

Philosophy Communiqué

Winter 2019

For the Love of Teaching

By Jordan Yount

Don Sievert first stepped in front of a class to teach in 1963, and he has no plans to quit anytime soon. Although the newly minted professor emeritus of philosophy officially retired from the University of Missouri Aug. 31, Sievert plans to continue to teach on a part-time basis for as long as he can.

“When I said I was going to retire, I asked about teaching longer, and my chair said, ‘Would you?’ I was so happy to be able to continue teaching because I don’t have another plan,” Sievert says. “Some people like to travel, some people like to make things, and I knew I didn’t want to just sit around. I’ve known too many men who didn’t have a plan, and they died within a year of retiring. I still don’t have a plan—I’ll just keep on doing what I did, and that will keep me going.”

The Continuing Conversation

Sievert grew up in Brooklyn with two intellectual parents and says he feels like his life has been a continuation of his family conversations because they were very intellectual, with dictionaries and encyclopedias on hand to resolve disputes or to get more information. When he enrolled at Harpur

College in New York (now part of Binghamton University) he took a physics course and liked it enough to major in physics for about a year and a half. However, he began to



Professor Don Sievert switching things up and teaching outside in 2007.

wonder if he could make any original contributions to physics, and his roommate suggested he take an introductory philosophy course.

“He told me which course and which instructor to take and said I would love it, and I did,” Sievert says. “It’s been a love affair ever

since. I never thought I would like teaching for so long, but I love coming to talk to bright young people and answering their questions—I haven’t gotten tired of that at all.”

Sievert earned his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Iowa, where he says he became an adult and solidified his desire to become a teacher of philosophy. His areas of interest include Descartes, Wittgenstein, and 20th-century British philosophy.

“Descartes and Wittgenstein both want to ask something like, ‘What’s rock bottom knowledge that is available to the world?’ With Descartes it’s ‘What can I know with certainty about the world and my place in it?’ With Wittgenstein it’s ‘What can logic say about the structure of the world?’ Each has a picture that they want to put before us, and they are very different kinds of pictures because Descartes is very God-oriented and Wittgenstein is logic-oriented. That’s what turns me on,”

Sievert says.

Retired, But Not Really

Sievert says philosophy still occupies a crucial role in a university education, despite today’s focus on science, technology, engineering,

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From ^{the} Chair



As the new chair of the philosophy department, I'm happy to have this chance to say hello. Your being part of the MU philosophical community makes the department proud and gives it strength.

The previous chair, **Matt McGrath**, has a leave of absence and is at Rut-

gers University, a philosophical powerhouse, where, because of his outstanding scholarship he may stay if he chooses. Matt did a stellar job leading the department the last two years and passed the baton with the department running in perfect form. I'll do my best to keep up the pace he set. In addition to hiring a new assistant professor, **Marta Heckel**, a specialist in ancient Greek philosophy, he hired **Troy Hall** to teach medical ethics and **Drew Woodson** to teach philosophy of race. **Keith Harris**, a new PhD who studied with Matt, won an MU post-doctoral fellowship and this year is bringing into the classroom his expertise in social epistemology.

Don Sievert retired at the end of August and became a professor emeritus, an honor earned because of his many years of dedication to philosophy. He joined the Department of Philosophy in 1973 and shaped the lives

of countless students. Although retired, he will continue teaching some courses for the department. We will miss Don's full-time engagement and wish him the very best in his new endeavors.

Philosophy is essential to the College of Arts and Science: it lays conceptual foundations for the disciplines within the college. Philosophical reflection enriches the lives of students and enhances their contributions to the state and the nation. The research the faculty conducts enlivens their courses and guides our society's responses to the big questions of life.

I thank you for the support you have given the department and look forward to working with you to promote the department's teaching, research, and service missions.

