The Society for Interdisciplinary Feminist Phenomenology

A new initiative promises to change the face of feminist philosophy

by Lori Brown, graduate student

The Society for Interdisciplinary Feminist Phenomenology (SIFP) will host its inaugural institute and public forum over Memorial Day weekend, May 28–31. SIFP is the brainchild of philosophy faculty members Bonnie Mann and Beata Stawarska. Bringing it to fruition, however, has involved the efforts of people and programs from across—and beyond—the university. Bonnie and Beata founded the institute in 2006 with advisory assistance from Sara Heinämaa, senior lecturer in philosophy at the University of Helsinki; and Eva Maria Simms, professor of psychology at Duquesne University. The society’s inception was further aided by generous funding from the University of Oregon’s Center for the Study of Women in Society, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Wired Humanities Project, the Oregon Humanities Center, and the Department of Philosophy.

Graduate students in the philosophy department also have been integral to the society’s success. Sarah LaChance Adams and recent graduate Celia Tagamolila Bardwell-Jones met regularly with Bonnie and Beata during its initial stages and played a significant role in the grant writing. Last year, Amrita Banerjee and Al Frankowski joined the planning process and helped bring the society closer to its realization. This year, Emma Jones and Elena Cuffari collaborated with the Wired Humanities Project to create the society’s website and listserv and continue to lend administrative support to the upcoming conference.

During the institute, twelve scholars from Europe, Canada, and the U.S. will gather along with three graduate students chosen from the University of Oregon to discuss the task of feminist phenomenology. What makes this gathering unique is the way in which its structure will be informed by the very philosophical approach it addresses. According to Bonnie, this goal will be accomplished through a small-group focus, an opportunity for deep engagement with one another’s work beforehand, and a commitment to holding the sessions in a beautiful place.

Now, that last point may catch you off guard. How can the location be philosophically significant? Bonnie explains: “In a sense, the typical conference is such a disembodied experience. You’re sitting there in a hard chair in an ugly room with somebody who...”

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is looking down and reading their paper. Here we are, phenomenologists, worried about our lived embodied experience and having a horrible lived embodied experience at the same time that we are talking about it. Nobody would choose that! So we decided to hold the institute in a place where people would want to go anyway." Located in a temperate rain forest and boasting a nationally recognized trail that runs along ten waterfalls, Silver Falls State Park fits that bill perfectly.

There will be plenty of unstructured time during the institute, so people can go hiking with one another, take meals together, and talk outside of the meetings. Rather than reading their papers aloud to other participants, attendees will share their work in advance of the conference. Sessions will be devoted solely to discussion of one another’s work, enabling scholars to engage deeply with each other’s ideas. According to Beata, "This method reflects how we are thinking about the task of feminist phenomenology. It is not a single-author project that happens in your mind. It is more engaged. It has this sort of communal dimension to it practiced by a group rather than individually." Rather than "just coming to the conference and receiving a product," as Bonnie puts it, this format will encourage participants to think along with rather than against one another. She points out, "So often our intellectual lives are lived in isolation and our work is ‘my work, my thinking, my idea.’ So much more happens when you have a dynamic community working on the same questions."

Participants have been asked to frame their research within a larger inquiry into what it means to practice phenomenology in a feminist manner. As a preliminary response to this question, Bonnie and Beata emphasize the way in which both disciplines interact with and change the shape of one another. Phenomenology deepens the reflection upon and understanding of lived experience to which feminist activists often appeal. Feminism, in turn, brings a political dimension to phenomenology.

We see this interplay at work in the projects of the graduate students involved in the institute. In her paper, Caroline Lundquist challenges Iris Marion Young’s early phenomenological work on pregnant embodiment. She does so by examining two "often-marginalized" forms of pregnant experience: denied and rejected pregnancy. Her goal is to develop a more comprehensive depiction of this experience that accounts for its "radical diversity." Sarah LaChance Adams also takes up the issue of maternity but through a different lens. Her emphasis is on the tension between what has been called maternal pacifism and the ambivalence mothers often feel toward their children. She brings the philosophy of Levinas into conversation with that of feminist care ethicists to explore what we can learn from this tension about the complexity of ethics. Finally, Amrita Banerjee develops a phenomenology of rape, illustrating the ways in which this method helps "disentangle the complexities" and make sense of the experience. At the same time, she highlights the manner in which the personal and political come together in the act of rape to form an ethical wrong.

