A Novel Enterprise: Philosophy Collaborates with Lundquist College of Business on New Ethics Course

By Christy Reynolds, graduate student

This winter, 120 undergraduates enrolled in a new course, Philosophy 120, most of them intending to consider things such as what went wrong with Enron, how to foster a positive workplace environment, and whether the corporate world is obligated to pursue sustainable business practices.

While these issues were certainly addressed, students came away from the course with an additional, invaluable insight: the ethical problems faced by the business world are not limited to businessmen and women; it is the responsibility of every individual, no matter their situation, to take seriously their relationships of exchange. For this reason, Philosophy 120 is not entitled “Business Ethics,” nor is it intended solely for business students. Rather, the course is titled “Ethics of Enterprise and Exchange.” It is offered for general education credit, thus inviting all interested university students to consider the implications of their inevitable social roles as workers and consumers.

Both the Department of Philosophy and the Charles H. Lundquist College of Business (LCB), which helped design the course, have deemed this particular enterprise a success: enrollment has nearly quadrupled since the course’s first trial run two years ago, instructor Jeff Stolle reports high enthusiasm among students in the classroom, and both philosophy and business faculty members plan to approach the provost for general university support, so that this course may become a permanent offering.

Constructing a course as exciting and relevant as this is no easy task, especially when working with another department. This is why philosophy and business faculty members discussed and tested curricula for two years before debuting Ethics of Enterprise and Exchange.

In 2004, Stolle, an independent business consultant who received his Ph.D. from the philosophy department in 2001, approached professors John Lysaker and Scott Pratt with interest in teaching a business ethics course. After several brainstorming sessions, Lysaker and Pratt initiated discussion with James Bean, the newly appointed dean of the Lundquist College of Business, and found that he too was keen on having an ethics course available to business students. Shortly thereafter, a collaborative committee was formed, composed of Stolle, Lysaker, Pratt, Bean, and Lundquist
collaboration—Continued from page 1

faculty members Ron Bramhall, Mark Phelps, Robin Clement, and Mike Russo. At the time, LCB was one of many business schools across the country that, in the wake of several high-profile corporate scandals, felt the need to enhance their ability to equip students with the critical reasoning skills necessary to tackle difficult ethical issues in the workplace.

While interest in business ethics may have been motivated in part by these instances of corporate corruption, it was made clear from the outset that this course was not to assume inherent fault in corporate values themselves. Rather, the LCB faculty hoped, according to Bean, that the philosophy department would “help us develop intellectual algorithms, if you will, to deal with real world complicated business issues,” noting that most problems that emerge in corporate settings are extremely ambiguous.

While philosophy faculty members were certainly willing to provide a solid foundation in moral and ethical theory to apply to problems of the business world, Lysaker notes that they in turn wanted to develop a course that addressed much larger issues, and thus, could reach a broader set of students. He says the philosophy faculty “wanted to treat economic relations as part and parcel of multiple social relations . . . (assuming) that no matter who is enrolled, they will be in relationships of exchange.”

This dialogue resulted in what is now the course’s thematic foundation: namely, an introduction to ethical theory and its application to various situations involving work and exchange. According to Ron Bramhall, LCB instructor of leadership and communication and facilitator of the curriculum committee, “the philosophy faculty was good at convincing (the Lundquist faculty) that there’s no real difference between business ethics and medical ethics, or environmental ethics, or other kinds of ethical inquiry.” The assumption of ethical theory’s broad applicability thus prevents students from demonizing the business world at large, but rather shifts the moral responsibility to individuals who must think critically about the effects their actions and exchanges will have on others.

In the classroom, Stolle begins with an introduction to historically established moral theories such as those of Kant and Mill, and asks students to consider their ramifications in common workplace situations, which are brought to life through literature, films, and guest speakers. Stolle finds this curricular structure to be quite successful, remarking “the little time we’ve spent with Kant and Mill, as inadequate as it feels to me at the time, has appreciably improved the sophistication of their in-class comments.”

Given the potential this course has for allowing students to negotiate the ethical dilemmas of the workplace, Bean says that the Lundquist college sees the main themes of Ethics of Enterprise and Exchange as providing the foundation of what will eventually become a “common thread” throughout upper-division course offerings.

