An Address to the Troops through Rose-tinted Glasses

Philosophy Graduation, 2004, Naomi Zack, University of Oregon

I have been asked to speak to the graduates, and I hope that their families and friends, and my colleagues will share how proud I am of you.

There have been times in my life when I've aspired to be a standup comic. However, I have finally concluded that that is one of the saddest occupations. A good standup comic is impious in surprising ways—criticism is thus used to get a laugh. This is sad exactly because of the laughter—so much air in the moment. A good philosopher does not amuse you. He or she changes your life and suggests how the world could be changed. He or she asks you to consider what is most important and why. That the philosopher is able to engage such serious matters, and transform them, is a kind of power, far removed from the ultimate helplessness of the comedian. There is nothing sad about the accomplishments of philosophers, because they are so serious. So in keeping with this celebration of the graduation of philosophers, I don’t intend to say anything funny to you. (However, if some chose to roll in the aisles, shrieking with side-splitting, hysterical laughter, I don’t think I can stop them.)

Western philosophy is an ancient discipline, going back at least 2,500 years. To have survived this long, it’s had to change. At its roots, with the pre-Socratics, and then Plato and Aristotle, philosophers posed questions about the nature of reality and how human beings ought to live. During the long hegemony of the Catholic church in Europe, philosophers made their living by puzzling over Christian theological questions. With the beginning of modern science in the seventeenth century, they became empirical and asked questions about the nature of knowledge. During the twentieth century, when philosophy became a profession in the academy, it also became what some scathingly call “analytic,” in order to hold its own with specialists in other fields. Toward the end of the twentieth century, some philosophers tried to reclaim areas of humanism: Who are we? What should we do? How can we change our world? We call the changes in philosophy the history of philosophy. In studying the history, you have been asked to apply yourself systematically to a well formed discipline, and whether or not you realize it, you have become disciplined in the process. What is this skill others may ask, and how can we acquire it? As you know by now, philosophers have no universal answers to such questions. The only way to find out what philosophy is, is to start to do it yourself. And of course, everybody does it differently. It is an art we practice, and not a science. To those parents who were hoping that today, finally, it would be explained to them exactly what they have been financing with this major, please don’t worry. Your sons and daughters will be able to live examined lives, and they are likely to be able to talk to you in meaningful ways, which will be increasingly important as you grow older. They are also unlikely to take up high risk employment, as in the police or military. (I say this as a parent myself.)

Back to the graduates. I cannot tell you what philosophy is but it is not necessary that you hear it from me, because you already know what it is through your practice of it. What I can tell you, however, is what the two main uses of your philosophy major are: You can go on to graduate school and become a professional philosopher; or you can apply your philosophical expertise to some other field such as law, business, English literature, organic farming, pubic service, Peace Corps-type activities, or, if you find yourself unemployed in a major metropolitan area, driving a taxi cab. (I have relied here on my memory of the plans of last year’s graduates, but as you will hear today, the list is much longer.) Most of

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GREETINGS FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

I am delighted to present you with a new issue of The Thinking Duck. Since our last issue we graduated a record class of students in front of a packed courtyard outside Cascade Hall. Our commencement speaker this year was Professor Naomi Zack, who joined the faculty in 2001. The commencement address drew rave reviews from the crowd and was even featured in a story about commencement in the Eugene Register-Guard. With Professor Zack’s permission, we have published her address in this issue.

This issue also features the first of three articles by new philosophy faculty members, a profile of one of our outstanding undergraduate majors, brief reports on faculty research, and a survey of our upcoming events.

At the heart of this issue are two profiles by graduate students in our department. It is not too strong to say that the excellent quality of our undergraduate program is in a significant way dependent on the excellence of our graduate students. While many graduate programs in philosophy emphasize research to the exclusion of teacher training, our graduate program believes that research and teaching go hand in hand. Over the last eight years, we have offered a yearlong seminar called Philosophy and Teaching for new graduate teaching fellows in the department. The seminar examines teaching strategies, grading, how to teach writing, and how to design a course, and it even helps students to develop a statement of their own philosophy of teaching. At present, we have about sixteen teaching fellows on staff in a given term. Of these, about nine are funded by the College of Arts and Sciences and the balance are funded by other sources including alumni support.