As the work of these scholars shows, the society is strongly committed to thinking about the political dimensions of phenomenology. "Questions of political recognition, of rights, seem inherent in the very phenomena we are trying to describe," Beata asserts. "It seems to be an abstraction and an oversight if we do not bring those questions that are traditionally defined as political into our phenomenological inquiry."

Of course, the institute is but one avenue for taking up this work. After the gathering, SIFP will craft an anthology addressing the task of feminist phenomenology. Beata and Bonnie will carry the work further by creating and co-teaching a course on this philosophical discipline. Through the website, the society has also created a virtual community that will help facilitate and carry forward the kind of collaborative work realized through the institute. Feminist phenomenologists from around the world can create a profile on the site that enables others to learn about their research interests and even access their publications. At this writing, twenty-eight scholars from more than twenty different universities in places as far-flung as the Philippines, Australia, Israel and Argentina have posted their profiles on the site.

These kinds of initiatives are important for the flourishing of feminist phenomenology. As it stands, there are few feminist scholars in the United States working out of continental traditions; even fewer are working within phenomenology. Both senior and emerging scholars lack a platform for presenting their ideas and receiving feedback from their colleagues, so creating an active society is a top priority. As Bonnie puts it, "There is a strong need for a community of scholars aware of the history of phenomenology and what it has to contribute to feminism..."

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Bonnie and Beata also see the society as an opportunity to distinguish the University of Oregon from other programs. "Part of what makes our department unique," Bonnie asserts, "is our emphasis on feminist philosophy. The society’s further emphasis on feminist phenomenology will help us stand out in a field where
the dominant philosophical approach is analytic." Their hope is that the society will showcase our department as one that is both supportive of graduate students who wish to work on feminism and feminist phenomenology and innovative in research related to these fields of inquiry. SIFP has already begun to meet the first goal through its active involvement of graduate students in every stage of its development. Bonnie and Beata also plan to involve graduate students in editing a conference anthology, giving them the chance to get involved in that aspect of the work.

As for the students participating in the institute, Sarah LaChance Adams has this to say: "This is a rare opportunity for a graduate student to collaborate with the top scholars in her field. At large conferences it can be difficult to even meet them. The usual conference presentation allows little time for comment or discussion, so it can be difficult to get much constructive feedback on one's research. The paper that I am presenting is part of my dissertation, so I feel especially fortunate to be able to get responses on it from the top scholars in the field." Amrita Banerjee adds, "I really look forward to hearing these scholars that I admire talk about their own work. It will be interesting to listen to some of the complexities and obstacles they experience and the ways in which they resolve these in their own work. I am very excited about the institute and am grateful to SIFP for providing graduate students with the chance to participate in something like this. It is indeed a unique opportunity!"

There may be more opportunities still for future students and the department. One of the unexpected fruits of the society has been the relationship forged with a circle of feminist phenomenologists in Europe. Bonnie and Beata connected with them through SIFP's international advisor, Sara Heinämaa, and were invited to attend the circle's spring meeting. Beata notes, "Now there is an interest on both the European and American sides to have a live collaboration going." This collaboration may manifest itself through a visiting professorship. Even more exciting is the possibility of an exchange program between the UO and the University of Vienna for graduate students concentrating on feminist philosophy. "Who knows what these connections will bring?" asks Bonnie. "Many possibilities lie ahead." Whatever the outcome, it is clear that SIFP will continue to play a key role in the development of this innovative approach to feminist philosophy.