—*Paul Weirich, Department Chair*

Undergraduate Education ■

In 2018, several of our majors were recognized by the College of Arts and Science with scholarships. Congratulations to: **Alex Fox, Evan Fook, Evan Hunt, Hannah Kauffman, Trenton Maberry, Erik Platner, Dominic Struckhoff, Jennifer Sutterer, and Mathew Swan.**

In addition, Fook and **Suryanshi Rawat** have been awarded the Outstanding Majors Awards for 2018.

Fook is mostly interested in metaphysics and ethics, and he plans to attend graduate school in philosophy once he earns his bachelor's degree at Mizzou.

Rawat, who is primarily interested in ethics and epistemology, would like to go to medical school to become a physician, once she graduates.

Our department is continuing its efforts to attract the best and the bright-

est among the students enrolled at MU. To this end, Andrew Melnyk, who has been the undergraduate advisor for the past few years, instituted a mentorship program for our majors. Each faculty member is assigned sev-



Evan Fook



Suryanshi Rawat

eral mentees with whom they meet to guide them through the process of making the most of their education here and to advise them concerning possible career paths. This informal program seems to be having really good results, indeed!

Bringing the Ancient World to Light

Marta Heckel originally thought she would become a botanist after graduating from college, but she wasn't certain that would be her career path, so she took courses in biology, Latin, history, and other disciplines at the University of Toronto to see what interested her most. She did not enroll in philosophy courses, but a friend of hers did, and one day that friend asked her to edit an essay she had written. Heckel liked the subject matter and signed up for two philosophy courses the next semester.

"I've always been interested in the history of philosophy and ancient history in general, but I also continued studying biology, so I declared botany and philosophy as my majors," Heckel says.

A Fork in the Road

She stuck with the dual majors and worked in botany labs in college, but at some point, she decided not to pursue botany as a potential career.

"I felt there were important philosophical questions that scientists were not thinking about," she says. "I also was interested in the systematics of plants, but that's not usually a practical branch of biology, and there seemed to be a lack of interest in science for science's sake in biology as a whole."

That's when she decided to focus exclusively on philosophy. She had offers for graduate school in both botany and philosophy and accept-

ed an offer from Cornell University to study philosophy. She earned her doctorate in 2017 at Cornell and served there as the philosophi-



Assistant Professor Marta Heckel

cal review visiting lecturer during 2017–18. She then began applying for positions, and the University of Missouri was looking for someone with a background in ancient philosophy.

Philosophical Foundations

This past fall, Heckel joined the philosophy department at MU as an assistant professor with a specialization in ancient western philosophy, especially Plato.

"It's because of the literary aspects," she says. "I like being able to approach a text and come up with interpretations and think about what philosophy might be there given the literary choices Plato makes. What I enjoy about Plato is the juxtaposition of his foreignness and his reliability."

Philosophy was once considered a critical component of a university education. For example, in the early years of the University of Missouri, seniors were expected to focus on intellectual and moral philosophy, along with coursework in constitutional law and political economy. Heckel says there is a perception today that philosophy does not play the critical role in a well-rounded education that it once did, but she says it should.

"It teaches people to think in a way that's important in navigating the world. It's no less important today than in the past, maybe even more important, because you are exposed to all of these ideas, and you have to be able to think about them in a critical way and break down the arguments people are making," she says.



André Ariew helped found the Evolution and Social Science group at Mizzou. It is composed of faculty from dozens of departments and across most colleges.

This is how he describes its mission: “What unifies us is an interest in how evolutionary approaches aid (or detract) from the study of societies. We have a bi-weekly colloquia series where we bring in faculty from all over the world. We are expanding our program by fostering grant writing and collaborative writing projects.” For more information, visit ess.missouri.edu/



Kenneth Boyce recently received a \$3,000 stipend from the John Templeton Foundation via the Society of Christian Philosophers to host a student reading group on the work of Alvin Plantinga. In September, he presented “On Why Explanationism Doesn’t Secure Empirical Grounds for Mathematical Platonism” at the 40th Anniversary Conference of the Society of Christian Philosophers at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In October 2018, his article “The Coincidental Reply to the No Miracles Argument” was published in the journal *Erkenntnis*. Boyce will present “Mathematical Application and the No Confirmation Thesis” at the upcoming meeting of the Pacific Division of the APA in April 2019.