This year we hope to begin to increase support for graduate students by establishing a new Philosophy Fund for Teaching Excellence to support our most outstanding graduate teaching fellows. We invite you to help recognize and support excellent teaching and our outstanding undergraduate program. You can do this in two ways:

- Mail a check, payable to “UO Foundation—Philosophy Fund for Teaching Excellence,” to:
  UO Annual Giving Program
  PO Box 3346, Eugene OR 97403-0346

- Or give generously or make a pledge to the Philosophy Fund when you receive a phone call or letter from the UO Annual Giving Program asking you to make a gift to the university.

Please help to show support for the importance of undergraduate education at Oregon and to reinforce the integral connection between philosophy and teaching. Recipients of alumni support from the teaching excellence fund will be featured in future issues of The Thinking Duck, and we will make every effort to keep you informed about their successes as new teachers of philosophy.

John T. Lysaker, Department Head

Faculty Notes

MARK JOHNSON taught the 300-student Philosophy 101 (Philosophical Problems) course this fall. He is giving an invited address at a conference on intersections between the humanities and cognitive sciences, entitled “Story/Vision/Metaphor,” to be held at Stanford. This entire year, he will be teaching and serving on committees in the Clark Honors College, as part of the third and final year of an agreement the department made to collaborate with the honors college, with the goal of eventually having philosophy as part of the required program for students in the honors college. Johnson continues to work on a book manuscript, entitled The Meaning of the Body, which examines the aesthetic dimensions of human meaning, understanding, and reasoning.

JOHN LYSAKER is currently pursuing two projects. One, entitled An Eloquent Life: Emersonian Self-culture, involves a book length presentation and defense of Emerson’s belief that human lives are projects that can succeed and fail. A shortened version of the first chapter appeared in The Georgia Review in December 2004. A second project, pursued with his brother, clinical psychologist Paul Lysaker, involves the development of a novel approach to schizophrenia derived from a
dialogical theory of the self, one that combines and systematizes remarks and observations in Dewey, Habermas, Mead, and Nietzsche with current clinical research into the structures of one’s sense of self. Two papers of particular interest to philosophers will soon appear in The Journal of Speculative Philosophy and Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences. Both projects have led John Lysaker to offer a new lecture course, Human Nature, which drew 300 students this fall. He also continues to serve as the department’s director of undergraduate studies, although he also devotes some of his time to comparative literature, serving on that program’s executive committee and as its acting head in the fall of 2004.

SCOTT PRATT taught American Philosophy this fall and will be on sabbatical leave in winter and spring 2005 to work on a new book on American pluralism. He presented the first chapter, “Wounded Knee and the Prospects of Pluralism,” at the March meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. He also will be giving one of the keynote addresses at the Josiah Royce Sesquicentennial Conference at Vanderbilt University in April. His address there will be on Royce’s contributions to logic. Pratt is also at work on a new introductory logic text (with Professor John Lysaker) that approaches logic from the perspective of pragmatism and especially the logical theories of John Dewey, Charles Peirce, and Jürgen Habermas. Pratt’s recent publications include “Jane Addams: Patriotism in Time of War,” in Midwest Studies in Philosophy (Vol. 28), and “Rebuilding Babylon: The Pluralism of Lydia Maria Child,” in Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy (Vol. 19, no. 2).

CHEYNEY RYAN taught Political Philosophy this fall. Last spring, he completed a book titled Empire Can Wait (Indiana Press) on different approaches to philosophizing about peace. Ryan is now at work on a manuscript on war and responsibility, an expansion of an article “War and Responsibility,” which appeared in the Responsive Community journal two years ago. He has been invited to teach at Oxford in June and July, in a new program on philosophy of war and peace.