To learn more about the society, visit whp.uoregon.edu/sifp/index.html.
Philosophy and Conflict Resolution

by Cheyney Ryan, professor

Philosophers often think of their discipline as resolving conflict. We reason together instead of hitting each other over the head; we engage in dialogue instead of fighting. Emmanuel Levinas identifies peace itself with conversation. A new graduate program at the University of Oregon seeks to develop the practical possibilities of this connection.

The Master’s Program in Conflict and Dispute Resolution has a unique history. It is the only program of its kind initiated by two philosophers—Rob Gould and me. (Rob is an Oregon philosophy Ph.D. who now directs the conflict resolution program at Portland State University.) The program finally came into being through the work of Jane Gordon and Michael Moffitt, two law professors interested in conflict resolution. They were assisted by three other graduates of our philosophy program—John Shuford, Alex Stotts, and Pam Hardy. The program is housed in the School of Law, but you don’t have to be a law student to be in it. Most of our students are not.

Given its origins, it is no surprise that the philosophy component of the program is strong. About twenty students begin the program each year. For the first month, they focus entirely on the philosophy of conflict resolution. We spend a lot of time on the theme of forgiveness, and then move on to the larger topic of reconciliation. We talk about how ideas about war and peace are reflected in our popular culture. We spend a lot of time on how gender relates to violence and violence prevention; we look at the role of race in these matters as well. More questions are raised than we can possibly cover or resolve, but that’s the nature of philosophy. After a month of this the students move on to courses on negotiation, mediation, cultural conflict and reconciliation, and the like. The whole program takes about two years.

I am happy to say that the interest and support for this work—which I consider to be applied philosophy—is strong. The field tends to attract people who already have some life experience. My students thus far have included a Eugene police officer, several newspaper reporters, teachers and K–12 administrators, as well as students just out of college. The field tends to attract more women than men, and thus far our students have been quite diverse. I think they appreciate our philosophical focus. I am honored to have been asked by the students to give the commencement remarks at our first two graduations.

Professional acknowledgment helps, too. Recently our program was ranked seventh among all graduate conflict resolution programs in the United States. Pretty good for only our third year.

The support of the philosophy department has been invaluable in this endeavor from the start, and my hope is to develop an undergraduate concentration in philosophy and conflict resolution. If you would like to be part of this, just send me an e-mail at cryan@uoregon.edu or come by my office on Tuesday or Thursday afternoons. You will find out more about the master’s program by contacting the law school or me.

Fellowships and Awards

A number of our faculty members received fellowships and brought accolades to the department this year. Please join us in congratulating them on their accomplishments.

Erin Cline, assistant professor of philosophy and religious studies, received a 2008–9 Oregon Humanities Center Faculty Research Fellowship (awarded for spring 2009) for her project entitled “Justice, Human Nature, and the Family.” She also received a 2008 Summer Research Award from the Office of Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies for her project entitled “Women’s Questions, Women’s Roles: Female Spirit Mediums in Southeastern China.” In addition to her recognition from the university, Cline received the 2007 Best Essay Award from the journal Dao for her
Commencement  
Saturday, June 14, 2008  
The Department of Philosophy will hold a commencement ceremony and reception in honor of graduating students. The festivities will be held outdoors in a new location for us this year, on the East Villard Lawn (between Villard and Lawrence halls) from 10:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. Following the graduation ceremony, philosophy department graduating students and their guests are invited to remain for refreshments. Our ceremony will end in plenty of time for graduates and guests to walk to McArthur Court for the 12:30 p.m. All-University Commencement. (For more information on the McArthur Court ceremony, see studentlife.uoregon.edu/programs/commencement/spring.htm.)  

UO faculty members, family, friends, and classmates of our graduating students are invited to join the celebration. Although no tickets are required to attend our ceremony, early arrivals will have the best choice of seating. Please take a moment to think about your guests and any accommodations that need to be requested in advance (wheelchair ramp, sign language interpreter, and so forth). If you or your guests have any special needs, please contact Student Life at (541) 346-3216 as soon as possible so requests can be met.

