

DEPARTMENT OF

PHILOSOPHY NEWS

SPRING 2019

Faculty news

Letter from the chair

Dear Alumni and Friends:

Greetings! It's been an exciting year in the Department of Philosophy. After a year-long national search, I was selected to serve as the new department chair. I am very grateful and humbled to be chosen to lead the department and look forward to working with our faculty, students, alumni, and friends to advance our goal of providing the best undergraduate philosophy program in Illinois.

In other faculty-related news: Two new faculty members joined the department last fall. Cassie Herbert joined the department as an assistant professor in August. We were also delighted to welcome Russ Hamer as our newest instructional assistant professor. Check out their bios and descriptions of their research programs elsewhere in this newsletter.

The department was also very pleased to welcome two visiting scholars from Southwest University in Chongqing, China. Zhanglv "Jonny" Li and Xuan Li arrived in February 2018 and spent almost a year here at ISU and in the Philosophy Department learning about how American universities work and expanding their English language skills. Both Jonny and Xuan were wonderful colleagues, and we all learned a lot from each other. At the conclusion of their visit, Southwest University, China invited us to establish a formal exchange program for both faculty and students. We will be working with ISU administration to make this happen! Stay tuned for more information in future newsletters.



David Sanson

Congratulations to David Sanson who was awarded tenure and promoted to associate professor at the start of the fall 2018 semester! Congratulations are also in order for Lana Kühle and her husband Amin Bahmanian from the Department of Mathematics here at ISU as their baby boy, Sebastian Bahmanian, was born September 12, 2018.

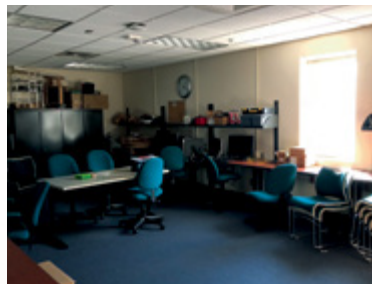
Finally, with the financial assistance of the College of Arts and Sciences, we were able to renovate Stevenson Hall 227A into a new, state-of-the-art, seminar and conference room. Our faculty can hold their 300-level courses in this facility, and we will use it to host virtual guest lectures and colloquia using the room's dedicated online video conferencing equipment. I hope you enjoy the rest of the newsletter!

Cheers,

Christopher Horvath, Department Chair



Chris Horvath



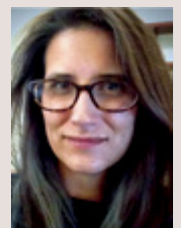
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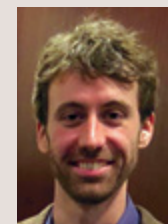
New faculty and staff

Cassie Herbert, Ph.D., joined the department in August 2018 as an assistant professor. Herbert works in feminist philosophy, social and political philosophy, philosophy of language, and philosophy of sex. Her research focuses on the pragmatics of slurs, the everyday ways we use language to construct ingroups and outgroups, and the ecology of harm of sexual violence. Herbert received her B.A. in politics and philosophy from Bates College and her Ph.D. from Georgetown University.



Cassie Herbert

Russ Hamer, Ph.D., joined the department as an instructional assistant professor in 2018 soon after receiving his Ph.D. from Marquette University. His primary research project is centered on pedagogy in philosophy classrooms, specifically examining how best to implement reflection and reflective assignments in the classroom. He also has research interests centered on Kierkegaard and the ways in which he uses parables and storytelling in his works.



Russ Hamer

Additionally, Hamer is interested in the ways in which pop culture engages philosophy and has published chapters in books from the "Pop Culture and Philosophy" series.

Faculty scholarship

Eric Godoy

On a hot Saturday in September, I went hiking along the Lake Mingo Trail at Kennekuk County Park. It was my first time hiking in Illinois since moving here. I really enjoyed the experience for a lot of the same reasons that people tend to enjoy hiking: the peace, the quiet, and sometimes it's just nice to get away from it all. But I also enjoyed it because, lately, I've been thinking a lot about this 'it' from which we're trying to get away and the sorts of natural spaces we visit to do so.