BEATA STAWARSKA taught a graduate seminar on Sartre in the fall. She is editing a special issue on intersubjectivity and embodiment for the Journal for Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences, based on selected papers from a conference of the Association for Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences she directed in Louvain, Belgium, in September 2003. The special issue will be published in spring 2005. Her article on “Mutual Gaze and Social Cognition” will be included in this edition. Another article, “Defining Imagination. Sartre between Janet and Husserl” is currently under review. Stawarska gave an invited talk to the Department of Psychology at the University of Oregon on “Phenomenological Alternatives to the Theory Theory of Mind” on October 15. She is working on a monograph devoted to Sartre’s treatment of embodiment and sociality in relation to the psychoanalytic theory. Stawarska is making preparations, together with Ted Toadvine, for the thirtieth Merleau-Ponty Circle conference to be hosted by the UO Department of Philosophy in fall 2005.

TED TOADVINE was on release from teaching during the fall term to complete research on a monograph addressing the contribution of phenomenological philosophy to environmental issues. He recently attended the twenty-ninth Annual Conference of the Merleau-Ponty Circle at Muhlenberg College to invite this organization to hold its next conference at the University of Oregon. The conference, on the theme of “The Child and the Animal,” will be codirected by Toadvine and Beata Stawarska in fall 2005. Toadvine has recently completed two forthcoming articles for publication: “Ecological Aesthetics” in Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics, edited by Lester Embree and Hans Reiner Sepp (Kluwer, 2005), and “Life’s Refrain: Expression without Organisms” in Chiasmi International 7 (2005). His essay, “Singing the World in a New Key: Merleau-Ponty and the Ontology of Sense,” will appear in the winter 2004 issue of Janus Head.

NAOMI ZACK is teaching an author’s course on C.I. Lewis, the Kantian American pragmatist whose epistemology was the subject of her 1970 dissertation at Columbia University. She is also teaching Moral Theory and a small seminar attached to that class, under a UO Williams grant. Zack gave talks at the California Roundtable for Philosophy and Race in San Francisco in September, and at Spelman College in Atlanta in October. Also in October, she spoke at the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP) Pacific Division fall meeting and at the UO law school’s forum marking the fiftieth anniversary of Brown vs. Board of Education. She is the director of graduate studies and a member of the Deans’ Advisory Committee and the President’s Council on Race. Her current research projects include a new book, Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women’s Commonality (Rowman and Littlefield) and a second edition of her short textbook, Thinking about Race (Wadsworth). With Scott Pratt, Zack cohosted the philosophy department’s second biennial Minority Recruitment Initiative (MRI), here on campus in November.
you will not become professional philosophers but will apply your skill elsewhere. I have mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, I think one of the best ways to spend your life is to become a professional philosopher. On the other hand, there are not enough jobs in the field to accommodate all who could make such a choice, and furthermore, the world outside of philosophy is without question improved by philosophers applying themselves to it. Although, I do not recommend politics, because some of the worst atrocities in the twentieth century—in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Cambodia—were instigated by revolutionary leaders who had studied a little philosophy. (Perhaps we should take comfort that George W. appears to be quite innocent of our field.)

Philosophy is a discipline but it is not the kind of discipline that is supposed to be a form of punishment. Philosophy is a discipline of leisure, of self-development in a special way. The discipline of philosophy creates order in the mind. You graduates with majors in philosophy now have orderly minds, but about what you will be able to do with them, for most of your lives (assuming that you don’t develop psychoses, or suffer premature strokes or dementia). You will be able to think about yourselves, other people, knowledge in other fields, current events, and movies and television in orderly ways. People who do not know you well (or who do) may think that this is the result of esoteric drugs, or that you are difficult, whacked, or conceited. Such reactions of non-philosophers are not important, although I hope you will have compassion for them. What is important is that you have developed one of the finest skills in the human repertoire.