Thinking Through Nature: Philosophy for an Endangered World  
Thursday–Sunday, June 19–22, 2008  
This summer, the University of Oregon will collaborate with the International Association for Environmental Philosophy to host a four-day international summit gathering together the environmental humanities and design communities, including scholars from anthropology, art, architecture, English, geography, landscape architecture, philosophy, political science, religious studies, and sociology. Events of the summit will include an afternoon of hands-on workshops, fifty interdisciplinary panels of speakers, keynote addresses by five internationally acclaimed guests, an opening reception and Saturday evening banquet, the Oregon premiere of the feature environmental film Hotspots, a book exhibit, and a series of excursions to nearby sites of environmental interest.

Keynote speakers will include:  
**Donna Haraway**, Professor of History of Consciousness, University of California–Santa Cruz  
**John Llewelyn**, Emeritus Reader in Philosophy, University of Edinburgh  
**Gary Paul Nabhan**, Distinguished Professor, Southwest Center and Department of Geography, University of Arizona  
**Alberto Pérez-Gómez**, Saidye Rosner Bronfman Professor of the History of Architecture, McGill University  
**Karen Warren**, Professor of Philosophy, Macalester College

For a program of events and additional information about “Thinking Through Nature,” please visit our website at www.uoregon.edu/~toadvine/TTN/.
Faculty Notes

Erin Cline
Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies
This year I have had three articles accepted for publication in refereed journals: an article on the virtue of restrained speech and nameless virtues in International Philosophical Quarterly, an essay on the relationship between the right and the good in early Confucian philosophy in the Journal of Religious Ethics, and an article based on my ethnographic work, “Female Spirit Mediums and Religious Authority in Contemporary Southeastern China” in Modern China. In the coming year I will turn most of my attention to my book manuscript-in-progress and to the revision of a related article. I enjoyed teaching three courses for the Department of Philosophy in the fall and winter and look forward to teaching two for the Department of Religious Studies this spring—Confucian Ethics and Chinese Religions. This year I was enormously gratified by the success of the conference “Confucian Virtues at Work” (March 2–3), which featured speakers from throughout the U.S. and Hong Kong, and I am most grateful to my colleagues in several departments, including philosophy, for their enthusiastic support and participation.

Mark Johnson
Phillip H. Knight Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences
I just finished a winter term research fellowship at the Oregon Humanities Center. My project focuses on the natural sources of morality, and it draws on recent work in moral theory, cognitive and developmental psychology, evolutionary theory, linguistics, and cognitive neuroscience. During winter quarter I took a two-week “research road trip” to visit philosophers, psychologists, neuroscientists, and linguists in Berkeley, Santa Cruz, Los Angeles, and San Diego to discuss their work in this area of naturalized ethics.

John Lysaker
Associate Professor
In the winter, I taught Ethics (PHIL 102) for the first time. I had a great time reading Aristotle, Plato, Epictetus, Hume, Mill, Kant, Beauvoir, and Gilligan, and the students seemed to really respond to this sequence of texts. This quarter, I am again teaching PHIL 312 and am leading a course in Latin American Philosophy in conjunction with a campus visit from Enrique Dussel, a leading Latin American thinker. I look forward to learning with and from students about this exciting thinker and field of thought. On the research front, my book, Emerson and Self-Culture, is now out from Indiana University Press, and my coauthored title, Schizophrenia and the Fate of the Self, will appear this August. Other work includes an analysis of the commodification of higher education entitled “Life Takes Visa” and a student-accessible piece on Heidegger’s work on language.

