone; we’ve welcomed a new faculty member, Erin Cline; and we continue to mourn the passing of two emeritus professors, Henry Alexander and Bob Herbert. In my view, one honors the dead best by building a future that would make them proud. We thus continue to do our best to teach and write in ways that stimulate genuine philosophical thought, which, I believe, prods us toward living well.

Two curricular changes merit particular mention. We’ve long striven to offer the best undergraduate education we can, and, to that end, I’m proud to inform you that we’ve decreased section sizes in courses required for the major to twenty, thus providing our students in the history of philosophy and logic courses with a superior teacher-to-student ratio. We’ve also introduced upper-division undergraduate seminars that cap at twenty, a change that should give our majors a fuller taste of what advanced work in philosophy entails. (Those numbers may strike you as expected, but when one serves more than 200 majors and minors with a faculty of ten, two of whom we share with other departments, protecting class sizes is a mighty chore.) At the graduate level, we’ve also increased the number of graduate-only seminars in order to intensify the kind of work our graduate courses involve. All in all, I’m confident that these changes will make a concrete difference in the daily exchanges that are the lifeblood of our program, and that they more than repay the costs they represent.

Inside this issue, you’ll again find faculty reports and profiles of students. I encourage you to review them and to contact the faculty should you like further information about their projects. You can always find us through our website, http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~uophil.

As always, heartfelt thanks to all who have given us support this past year. Each donation helps, whether by supplementing our travel awards for graduate students presenting work at conferences, or by helping us to cover the costs of the conferences we host. As I consider our financial future, one brilliantly managed by Scott Pratt (now acting dean of humanities), I know that your gifts will continue to make a real difference in our efforts to remain a vibrant, growing department.

John T. Lysaker
Department Head

Faculty Notes

ERIN CLINE
Assistant Professor

I have two new essays forthcoming this year: “How to Fish Like a Daoist,” in Riding the Wind with Liezi: New Essays on the Daoist Classic (State University of New York Press) and “Rawls, Rosemont, and the Debate Over Rights and Roles” in Polishing the Chinese Mirror: Essays in Honor of Henry Rosemont Jr. (Open Court Press). In addition, my “Mirrors, Minds, and Metaphors” was recently accepted by the journal Philosophy East and West. This year I will be presenting papers at the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division meeting in San Francisco, the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in Washington, D.C., and a Chinese philosophy roundtable held at San Francisco State. I also look forward to teaching Asian philosophy, Chinese religions, and seminars on the Analects, classical Chinese political philosophy, and Taoism.

MARK JOHNSON
Knight Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Mark Johnson’s latest book, The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding, explores the deep sources of human meaning in body movement, feeling, emotions, and other dimensions of bodily experience. Mark’s next research project will focus on the physical and social origins of human values, asking how they contribute to our sense of a meaningful and morally fulfilling life. In addition to his large-lecture introduction to philosophy course and a 400- and 500-level philosophy of language course, Mark taught three new courses last year: a graduate seminar on naturalized ethics, a course on Hilary Putnam, and an experimental course on imaginative reasoning (with Jim Crosswhite in the English department). Courses this year include introduction to philosophy, philosophy of art, philosophy and cognitive science, philosophy of language, and Kant’s theory of morality.
JOHN LYSAKER  
Associate Professor  
Interim Department Head, 2006–7

John has finished his book, An Eloquent Life: The Bearings of Emersonian Self-Culture, and expects a good word from a press before the end of the year. A second book, Life among the Ruins: The Fate of the Self in Schizophrenia—coauthored with his brother, Paul Lysaker—is under contract with Oxford and should be out before the end of 2007. In the classroom, Human Nature (PHIL 110) continues to attract more than 300 students, while History of Philosophy: Nineteenth Century (PHIL 312) remains a personal favorite. Those staples aside, courses in Hegel, Frankfurt School critical theory, and American philosophy (particularly Emerson) are usual fare.