As a skill, philosophy is like a virtue, in Aristotle’s sense. It is neither obstructed nor determined by nature, and it is developed by its practice. The philosopher, like the courageous person, becomes a philosopher by doing philosophy, and in the end, whether any given expression is philosophical will depend in part on whether it comes from a philosopher—just as whether an act is courageous depends in part on whether it was done by a courageous person. One swallow does not make a summer. There has to be a habit. This is not an elitist view. Anyone can become a philosopher, although not anyone can do it well, and this is where the art comes in. Speaking of virtue, courage, and art, and in keeping with what has been called “An Address to the Troops through Rose-tinted Glasses,” I want to conclude with a brief reminder of what Aristotle said about the practice of righteous indignation, which is also true of the way we do philosophy, insofar as philosophers are critics.

We not only criticize one another but are also uniquely equipped to criticize just about everything else. Here is Aristotle:

Anyone can get angry, that is easy.
But to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive and in the right way, that is not easy; therefore goodness is both rare, and laudable, and noble.

Well. You are graduating today with a major of philosophy. You could have majored in any one of a number of other subjects. But you chose philosophy. I hope it has been clear that I think you made an excellent choice—the most excellent choice.

Congratulations.

Address to the Troops
Continued from page 1

Feminist Theory and Practice
by Bonnie Mann

Being a philosopher commits you to wondering about all the things that normal people take for granted. I grew up in a fundamentalist Christian working-class family in Northeastern Oregon. I was given explanations for things that were extremely unsatisfying: poor people were poor because our reward was in the next life, not in this one; the boys got to play football and their teams got the best uniforms and best motel rooms at away games because they were boys; God let Job suffer for reasons we humans were too limited to understand; sex was bad because Eve, who was not willing to live in ignorance, ate an apple from the wrong tree; we were for Richard Nixon because my parents were Republicans, and (later) we were against Richard Nixon because he had “shifty eyes.”

I didn’t know what philosophy was when I went away to the big city for college, but at the University of Portland, which I chose solely on the basis of its size and the fact that my older sister went there, I was required to sign up for a philosophy class. By the time I got my schedule in place, the only class that had space was with the hardest, most unpopular professor on campus. He taught an introductory course in philosophy that started with social injustices and ended with existential
phenomenology. I changed my major to philosophy after that class, and by my second year, I was reading The Second Sex on Christmas vacation.

Feminist philosophy gave me a way of wondering about all kinds of things: What is a woman and how did I get to be one? Can I change my mind? What is a mind, and what does it mean to change it? What does it mean to be in a particular body, and particularly a sexed body? What is the relation between gender identity, sexuality, and sexual desire? Says who? Does power have a gender? If so, how stable is it? What would it take to change it?

This last question sent me out of the university to volunteer at the local battered women’s shelter. I spent almost a decade working with battered women and their children, in homeless shelters, and as a feminist activist. But the problem with activism is that the activists don’t have any time to think, even to think about what they are doing. Activists are too busy responding to crises and fundraising. Activism sent me back to academia with more questions and a great appreciation for the kind of luxury of time that graduate students have (though they don’t have much else).

I returned to my home state last year after twenty-one years in self-imposed exile in Massachusetts, New York, Germany, Nicaragua, and California. I was delighted to be hired to teach at the University of Oregon, which is, as far as any of us has been able to determine, the only university that reserves such a prominent place in its program for feminist philosophy. I teach classes that explore all of the questions that drew me to philosophy and to feminist philosophy in particular. So far I’ve taught courses on Social and Political Philosophy focused on the themes of war and gender, Ethics, and Feminist Ethics. I’ve also taught Feminist Topics courses (including Nature and Culture Before and After the Linguistic Turn, and Feminism and Pornography), and an author’s course on the work of two lesbian authors, Monique Wittig and Judith Butler. I taught a Feminist Phenomenology course in the winter, and I will be teaching Feminist Postmodernism, Philosophy of Love and Sex, and an Introduction to Feminist Philosophy course in the future. I plan to do author’s courses on Beauvoir and Arendt.