This change, however, would not have been possible without collaboration with the philosophy department, an opportunity not available to all business schools. As Bean notes, “The advantage of having a business school within a liberal arts university such as (Oregon) is that it allows us to collaborate with other departments that we wouldn’t have otherwise.” Yet the advantage is not just one-way. By offering this course, the philosophy department gains exposure to a larger group of students and an important message is conveyed: the need to take responsibility for one’s world through critical engagement. As Stolle says of his students by the end of the course, “I think they understand and appreciate the position the class puts them in—ethics requires thinking.”
Faculty Notes

MARK JOHNSON
Knight Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Mark Johnson’s forthcoming book, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, should appear from the University of Chicago Press this coming June. He is currently completing a long article on Dewey’s theory of mind, thought, and language in relation to current cognitive science for the *Cambridge Companion to Dewey*. Professor Johnson taught an undergraduate philosophy of language course and a graduate seminar on philosophy and cognitive science this winter and is teaching Kant’s moral theory in the spring. He is scheduled to deliver invited lectures or make paper presentations in Vermont, Virginia, Florida, South Carolina, and England over the next few months. He recently participated, with Cheyney Ryan, in a debate for the undergraduate philosophy club, on whether ethical naturalism is a viable moral perspective.

JOHN LYSAKER
Associate Professor

*Department Head 2006–7*

Indiana University Press has accepted John’s book, *Emerson and Self-Culture*. It should be available in the late fall or early winter of this year. Something of a follow-up to *You Must Change Your Life*, it offers a conception of self-culture for a being whose life begins in reception rather than self-legislation. A paper on art as a kind of criticism is also forthcoming from *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. On a third hand, John, along with Bill Rossi in English, is editing a collection of papers reflecting upon the theme of friendship in the work of Emerson and Thoreau. In the classroom, John is currently teaching nineteenth-century philosophy and leading two reading groups, one on Heidegger, the other on Lukacs.

BONNIE MANN
Assistant Professor

My book, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment*, came out from Oxford University Press this fall. Since then I’ve been focused on questions of gender and nationalism: how do deeply personal commitments to gender get mobilized in the interest of nationalism? This has led me to start thinking about the “imaginary domain,” drawing on phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and social theory, as a gendered domain of human experience that hinges social life to individual identity commitments. This spring I’m teaching a class on the distinction between sex and gender. We will trace the history of the distinction in Anglo-American feminism and criticisms of it in phenomenological and poststructuralist accounts. We’ll also discuss the distinction in relation to feminist environmentalism. Next year my courses will include an author’s class on Hannah Arendt and a feminist ethics course.

SCOTT L. PRATT
Associate Professor

*Interim Associate Dean of Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences*

In addition to his work in the College of Arts and Sciences dean’s office, Scott Pratt has continued work on several projects: a logic text based on work in the American pragmatist tradition, a book-length study of the philosophy of pluralism, and a paper on the philosophy of musical performance. He will publish a paper on Josiah Royce’s logical theory this spring in the journal, *History and Philosophy of Logic*, and a paper on the meanings of pluralism in the fall issue of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*.

TED TOADVINE
Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies

This spring, Ted Toadvine is attending a conference in Seoul, South Korea, on “Phenomenology as Bridge between Asia and the West” where he will present an invited paper on environmental phenomenology. He also has finished recently a manuscript entitled *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature*, which explores the twentieth-century French philosopher’s work on the problem of how human reflection emerges from the natural world. Two edited volumes are also scheduled to appear this year: *Nature’s Edge: Boundary Explorations in Ecological Theory and Practice* (from SUNY Press) and *The Merleau-Ponty Reader* (from Northwestern). In the fall, Ted will take on the role of managing editor of the journal *Environmental Philosophy*, which will move to the University of Oregon from the University of Toronto. The journal is a joint project of the Department of Philosophy and the Environmental Studies Program.