BONNIE MANN  
Assistant Professor

This fall Bonnie Mann’s first book appeared from Oxford University Press, Women’s Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment. A special issue of Hypatia, entitled “Writing against Heterosexism,” will appear as well, coedited by Mann and featuring an essay and editorial she wrote. Her current work is on the relation between nationalism, gender, sexuality, and war. In this work she is exploring the primacy of the aesthetic in both lived gender and the gendered social imaginary, which involves exploring the relation between aesthetics and politics. Mann will teach an author’s course on Simone de Beauvoir this winter, and a topics course on the sex-gender distinction in the spring. The sex-gender course engages the debate between feminist poststructuralists and phenomenologists over the meaning of sexual difference, and feminist environmentalist’s critique of the nature-culture distinction.

SCOTT L. PRATT  
Associate Professor  
Interim Associate Dean of Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences

My current research is centered on conceptions of pluralism, especially those developed in the American philosophical tradition. The crucial insight in this tradition is offered by William James, who argued that pluralism is not a collection of unrelated things, but rather is found in the character of relations. This starting point, on the one hand, enables one to reexamine classical philosophic conceptions of being, knowledge, and agency. On the other hand, it allows one to consider the character of boundaries that make for difference among cultures, races, genders, places, and individuals. My current projects include a book on the philosophy of pluralism, an introductory logic text that develops the formal aspects of pluralism, and several other essays on conceptions of pluralism as developed by Josiah Royce, Vine Deloria Jr., and within the American feminist tradition.

BEATA STAWARSKA  
Assistant Professor

I am currently writing a book about dialogue. My forthcoming book chapters include “Childhood as Challenge to ‘the I’ of Modernity,” The Empty Throne (Cambridge University Press); “Persons, Pronouns, and Perspectives,” Folk Psychology Reassessed (Springer); and “From the Body Proper to Flesh,” Feminist Interpretations of Merleau-Ponty (Penn State University Press). My plans for the fall include writing an article on affectivity and intersubjectivity for Continental Philosophy Review and on sociality for the Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science (Springer). I am submitting a chapter on Merleau-Ponty and psychoanalysis to Key Concepts: Merleau-Ponty (Acumen Press). This summer I gave a conference presentation to the Association for Phenomenology and Cognitive Science. I will present at the forthcoming Merleau-Ponty Circle conference and North American Sartre Society in the fall. I will give an invited talk on Merleau-Ponty at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division meeting in December 2006. I am teaching a course on the philosophy of dialogue in the fall.

PETER WARNEK  
Associate Professor

Peter Warnek’s recent book, Descent of Socrates: Self-Knowledge and Cryptic Nature in the Platonic Dialogues (Indiana University Press, 2005), explores the theme of nature in the Platonic dialogues by considering the figure of Socrates as a natural phenomenon. The book develops how the Socratic task of self-knowledge is connected to our human way of belonging to nature. Peter Warne was also the invited speaker at the Ancient Philosophy Society meeting at the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy last year in Salt Lake City. He presented a paper that dealt with the virtue of courage in Aristotle’s Ethics. He also presented a paper last spring at the Western Phenomenology Conference at the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association in Portland, Oregon. The paper was entitled “The Phenomenology of Freedom in Merleau-Ponty (and Schelling)” and concerned the relation between reflection and freedom. Peter Warnek is currently working on a book-length study dealing with philosophical conceptions of freedom.

NAOMI ZACK  
Professor

During 2006–7, I am teaching an author’s course on the empiricist philosopher David Hume, a graduate seminar on the history of political philosophy, the introductory ethics course with an attached small seminar on contemporary moral issues, and a course on the philosophy of disaster and emergency response. The disaster course, to be taught in spring 2007, received an award from the Tom and Carol Williams Fund for Undergraduate Education. I have begun a book, Moral Philosophy for Disaster: Surviving and Thriving in the Second State of Nature. My recent publication on this topic is “Philosophy and Disaster,” Journal of Homeland Security Affairs (April 2006) (http://www.hsaj.org/hsa/vol11/issi/art5). Service includes the following: director of graduate studies, Department of Philosophy; members of the President’s Council on Race, the Women’s Concerns Committee, and the Faculty Advisory Committee. I also hope to start a volunteer first-response emergency program for the University of Oregon community.
Faculty Profile