Philosophy became my home because it gave me a place to wonder about the “normal” things. Having such lively and engaged colleagues and students is the richest possible context for such wonder to flourish.

Graduate Profiles

Adam Arola

THERE ARE INNUMERABLE WAYS IN WHICH I CAN account for my entry into philosophy. I could tell a story about how I’ve been inquisitive and critical since I was a small child. I could tell a story about how I’ve longed to be a professor since I was in my youth. The reality is, my entrance into philosophy came about entirely by accident. As an undergraduate I was a Spanish major when one day I came to the dreaded realization that I wouldn’t be able to finish my major within four years. In a panic, I went to an undergraduate adviser. While looking at my transcript she asked me if I was also majoring in philosophy. It turned out that I had nearly finished a philosophy major with no aforethought whatsoever. At that moment I made the fateful decision to declare a new major. Who knew you could do what you loved? Initially my passion for philosophy did not come from my desire to be an academic, but rather out of a very Socratic impulse to engage the world critically. To ask why we believe and accept the things we do as true. Why do we see as justice the way we do? Are we capable of giving an account of ourselves, our beliefs, and the meaning of human life?

Since the day I realized I could do this “for a living,” I have been a philosopher. I had loved it all along, but never really taken seriously the idea that I could do this for the rest of my life. Even after this transformation, the problems of my life were in no way solved. My love of philosophy manifested itself in a peculiar form. I wanted to read Nietzsche, I wanted to learn about the Greeks, I wanted to read about what had happened in twentieth century philosophy. I didn’t realize that I wasn’t going to “fit” neatly into the world of contemporary academic philosophy until I began my search for a graduate program. It was strange to find out I was interested in too many things from the perspective of a lot of universities. The University of Oregon’s philosophy program offered me an opportunity to do all of these things under the guidance of a wide spectrum of brilliant, generous, and kind faculty members. My interests are all represented here, they are all taken seriously, and I have truly become part of a community of which I have encountered no equal.

Beyond all the kind words I can say about my experience as a student in our department, a second, and possibly more important result has emerged from my time in Eugene. With an opportunity to work as a graduate teaching fellow and to teach my own courses during the summers, I have encountered my true passion. Sitting alone contemplating the universe is great, I suppose, but it is only when I am confronted with a room full of students that the project of philosophy
truly comes alive. I love what I do, and I believe this comes across in the classroom. Many other institutions would not have offered me the opportunities which I have been granted here to try my hand at teaching, and only because of this department’s willingness to trust the intelligence and potential of their graduate students have I become not only a passionate, but also I believe, an effective teacher. While dragging people out of the cave into the sunlight is probably one of the most difficult tasks one could ever hope to engage in, it is also the most rewarding. My love of philosophy is not about me. Through teaching, my ego has repeatedly been destroyed and taken over by a desire to stretch out beyond myself, my thoughts, and my own little world. Now, I see education as the opportunity to share what I have learned with others in the hope that we can transform ourselves, and accordingly the world, together.

Sarah LaChance Adams

I HAVE ALWAYS HAD AN INTEREST IN THE humanities. As an undergraduate college student, however, I frequently confounded my professors with questions about the epistemological assumptions and ethical implications of history, psychology, sociology, literature, or whatever the subject happened to be. When I took my first philosophy class, I realized that I wasn’t just a nuisance, I was a philosopher.

I discovered the University of Oregon’s philosophy doctorate program while working on my master’s degree in existential-phenomenological psychology at Seattle University. I knew that I wanted to continue my studies in a program that was flexible enough to accommodate my interdisciplinary approach to philosophy. I found that the University of Oregon was not only supple in this regard, but that the students and faculty members actively embrace a pluralistic approach. Since arriving here, I have discovered that this pluralism is just one of the indications of this program’s responsiveness to philosophical problems and its unwillingness to foreclose on possibly rich avenues of inquiry.