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Marina Folescu was the recipient of the prestigious Edinburgh Fellowship, awarded by the American Philosophical Association (2017–

18). This fellowship allowed her to spend two months in residence at the Institute for Advanced Studies

Faculty Updates

in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh. This is where she wrote the article titled “Reid’s View of Memorial Conception,” which was subsequently published in the *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*. This article will constitute the basis for a book-length project, tentatively titled *Consciousness and Immunity to Error Through Misidentification in British Modern Philosophy*.



Troy Hall, MA ’02, PhD ’18, is now a visiting assistant professor of philosophy at MU. He defended his dissertation, titled *Three Studies in the Philosophy of Jazz*, in 2018. That fall, he was awarded the Green Chalk Teaching Award, which is given to the best graduate student teacher in the College of Arts and Science. The department is very fortunate to have him teach our undergraduates.



Claire Horisk is continuing work on a book manuscript, tentatively titled *The Pragmatics of Disparaging and Demeaning Jokes*. An April 2018 article, “Racist Jokes,” in *Oxford Bibliographies* online received 39,000 online views in its first three months of publication. The next most-popular article in the same venue was an article on psychology, with 11,000 views in the preceding six months. She has redesigned her Philosophy 1000 course, incorporating more contemporary philosophy as well as innovative media like podcasts, videos, and cartoons.



Andrew Melnyk has published two papers: “In Defense of a Realization Formulation of Physicalism” in *Topoi*, which is a reply

to several critics of his formulation of physicalism; and “Grounding and the Formulation of Physicalism” in *Scientific Composition and Metaphysical Ground* by K. Aizawa and C. Gillett, eds., (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016), which argues that it won’t work to formulate physicalism in terms of the trendy notion of “grounding.” He is well advanced with a book addressing the question, “If phenomenal consciousness is physical, then why does it seem to us, introspectively, not to be physical?” In it, he will argue that there are no good anti-physicalist arguments based on introspection, and he will offer an explanation of why introspection would tell us that phenomenal consciousness is not physical, even if it is. Melnyk continues to serve as the director of undergraduate studies.



Alex Radulescu has published several papers in top-ranked journals: “Synonymy Between Token-reflexive Expressions,” in

Mind (2018); “A Defence of Intentionalism About Demonstratives,” in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2018); and “Token-reflexivity and Repetition,” in *Ergo* (2018). He gave an invited talk at The (Meta) semantics of Context-sensitivity and Ambiguity, in Berlin in October 2018. He presented “Token-reflexivity and Repetition” as a symposium paper at the 2019 Eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association.

Philip Robbins published two papers: “Crime, Punishment, and Causation: The Effect of Etiological Information on the Perception

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Jared Bates, MA '98, PhD '01, was promoted to professor in spring 2018 at Hanover College in Indiana. He sends thanks to the Mizzou philosophy faculty for the substantial part they played in making it possible for him to earn his degree—especially the two with whom he worked most closely, Paul Weirich and Andrew Melnyk.



Taylor Dunn, BA '15, recently earned his master's in philosophy from California State University in Los Angeles. He started a doctoral program at the University of California, Irvine in fall 2018, where he has begun developing a research project that ties together epistemic closure and the logic of belief entailment with

News from our Alumni

the epistemological challenge that different realism views face. Dunn writes: "My time at Mizzou exposed me to a wide range of ideas that have helped me uncover my own interests, and most importantly, the faculty encouraged me to get serious about studying philosophy. I feel confident to contribute to the field only because I was pushed to

cultivate the necessary tools of intellectual rigor, clarity in writing, and careful thinking, while at Mizzou."

Tim Tung-Ying Wu, MA '15, PhD '18, is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Philosophy of Science and Logic, in the School of Philosophy, at Fudan University, Shanghai, China.