TED TOADVINE
Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies

Life on the family farm in Maryland where I grew up involved many repetitive tasks that left the mind free to wander. I spent many hours working alongside my father, weeding or hoeing. Early on, he believed that he was teaching me to be a farmer. I always insisted that I had no intention of farming for a living, to which he would reply, “Yeah, that’s what I told my father.” As hours stretched into days and weeks of working our way up and down the rows of cucumbers and watermelons, hoe in hand, we would discuss every topic that came to mind. My father had an opinion on everything, and he loved to argue. Rarely could he be cornered into admitting that he was wrong. Although I’m probably still handy with a hoe, what was formative for me were those free-ranging debates, and, admittedly, the desire to convince my father of the limits of his dogmatic convictions. He thought that he was teaching me to be a farmer, but actually he was raising a philosopher.

Like most freshmen, I arrived at college knowing nothing about philosophy as an academic discipline. My conversion happened in a course on the crisis of meaning in the modern world, taught by a Professor Jerry Miller, whose teaching style was a blend of Socrates and Charlie Chaplin with a shot of Albert Schweitzer. Miller’s classes were legendary, drawing curious community members as well as students and usually overflowing into the hallways. He never lectured but instead confronted us with the fundamental problems of human existence and challenged us to think them through for ourselves, drawing as much from literature as the history of philosophy for insights into the phenomenology of suffering, love, wonder, and meaning. Although he must have been around fifty, he seemed ageless to me, pleading with us on his knees to follow out a promising thought, covering the board with stick-figure diagrams that charted the course of our reflections, and letting fly with a well-aimed eraser to bean any unwary author of a snide remark. From Miller I learned that literature harbors truths about the human condition that reflection is much slower to grasp. I learned that thinking happens in a tradition, that it is essentially historical, which opened my eyes to the significance of the history of philosophy. And I learned the power of phenomenological description—before I learned that term or the technical vocabulary usually associated with it. Near the end of my junior year, I wandered into Miller’s office to ask what I could do with a philosophy major (besides making lattes), and only then realized that graduate school was in the cards for me.

After an ill-fated year of graduate study in the midst of a faculty strike at Temple University, I found my way to a new doctoral program at the University of Memphis, where I studied ancient Greek thought, nineteenth-century philosophy, and especially contemporary continental philosophy, focusing on French phenomenology. During a year of postdoctoral research at the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology at Florida Atlantic University, I was asked to take over a course in environmental ethics for an ill colleague, the late Don Marietta Jr., who was a pioneer in this field. Teaching this class was an eye opener for me, as I realized how much work remained to be done in the field of environmental philosophy and how fruitful the methods of phenomenology could be there. Over the next six years, while I taught at Kalamazoo College in Michigan and Emporia State University in Kansas, the effort to develop a phenomenological approach to the philosophy of nature moved to the center of my philosophical concerns.

I was lured to Oregon in 2003 by a joint appointment in the Department of Philosophy and the Environmental Studies Program—a rare combination in academia today, and a perfect match for my own academic interests. I like to describe my position here as “amphibious,” since it allows me free movement between very different academic atmospheres and ways of framing problems. Even though our philosophy department is pluralistic, we still share a common language, training, and method that I cannot take for granted when working with environmental studies colleagues in biology, geography, or architecture. Negotiating these different intellectual contexts and working with the gifted graduate students in both programs has been challenging and immensely rewarding. I consider myself very lucky to have such an interdisciplinary academic life and such a congenial group of colleagues, from whom I hope to learn much during my career here at the University of Oregon.
Graduate Profiles

CAROLYN CULBERTSON

When I think about how I came into philosophy, I recall a list of life-changing people and events for which, I imagine, I will always feel a great indebtedness. So in my third year of graduate school, telling the tale of my emerging curiosities, as though they followed logically from one another, seems a little false. True, in retrospect it seems possible now to make sense of the development in terms of a natural progression of “scholarly interests.” But this part of my life will also always have been a series of unexpected encounters and unpredictable situations. And it’s this very aspect of these experiences that makes them so valuable to me.