As a first-year student, my first teaching experience has been in Philosophy 101. I have enjoyed being a graduate teaching fellow for this particular class because the students come with a wide variety of backgrounds and are headed in diverse directions. Studying philosophy gives them essential skills—writing, listening, speaking, arguing, and critical thinking—that are vital no matter where they decide to take their educations and careers. In Philosophy 101, students also confront ideas which are quite different from what they are used to. As one of my students recently wrote in her paper on the absurd, “To be completely honest, the thought that someone else could have doubt in the things that I considered to be fact had never even crossed my mind before . . . .” It is my hope that as a result of taking this class the students will be able to critically engage their studies, to keep an open mind to strange, new ideas, and finally, to make a bit of a productive nuisance of themselves.

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 has come to matter most for you. 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.

Mail your information to: The Thinking Duck, Department of Philosophy
1295 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1295
E-mail: philalum@uoregon.edu

Name ____________________________ Class Year ____________________________
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Undergraduate Profile

Erin Bolles

PHILOSOPHY FOUND ME AT AN UNLIKELY TIME. I had just started taking classes at the UO after moving to Eugene from Ashland. I transferred here to study art history and studio art, as I had done for one and one-half years at Southern Oregon University. I took a course called Social and Political Philosophy with Bonnie Mann, and was surprised to find myself engaging with the material in a particularly deep and relevant way.

Until that point, philosophy had seemed to me a mystery-shrouded, deliberately inaccessible realm of self-indulgent circularity that other folks engaged in due to a strange proclivity I would never understand. I had signed up for an introductory philosophy course at Wheaton College (Massachusetts) in 1994, only to drop it like an armful of bricks and run screaming toward anthropology. Two years later I left school disillusioned and frustrated. Then six years after that—an older, wiser and poorer west coast transplant—I went back to school, first in Portland, then in Ashland, and finally here in Eugene. This is where I will commence.

I've made meaningful intellectual connections with a number of professors and students in the philosophy department during my time here. I have gravitated toward a feminist approach to philosophy. Even though I've found exhilarating challenges in phenomenology, psychoanalytic philosophy, and nineteenth century continental philosophy, it is the possibility of feminist critique that keeps me grounded and keeps me interested in traveling this path. I feel that without solid, consistent feminist critique within the western philosophic tradition, the discipline is extremely limited, and one's experience within it incomplete. The diversity of thought already present in the UO philosophy department is greatly enhanced by incorporating this rich tradition of thought.

I feel fortunate to have found a challenging, open-minded community of thinkers in this dynamic department.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- **The Fifth Annual Independent Meeting of the Ancient Philosophy Society, April 14–16, 2005**
  Featured Speakers: David Farrell Krell, DePaul University, and Debra Nails, Michigan State University.
  Past speakers listed at http://www.trincoll.edu/orgs/aps/.

  The Ancient Philosophy Society was cofounded by Professor Peter Warnek. It was established to provide a forum for diverse scholarship on ancient Greek texts, including phenomenological, postmodern, Anglo-American, Straussian, Tübingen School, hermeneutic, psychoanalytic, and feminist interpretations.

  APS website: http://www.trincoll.edu/orgs/aps/

- **American Philosophy Summer Institute: July 11–16, 2005**
  This summer, the department again will host the American Philosophy Summer Institute in conjunction with the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy and the Center for Dewey Studies. The institute meets for a week and convenes scholars from around the country to discuss topics and issues related to American philosophy. Alumni are welcome to participate. For details, please contact John Lysaker, jlysaker@uoregon.edu.

- **“The Ethics of Work,” a Community Philosophy Institute, May 2005**
  Led by philosophy alumnus Jeff Stolle, Ph.D. ’01, a consultant with GPA Consulting Group (Eugene), this year our focal issue will be the good worker. Given that every job places multiple demands upon us, it is difficult to simply characterize the good worker. In a group composed of roughly fifteen business leaders and ten or so philosophers, we will entertain questions such as: What are his or her virtues? What obligations does she or he owe an employer? What are his or her duties to clients, customers, and the community at large? Concrete scenarios and possibly an article or two will focus discussion.