NAOMI ZACK
Professor

I completed two book chapters, “Can Third Wave Feminism be Inclusive? Intersectionality, Its Problems and New Directions” in *Blackwell’s Guide to Feminist Philosophy*, eds. Eva Kittay and Linda M. Alcoff; and “Ethnicity, Race and the Importance of Gender” in *Race or Ethnicity?: On Black and Latino Identity*, Jorge Gracia, ed., Cornell University Press. In March and April, I spoke on gender and race at the University of North Carolina–Charlotte and at Washington and Lee University, and on a memorial panel for Iris Young at the Pacific American Philosophical Association meeting, where I also gave a paper on “Identities, History and Disaster.” During winter break I went to Europe and returned home from China after crossing Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. My travel impressions are forthcoming in *Philosophers on Holiday*. 
I hate to admit it now, but I only took a philosophy course in the first place because the other courses that would fulfill my degree requirements were full. In fact, when I got to the front of the registration line, the philosophy course was full, too, but the registration counselor suggested that I appeal to the professor. When I knocked on his office door, Professor Ronnie Littlejohn cheerfully greeted me and let me into his course. With that turn of events, my life changed forever.

Professor Littlejohn's ethics course examined traditional ethical theory in relation to the moral cultures of Islam, China, and Japan. It was by far the most difficult course I had ever taken, but it was also the first time I saw clearly the transformation that could occur in a college classroom. Not a single student left that class unchanged, including me, and as a result I signed up for a study-abroad trip to China.

The following summer, I was riding on a bus through the Chinese countryside. As I looked out the window, a voice in the seat next to me awaked me from my thoughts. “You are from America? You have come to study China?” I turned to find a beautiful older Chinese woman smiling up at me inquiringly. I smiled back at her and said “Yes.” Then she said, “Oh, this is so wonderful! Okay, we will be friends. Tell me your life story, and I will tell you mine!” Startled and pleased by her friendliness, I obliged. As the bus sped along, I talked about growing up along the shores of Kachemak Bay in Homer, Alaska, the daughter of a cultural anthropologist and a music teacher. I began singing and talking at about the same time, and by age fourteen I was composing music on three instruments—piano, guitar, and double bass. When it was time for college, a vocal performance major was a natural choice, but after a couple of years, the ground shifted beneath me and I knew I was not in the right place. Enter that degree requirement, and here I was. With that, I turned to her and said, “Okay, now tell me your story!”

She leaned back in her seat, smiled broadly, and said, “My great-grandfather was an official in the Qing dynasty.” She proceeded to describe her great-grandparents in detail. Puzzled by the new topic of conversation, I thought there must have been a miscommunication. My Chinese was pretty shaky, and her English wasn’t the best, so I figured something had gotten lost in translation. But the story was intriguing, and it seemed rude to interrupt, so I let her continue.

She went on to discuss her grandparents, followed by each of her husband’s great-grandparents and grandparents. Finally, she began to talk about her parents, then her husband’s parents, and then at last, the story of her life, how she met her husband, and then their children and grandchildren. Suddenly, I realized something. She was telling me her story. The texts I had studied in my first philosophy class came flooding back to me. In Confucian philosophy and in Chinese culture more generally, your life story is the story of your great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, spouse, children, and grandchildren. Your life is inextricably bound up with their lives, even if you did not know them. You understand yourself first and foremost as a daughter, granddaughter, great-granddaughter, wife, mother, sister, aunt, teacher, friend—your roles and relationships play the most critical role in who you are.

This experience was one of many that convinced me of the value of studying Chinese philosophy, not only because Chinese culture is largely defined by its philosophical underpinnings, but also because the ideas I encountered were so compelling. When I returned from China after that first trip, I changed my major to philosophy, and at last, I knew I was in the right place. In the years ahead, I kept going back to China as I completed my undergraduate and graduate degrees, with simultaneous training in the Western and Chinese philosophical traditions.

In graduate school at Baylor University, I fell in love with teaching, and I am proud that several of my former students are now graduate students in Asian-area studies, in such diverse fields as history, ethnomusicology, and international business. As much as I love my research, I hope that my most significant professional contribution will be to the lives of my students. For my first philosophy lesson was that lives can change in a college classroom . . . and on buses traveling down country roads in China.
Looking back on my life as a philosopher, I am struck by a curious incongruity. I feel a strong sense of necessity in having followed this particular path rather than another, and philosophy seems like the only thing in the world that I can be fully invested in. And yet there is an equally strong element of chance in how I ended up as a philosopher. I have to admit it, my peers in school whom I considered cool at the time, played an important part in that regard as well. They thought of philosophy as the only academic discipline worthy of spending some air on. So I was drawn to it to be like other members of that artsy gang. Furthermore, I initially lacked the courage to follow philosophy's evanescent and hardly lucrative path. I chose to study English instead. If everything else fails, I'll work as a translator, my entrepreneurial self seemed to have reasoned.