I’ll spare you the story of my childhood, though I’d like to acknowledge those years as a crucial source of inspiration for me. I’ll begin instead by saying that, by some stroke of luck, I ended up at a small liberal arts college in Atlanta that turned out to be an amazing place to first start studying philosophy. This didn’t happen right away. My first philosophy class was on Marx, which I enrolled in after a year and a half of being increasingly frustrated with political science. It was thrilling to have found a subject that encouraged me to slow down. More specifically, I discovered that in philosophy classes I would be encouraged to think critically about the presumptions at work in all forms of knowledge. Philosophy showed itself to be a crucial aspect of the liberal arts experience because it emphasized the art of reflection. In this, it provided a certain unity to the disparate disciplines that comprise the core curriculum of liberal arts. It concerned itself with putting the various disciplines into a single conversation, instead of letting them remain unaware of one another.

The community of philosophers at Oglethorpe University was small but intense. We read mostly nineteenth- and twentieth-century continental figures—Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Schelling, Deleuze, and Bataille—but there was also a very strong focus on Asian philosophy. In addition to classes and reading groups, my undergraduate experience was also augmented by some very exciting trips abroad. As part of a Czech philosophy class, a large group of us went to the Czech Republic. After participating in a few seminars on Japanese philosophy, a small group of us formed a zazen (sitting meditation) group that I was a part of until I graduated. And in the summer of my junior year I went to Japan to train at a Zen monastery. None of these things would have been possible on my own, I realize, and so I consider myself very lucky to have walked into such an amazing department, as supportive as it was inspirational.

My graduate studies at the University of Oregon have only furthered my love of philosophy and my commitment to it. This is, in part, because I have had the opportunity here to focus in depth on learning the history of philosophy, and because the people in this department make that history wonderfully complicated. Here I have focused lately on the tradition of German idealism, but I continue to have strong interests in ancient and twentieth-century continental philosophy. With teaching came responsibilities that I had previously not anticipated, namely, the responsibility I feel to communicate ideas to my students as well as they have been communicated to me. Almost halfway through my graduate career now, I feel more and more that this responsibility plays a major role in what I want to accomplish as an academic. Whether in writing, lecture, or discussion, my experience has shown me the value of giving close attention to those who are reading and listening to what I say. You might say that graduate school has taught me to hear myself with others’ ears and see myself with others’ eyes—and they are some good ears and eyes.

GRANT SILVA

As an undergraduate, my response to the question “Why philosophy?” involved the sentiment that philosophy was the only major that made sense. More important, it was fun. What other profession is there where one is afforded the opportunity to think and write about questions concerning life, existence, and thought?

My interests in philosophy started to materialize while attending Don Bosco Technical Institute, a private high school in Los Angeles, California. There, I selected a major called space technology, a program designed to promote the study of space exploration through a relationship with Jet Propulsion Laboratory, based in Pasadena. I studied astronomy, astrophysics, and cosmology. Sure enough, it was the cosmological questions, those concerning the origins of the universe, that I liked best. These courses, in conjunction with others examining the

continued on page 6
relationship between science and religion, scattered the seeds of what was to become a career in philosophy.

Upon entering college my interests led to a major in religious studies. In fact, at this stage of my education I remember thinking that philosophy was a waste of time. However, I quickly became frustrated with not approaching the topics I wanted to study and eventually started taking courses in philosophy. Since then I have shared the luxurious burden of being in this field.

Soon after adding a philosophy major, I began thinking about what it means to be a philosopher. I wondered about what sorts of ideas people like myself had contributed to this field. This led to an encounter with and subsequent interest in Latin American philosophy. I realized that this interest was a sure way of becoming marketable (in regard to getting a job), but it also provided a means of arriving at an understanding of myself. In this sense I considered the consequences of being a thinker who approaches philosophy from a perspective rooted in a specific identity: the practice of philosophy as a Latin American philosopher.