Faculty Updates

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of Moral Agency" (with Paul Litton), in *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*; and "Modularity of Mind" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Intriguingly, Robbins' and Litton's research was publicized by three media outlets: *Science Daily*, *Futurity*, and the *St. Louis American* (*Science Daily* and *Futurity* are international in

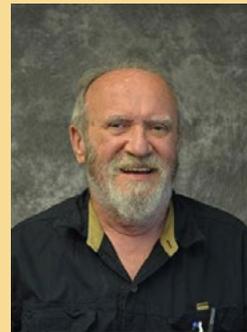
scope). He gave several presentations as commentator at the Central States Philosophical Association meeting and a few Kline workshops (internal to the department).



In 2018, **Peter Vallentyne** published eight papers in various venues—edited collections and journals. He also gave a talk: "Full Self-ownership: Interpersonal vs. Comprehensive," at the Tulane University Conference in honor of Eric Mack (2018).

Sievert

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and mathematics (STEM). That point was driven home this summer by a former student's Facebook post.

"I was shocked when this former student, an engineer, just said in passing that the courses he took with me were the pillars of his existence," Sievert says. "I don't know what he meant by that, but it sure made my day, and for an engineer to say that—that's someone who thought taking philosophy, even though it wasn't his main area, really contributed to his overall intellectuality."

Luckily for Mizzou students, Sievert will continue contributing to his students' overall intellectuality.

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The department appreciates hearing from alumni and friends. Send announcements or milestones to the address listed at left.

Graduate Students & Postdocs



Ritwik Agrawal, a third-year doctoral student, won a fellowship that allowed him to attend the two-week international

rationality summer institute organized by the Munich Centre for Mathematical Philosophy (2018.irschool.de/). In February 2019, Ritwik will be commenting on a symposium paper that will be delivered at the American Philosophical Association Central meeting.



Jon Marc Asper, a doctoral candidate, presented his paper “A Defense of Parity: Value Intransitivity Without a Money Pump” at the

eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association, in January 2019.



Beth Barker, a third-year doctoral student who successfully defended her master’s last May, will present her paper “Epistemic In-

justice and Intellectualist Know-how” in a symposium at the central meeting of the American Philosophical Association, in February 2019. Only a handful of submitted papers are selected to be presented as symposium papers at any meetings of the American Philosophical Association, so this is extremely

good news! Barker was also co-winner of the Scott T. Davey Memorial Prize for Excellence in MA Research for the same paper. Congratulations, Beth!

Selwyn Griffith, a second-year doctoral student, presented “Art and Archetypes: A Jungian Analysis of Oral Traditions and Hip-hop” at the American Society for Aesthetics–Rocky Mountain Division, in July 2018.



Keith Harris, PhD '18, is a Preparing Future Faculty postdoctoral fellow at MU for the academic year 2018–19. He has a book

chapter called “What’s Epistemically Wrong with Conspiracy Theorising?” coming out in *Harms and Wrongs in Epistemic Practice*, based on the proceedings of a conference with the same name. Harris presented “Group Knowledge and Epistemic Luck” as a colloquium paper at the 2018 Pacific meeting of the American Philosophical Association in 2018, “Group Knowledge and Group Agency” at the Cologne Summer School in Philosophy, and “Belief and the Norms of Assertion” as a colloquium paper at the eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association in January 2019. Congratulations, for all this wonderful academic activity!



Eric Rowse defended his dissertation in November 2018 and will

be presenting “Does Scheffler’s Re-

lational Egalitarianism Defeat the Distributive Objection?” as a colloquium paper at the 2019 central meeting of the American Philosophical Association, in Denver.



Sukhvinder Shahi, a third-year doctoral student, presented a paper at the Norwegian Institute of Language and Mind in Oslo in August 2018. She

was awarded the GPC Conference Presentation Travel Award to enable her to do so.



Alek Willsey, who defended his proposal in spring 2018, won second place in the category of Humanities and Creative Arts at the 35th Annual

MU Research and Creative Activities Forum. In January 2019, he presented his paper “An Illocutionary Model of Discursive Injustice” in a colloquium at the eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association.