Bonnie Mann
Assistant Professor
These days I am stuck between three related projects. On the one hand, I’ve been doing a good deal of work on Simone de Beauvoir, and in that context trying to think hard about her contribution to the practice of phenomenology. I am exploring how Beauvoir revolutionized the practice of the “reduction” in phenomenology. The usual imaginative or meditative exercise is turned into hard work by Beauvoir, and this has all kinds of ramifications for what it means to do phenomenology. Secondly, I am trying to say something different about what feminists should do with “nature.” The association of women with nature makes this a touchy political question for feminist philosophy, yet it seems to me that contemporary feminist philosophy tends to divide over the question in unproductive ways: a strict antiessentialist poststructuralism would like to do away with nature altogether, by collapsing it into culture, while the “difference feminism” that is rooted in psychoanalysis relies on uncritical notions of “nature” to ground the originary notions of sexual difference they are committed to. Meanwhile, something we call the “natural world” seems to be undergoing irreparable damage and this has little to do with the feminist debate on the question. If we are committed to engaged philosophy, this debate about nature seems very disengaged from contemporary problems. Hannah Arendt is helpful here, and at the center of these reflections for me. Lastly, I continue to work on the relation between gender and war as an embodied aesthetic relation. The difficulty is to say how this relation is embodied, and what it means for nationalism and patriotism to work in, through, and on the body. While it is clear to me that these three are really the same project, I am not yet able to explain that to anyone else! Maybe by the next Thinking Duck I will have made some progress.
Scott Pratt
Associate Professor
Interim Associate Dean of Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences

Over the last year, I have completed several projects. At the Eastern and Pacific Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association (APA), I presented a new paper, “On the Politics of Disjunction,” on the history of logic and the logical system of Josiah Royce. The paper will be published in the Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society next year. In May, I will present an invited paper to the East European Pragmatist Forum in Brno, Czech Republic. This new work on identity and social change, titled “Mistaken Identity,” develops the work of identity theorists such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Linda Alcoff in relation to a logic of boundaries. This spring I will also present two papers on aesthetics and opera. The first, “Damned Opera," I will present at the University of Notre Dame in collaboration with their director of opera, Mark Beudert, as part of a series of lectures and performances on the Faust story. I will present the second paper, on opera and Dewey's aesthetic theory, as part of a conference sponsored by the German Studies Committee of the University of Oregon. Finally, this summer and fall, I will complete work on a new logic text, Inquiry, Argument, and Order, to be published next year by Wiley-Blackwell Publishing. I have also served as the associate dean for humanities since summer 2006 and will complete my term in the dean's office in June 2008.

Beata Stawarska
Assistant Professor


Ted Toadvine
Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies

Two books that I co-edited have recently appeared: Nature’s Edge: Boundary Explorations in Ecological Theory and Practice, edited with my former colleague Charles Brown, was published by SUNY Press; and The Merleau-Ponty Reader, edited with Len Lawlor, was published by Northwestern. The appearance of the latter volume was timely, since 2008 is the centennial of Merleau-Ponty's birth. I am participating in several conferences this year devoted to the French phenomenologist: at Basel in March, Paris in June, Morelia in September, and Lisbon in November. In the area of environmental philosophy, my essay “How Not to Be a Jellyfish: Human Exceptionalism and the Ontology of Reflection,” was recently published in a collection entitled Phenomenology and the Non-Human Animal (Springer), and I was invited to join the advisory board for the journal Environmental Ethics. I am also lead organizer for the summit in environmental humanities that the UO will host in June, "Thinking Through Nature: Philosophy for an Endangered World," which is described in more detail elsewhere in this issue.

Naomi Zack
Professor

I have been on sabbatical leave fall and winter terms and am now back to teach Philosophy of Disaster and a Feminist Theory graduate seminar. I finished a book, The Specter of Disaster: New Moral Questions in Life and Popular Culture, which is now out for review. I am working on a 150,000-word Handy Philosophy Answer book for Invisible Ink Press, which publishes popular reference tomes. After that I plan to start a feminist philosophy work on motherhood. I gave papers at conferences at Oxford in the United Kingdom (July 2007), in Romania (September 2007), and at the Eastern (December 2007) and Pacific (March 2008) APA meetings. I'm excited to be back after the sabbatical.
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
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Name _______________________________ Class Year _______________________________
Address _______________________________
Home Phone _______________________________ E-mail _______________________________
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