Following this train of thought, I arrived at the opinion that philosophy is crucial to all humans. It is a social mechanism that fosters critical analysis and answers fundamental questions about life. These questions are engendered through the relationships that humans have with their social, biological, and (some would say) spiritual or mental environments. And though humans share many things in common, some of which are the same types of philosophical questions, the context and circumstance where these inquiries emerge cannot be dismissed. To do so is to limit philosophy to an ahistorical, acultural, and hence “universal” perspective—something which can hardly be intelligible.

Thus, for me, race, ethnicity, gender, politics, culture, and nationality are to be examined with a philosophical eye, especially since these concepts play a role in shaping the lives of many people. Likewise, colonization, globalization, religion, and theories of modernity are in need of critical thought, for these ideas and the reactions they’ve provoked have established current understandings of the world.

At the University of Oregon, I have been able to express these interests without feeling alienated or rejected. In fact, given the pluralistic leaning of our department, I have been encouraged not only to approach philosophy in the manner I enjoy, but I have been asked to share what little I know. Similarly, my experience as a graduate teaching fellow has supported my thoughts and philosophical explorations. Not only have I academically matured through teaching but I have come to identify with those sharing the same enthusiasm and commitment for philosophy. I learned that working through philosophical differences is what living, integrated pluralism is about, and I am grateful for the interactions I have had with my professors, colleagues, and students. We all benefit from having this sort of department, and philosophy is better off for that.

Undergraduate Profile

LAURA LANGDON

Week after week I sat shivering in a cold dim basement desperately trying to follow the conversations. It usually started okay, Emerson—I could do this. Metaphors—I know this. Then out of nowhere it would jump from difficult yet feasible dialogue to foreign correspondence. Time and again I would leave frustrated and disappointed. I had read the piece so carefully and thought about it so much. But I still found myself lost in the conversation. It seemed for a time I was stuck. I felt as though I would never be as good as them; I would never be at that level. It wasn’t just that they were all boys or that they were seniors, but there was something about their dialogue. It was fascinating, gripping, I would get into it and then I would be lost. I almost quit, yet for some reason I kept coming. This is how philosophy was for me for a long time. There were many moments when I wanted to give up and simply retreat back to my novels, yet something held me there. This is how I feel philosophy can be: sometimes dry, difficult, and often very confusing. Then there are those other times when you get it, when it provokes that certain question, and a powerful emotion is triggered—then the realizations hit. It was these moments that kept me coming. The moments that held me were the first time I read The Second Sex and everything I read in Cheyney Ryan’s ethics class. So I kept coming back.
Last year for the undergraduate philosophy conference, I wrote a paper about my experience doing philosophy as a woman. It took me a while in philosophy before I understood how my experience was shaped by my gender. My experience in that basement did have meaning in relation to my study of philosophy. I wrote about how, often, it was easy to feel alienated in a field dominated by men where we read texts written by men for men. This understanding was important in my experience because it helped me shape myself as a student of philosophy. Studying feminism last year with Bonnie Mann taught me how to understand my experience as a woman in philosophy but also how to face that experience and continue with philosophy without feeling repressed by that initial alienation.

While I continue to enjoy feminism and find it to be one of the most important topics in philosophy today, I am also drawn to topics in ethics and issues of the personal realm. I am now beginning to work on my thesis on hope and how we experience hope in relations, particularly alongside Julia Kristeva’s work on abjection. I will also continue to work with the undergraduate philosophy club to foster a community among philosophy students.

Laura Langdon

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What’s New in Your Life?

Tell us what’s happening—send a Class Note to The Thinking Duck!

Through The Thinking Duck, we aim to keep you informed about the Department of Philosophy and its work. We invite you to do the same and tell us about news in your life that we can include in an upcoming issue. We’re interested in awards, jobs, moves, family information, and even moments when philosophy continues to inform your life. Please note changes in your address, employment, professional activities, or personal life that you would like to share with your classmates and colleagues in philosophy.

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