I kept philosophy as a side interest, and when an opportunity presented itself to study it abroad for a year I gladly accepted it. Needless to say, my fate was sealed by that move. Once in a philosophy program in Louvain (Belgium), I felt like I discovered an intimate other with whom I was previously conjoined, a bit like in Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Republic*. I couldn't let my twin go. So I stayed on and completed a Ph.D. program in 2000, and after a two-year postdoctoral research position, I joined the philosophy department at the University of Oregon in the fall of 2003.

My teaching at the UO covers a range of areas I specialize in: philosophical psychology, phenomenology, philosophy of dialogue, psychoanalysis, as well as the history of modern philosophy and metaphysics. I have been lucky to be able to teach advanced undergraduate and graduate seminars in these areas, and I enjoy the give-and-take of a focused discussion with our students, who often impress me with their ability to engage the material in a critical as well as personally and politically relevant manner. While discussing classical texts with our philosophical community, I often feel that philosophy speaks directly to lives and concrete choices we make. This engaged manner of reading the tradition seems to me reflective of the larger community the university is a part of, where intellectual debates constantly spill over into the larger context of mundane concerns and daily lives.

It may be this direct engagement of philosophy in our lives I came to experience with a special acuity since I have moved to Eugene from Europe that spurred my interest in the dialogical tradition in continental philosophy. This tradition remains largely underrepresented in contemporary academic scholarship and yet has invaluable contributions to make to the philosophical and existential questions regarding the social world, especially the practical concern which is as urgent today as it was in the Europe of the 1930s, of how to live with others in peaceful mutual co-existence. Thinkers like Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Eugene Rosenstock-Hüsey, Gabriel Marcel, and others advocate the primacy of an I-you relation as the interpersonal connectedness which precedes any individual existence. I have become deeply immersed in this tradition over the couple of years and have authored a book manuscript that attempts to counter both the amnesia surrounding the dialogic tradition in academia, as well as the amnesia regarding the primacy of dialogue in language, meaning making, and community building. I argue that there is an inescapable dialogic dimension to language insofar as it is learnt from others and addressed to an at least potential other. Language is therefore a fabric that communities are made of, and it is important to retrieve its dialogic potential in order to do justice to the primacy of sociality over the individualist bias that pervades some of Western philosophy. Alongside the dialogic tradition, I use resources from developmental psychology and linguistics to make a strong case for the primacy of interpersonal connectedness in human life.

These interests are directly reflected in my teaching, hopefully not only in terms of the content or what I teach, but also in the style or how I teach. As Buber tells us, meaning arises in the between sphere that opens up between interlocutors, rather than in the special sphere confined to each, and I hope to be able to open up this ambiguous sphere of meaning that is shared by the partners engaged in dialogue when I teach. My students can bear witness whether I am more likely to succeed or fail in that regard.
Graduate Profile