Along the trail, a member of our group found a discarded aluminum can, crunched it up and put it in their bag so that future hikers wouldn't have to see it. I thought that was a nice thing to do. Aluminum cans and trash certainly seem to be part of the 'it' we were attempting to get away from on our hike. But then I started to look around for other signs of human activity on the trail.

One sign I noticed was quite literally a sign—multiple signs, in fact. Periodic signs attached to trees marked the trail so that hikers don't get lost. The little signs were also made of metal, but unlike the discarded cans they didn't seem to detract from the experience of getting away from it all. In fact, I was quite thankful for them since it was hot, and I didn't bring enough water to wander around lost all day. Then I noticed a host of other things: bridges built over small creeks kept hikers' feet dry and those same feet stomped back the growth of foliage over time wearing a clear pathway into the land. Even hikers in the front of our group influenced the experiences of those in the back by accidentally frightening an eastern hognose snake off the trail.

Nature is a key concept in environmental philosophy, yet it remains one of its murkiest. In one sense 'nature' seems to mean 'devoid of human influence.' According to this definition, we ruin nature by our very presence. All use is ab-use, to paraphrase William Cronon's critique. This is problematic since all living beings must influence their environment in some way to survive. But it's also problematic because only some human influence seems to ruin our encounters with the natural: cans but not signs, for instance.

Nature can also mean the totality of the physical world. Aluminum cans, snakes, supernovas, quarks, and even people are all natural in this sense. That's a lot of stuff. Most of it is in fact devoid of human influence. The distant moons of Jupiter are still people-free—even during peak tourist season. In this sense, it seems odd to worry about polluting nature with our presence when there is still so much of it out there.

It seems to me then that nature is best thought of, not as an ontological concept, but an aesthetic and normative one. This is clear once we recognize that claims to protect or preserve parts of nature are often also sites of power struggles.

In 2015, Cecil the Lion was shot in Zimbabwe by a trophy-hunting dentist from Minnesota. People from places where lions don't live donated record-breaking amounts of money to the conservation group studying Cecil. Yet lions routinely kill people. Many Zimbabweans who live alongside the lion preserves, which were established through colonial regimes and are sustained through foreign wealth, felt differently about Cecil's death.

While I think lions and other vulnerable parts of nature warrant our protection, the nature we protect can't mean one devoid of people, those living alongside lions and others. Better understanding how nature functions as a normative concept can help us identify and think through these power struggles. In any case, I'm glad we didn't have to worry about encountering lions on our hike, but I wish I had gotten a better look at that snake.



Eric Godoy

THANK YOU!

The Department of Philosophy would like to thank all those who have generously offered their support over the past year:

A.J. Barron '95
Reston, Virginia

Douglas Crossman '86
Bloomington

James and Marty Jacobs '73
Normal

David and Constance MacTaggart '80
Libertyville

Daniel and Shannon Melzer '14
Palm City, Florida

Laura and Ronald Rohlving '77
Chandler, Arizona

Solomon and Sara Rutzky '96
Raleigh, North Carolina

Denise Vowell '74
Bentonville, Virginia

Lanny Waitsman '92
Highland Park

I graduated from the program in 2014, and while I was applying for new jobs and going through all my old files looking for transcripts etc., I became quite nostalgic about the time I spent at Illinois State in the Philosophy Department. I cannot overstate how important my education from the Philosophy Department and my interactions with philosophy faculty members and students have been for my growth, both personally and professionally. —Daniel Melzer '14



For more information, visit
Homecoming.IllinoisState.edu

Alumni News

Starting with our next newsletter, we would like to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of our alumni. If you graduated from ISU and either majored or minored in philosophy and would like us to acknowledge a recent event in your life (e.g. finished a graduate degree, started a new job, received a promotion, won an award, etc.) send us an email at Philosophy@IllinoisState.edu and let us know! Include a mention of the year you graduated in the message, and we'll include it in our next newsletter!

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