AMY E. STORY

In a job interview recently with the dean of a small Ohio college, I was asked what brought me to this place, why philosophy, and why the University of Oregon? I began by answering, perhaps not surprisingly, that it was mostly my father’s fault (aren’t our parents always to blame?), at least regarding the “why philosophy” part of the question. My largely self-educated father has always been a bit of a lay philosopher, not to mention physicist, literary critic, sociologist, and mystic. Always the optimist, my father had given me the complete works of James Joyce by age fourteen (I confess: I never made it past Portrait of an Artist), a growing body of literature on Zen Buddhism from the age of twelve, and the majority of Joseph Campbell’s work on myth and archetype by the tenth grade. In our periodic conversations about the nature of the universe (for example, atoms are mostly empty space, which seems to mean that we should be able to stick our hands through the table—only we can’t), existentialism (“the absurdity of existence,” according to my father), the value of meditation, and the criminality of the Christian church, I was almost always lost. In short, I was in over my head. Luckily, my mother, an exceptionally grounded and practical woman, taught me a lot about keeping things in proportion. The feeling of comprehension being just beyond my grasp, however, moved at some point during high school from a frustrating, tedious experience to a palpable desire for education. I knew by the time I was sixteen that I wanted to get a Ph.D. and be a college professor. Perhaps the most formative moment of my college experience at Emory University was reading Luce Irigaray’s Sexes and Genealogies with the professor who would become my mentor there, Cynthia Willett, and, coming to class feeling that I had understood nothing at all of the text, being told to read it again. Read it again? Baffled by this advice, I was nevertheless an obedient student, and was rewarded by the exhilaration of having come to understand a little bit of what was being said there. This, I believe, was when I began to understand why I wanted to go to graduate school and become a scholar and also a little of what I wanted to study there, namely feminist theory and ethics. I came to the University of Oregon because I was looking for a small department with faculty members who would care what I was doing, who would make time to talk to me, and who would have genuinely interesting things to say about whatever I was working on. I have found all of this to be true about our department. I also found a great deal of freedom here to do the work I wanted to do, and significant intellectual inspiration from the work done by our faculty, especially my adviser Bonnie Mann, whose ideas and philosophical concerns are so captivating I wish they were my own, and John Lysaker, who manages both a breadth and depth of inquiry in his writing and teaching that seems to me to be rivaled by only the best in academic philosophy. This is my sixth and final year at Oregon. Barring catastrophe, I will defend my dissertation—which investigates ethical subjectivity in the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Emmanuel Levinas and in Toni Morrison’s novel Beloved and Joan Didion’s Play It As It Lays—this July. The job interview mentioned above was successful, and in August I will join the faculty at Baldwin-Wallace College, a 4,000-student liberal arts college just outside of Cleveland. This final achievement, as well as all of the small victories in comprehension along the way, would not have been possible without the continued support and thoughtful advice of all of our faculty members over the past six years. Thanks to each of you and also to the graduate students who formed my social and intellectual community here, who helped teach me how to be a feminist, a teacher, and a scholar.

SPRING EVENTS

Lecture: Allen Carlson
“Art Theory, Aesthetic Appreciation, and the Requirements for an Adequate Aesthetics of Nature”
Thursday, April 26, 2007

Allen Carlson, professor of philosophy at the University of Alberta (Edmonton, Canada), is an authority in aesthetics and has pioneered the field of environmental aesthetics. In addition to editing four volumes and publishing numerous articles in leading journals, he is the author of Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture (Routledge, 2000). For more information, contact Ted Toadvine at toadvine@uoregon.edu. This event was cosponsored by the Environmental Studies Program.
Initially, I stumbled into philosophy by accident, coming from a place of anger and frustration. I guess that I should say that I came to philosophy when I most needed it. I was fifteen years old, and as with most teenagers, I was irate with existence in general without ever really understanding why. I was unhappy with something about the way that I found myself in the world, this country, and at home, and so to make the situation easier for myself, I became more and more difficult for others. Rebellion became a science I set out to master.

It was around this time that I started reading philosophy and poetry. I read the beats, Plato, Poe, political science books my sisters would bring home from college, but the most influential texts were from Thoreau and Marx. I would sit in class and read *The Communist Manifesto* mostly just to infuriate my teachers. I would quote *Civil Disobedience* to people that stood for the national anthem as I sat next to them.

Needless to say, my perspective on and use of philosophy was misguided, and like me, immature. Thankfully, as I embraced and solidified my role as the mad scientist, I found it all the more unfulfilling and problematic. What I began to learn, slowly, as I read and re-read Thoreau, Marx, and many others was that in order to better understand what they were really up to, I needed to be productive and focused with my frustration and energy. I began to better understand my own alienation. I realized that it was OK to be angry at the world because, along with my dissatisfaction, there was a desire for things to be better. The drive to improve both myself and my world was beautiful to me. I realized that I could no longer simply negate what I saw as problematic. Instead, I had to engage it constructively in order for it to change.

About eight years and at least two lives later, I came to the University of Oregon to study philosophy. I cannot say that I have mastered my role as a philosophy student; more often than not I feel like the slave. But there is something to that vantage point.

I have learned via amazing teachers and dedicated students that there are other people who, while fearful and trembling at the uncertainty of what lies before us and in the face of responsibilities we must accept in being and acting, are nonetheless warmly focused on what Emerson referred to as the “common benefit,” and although we will make mistakes, we will “tend to the correction of these flagrant wrongs, by laying one stone aright each day.” It is for this purpose that I have found a healthy ground for my rebelliousness. And, although it is forever a process of construction and deconstruction, it is nonetheless a process I feel is necessary for both the people of the center and those beyond our view on the periphery. *Hasta la victoria siempre.*
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 philosophy department 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
1295 University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403-1295
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