

# WABASH philosophy NEWSLETTER

## Philosophy Club Gets Official

by J. Patrick Wright '15

Wabash College prides itself on its students' level of commitment to cultivating a community of effective thinkers and responsible citizens. Through student-run clubs and organizations, Wabash men display their passion for academic excellence and community involvement. This strong sense of community is one of the many reasons I came to Wabash in the first place, and as a senior I continue to be concerned with nurturing such a community.

As a philosophy major, I couldn't help but feel like the humanities were somewhat lacking in such involvement. Relatively few lectures or campus events are concerned with subjects in the humanities, and philosophy in particular. I knew that this was not due to a lack of passion for philosophy as a subject, students in the department will tell you that through thorough in-class discussions, strong relationships are built quite easily, as philosophy is an excellent facilitator of meaningful dialogue. Philosophy students very much have a community of their own, but I had hoped to share this community with all students at Wabash.

When Dr. Trott approached me about putting together a philosophy club, I thought it was a great opportunity to establish a presence for philosophy in the greater Wabash community. While I knew that philosophy faculty would be quite helpful as we made progress, I felt it

would be important to have philosophy club be student-centered in its focus. For this reason, most of our early meetings consisted of relatively informal discussions about whatever philosophical subjects students felt like talking about. Fortunately, our discussions were always fruitful and worthwhile. I always brought some text or video to discuss, while being open to the potential emergence of new subjects and ideas.

This semester we also sponsored a discussion about drone strikes lead by Dr. Gower. This subject has been in the news for a few years now, and it was accessible and interesting to people of all departments at Wabash. My hope for the club moving forward is to have more all-campus events which will be recognizable and accessible to those outside the department. As I said, philosophy can apply to just about anything, so opportunities for interdepartmental involvement should be plentiful.

I'll admit that our attendance has not been what I had hoped this year, but I am very pleased with the quality of our meetings as a whole. Through analyzing films, short stories, and current events through a philosophical lens, we have been able to capture what I think is the essence of a philosophical community, engaging in meaningful dialogue about pretty much anything.

## Undergraduate Ancient Philosophy Workshop!

Students from GLCA schools present  
on Aristotle's *Politics* at Antioch!

December 3.

**Keynote Speaker:**

**Sara Brill,**

**Fairfield University**

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## "What Are You Going to Do with That?" Alumni on Majoring in Philosophy

We were pleased to welcome two of our philosophy alumni back to campus in October. Burt Carlson '59 and Prof. Paul Spade '66 both joined us to answer the question, "What are you going to do with that?"—about their lives and careers after completing their philosophy majors at Wabash. Carlson talked about the constant challenges of his "accidental career" as he moved through a Masters program at Yale Divinity, worked as a chaplain and community organizer, became a State Planning Coordinator in Utah, then served as a congressional aide on Capitol Hill before joining the staff at the Departments of Labor and Education. He encouraged students to "question everything"—but most importantly yourself—and to be open to challenge.

Prof. Paul Spade '66 met with our current philosophy majors and minors to talk about his distinguished career as a recognized authority on medieval philosophy and his expansive teaching in existentialism and interests in jazz. He is now Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Indiana University, and he talked about his own path through graduate study and into a career devoted to research and teaching in philosophy.

### Thinking about a Major?



**Major in thinking.**

# Philosophy Students Present Research

## Building Community, Sharing Ideas

by J. Patrick Wright '15

*In November, 3 senior philosophy majors presented papers alongside 3 students from Earlham and three from Antioch College. Students from Wabash and one student from Antioch commented on papers.*

In the fall semester, the Philosophy Senior Seminar had the pleasure of participating in the first GLCA Ancient Philosophy Workshop here at Wabash. This student workshop was part of a three-year grant won by Adriel Trott and colleagues from Earlham and Antioch Colleges to support collaboration on Ancient Philosophy Teaching and Research among member colleges of the Great Lakes Colleges Association. Senior philosophy major, Patrick Wright, offered this description of the experience:

Having methodically trodden through *The Republic* of Plato for an entire semester, our class had begun work on our final papers, attempting to pull together a cohesive thesis from this remarkably thorough and intriguing philosophical text. All Platonic dialogues require a significant amount of both literary and philosophical interpretation, and *The Republic* is no exception. Within our class alone, no two projects shared the same focus and we quickly came to appreciate the scope of Plato's work, as well as the vast possibilities for its interpretation.

The GLCA workshop provided an excellent opportunity to expand our appreciation and also to engage in philosophical dialogue with students and faculty from Earlham and Antioch Colleges. My project was to show

that Plato's Socrates encourages a plurality of opinions in the political community, each of which contributes to the community's holistic understanding of the Good. While my project did suffer from a few interpretive and syntactic mistakes, the workshop provided at least some confirmation of my position. Students and professors alike had plenty of excellent questions and suggestions which I made use of in the final edits of my paper and continue to think about as I revisit *The Republic*.

Hearing other students' papers yielded many of the same benefits, offering new perspectives on *The Republic* to be made use of both in my comprehensive understanding of the work as well as my individual project. The variety of papers drew attention to Plato's ability to touch on a plethora of philosophical issues, from the paradoxical nature of rule of law to the role of women in political communities.

Aside from all of its academic benefits, as a philosopher I can say that I truly enjoyed my experience at the workshop. Philosophy always happens in some form of dialogue, and being able to participate in such a dialogue with a community of thinkers from both inside and outside of the walls of this college was personally and academically beneficial to each one of us. It reminds us all of the true benefits of living in philosophical communities.

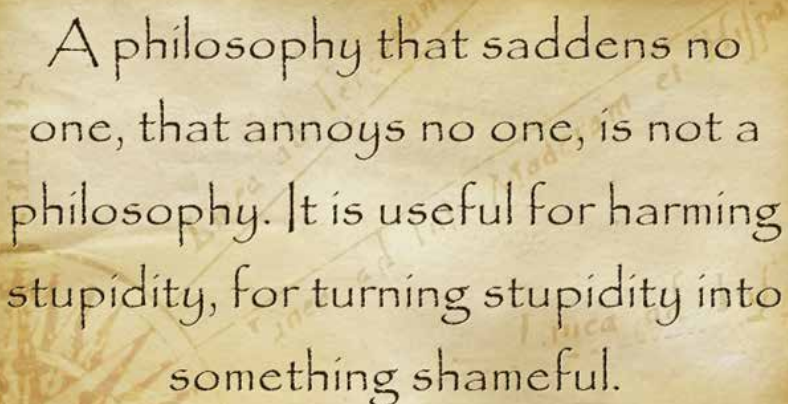
## "CELEBRATION" RESEARCH

by Tanner Watson '15

After taking Professor Trott's philosophy of race class in the spring of 2014, I knew that I wanted to study those issues further. Understanding the way race plays a role in our society and being able to explain that to other people became very important to me, so in the fall I decided to embark on an independent study.

In this independent study I spent the semester with professor Trott and fellow student Tyler Hampton studying a variety of topics related to race, but specifically a theoretical foundation on how race came to be and how it fits into our society. While I found the readings to be difficult, the discussions I had with professor Trott and Tyler were very fruitful. The type of work that goes into an independent study was different than a normal philosophy course in that sometimes we would spend weeks on a specific reading, and, somewhat similar to a senior seminar, the goal of the semester was to produce a paper that was philosophically interesting.

By the end of the semester I had produced my essay titled "How the State Became Racist" and presented my findings at the Celebration of Research. This was a very enjoyable culminating experience where I was able to present my argument to faculty, students, and friends on what I had been studying for a little over a year. Presenting this essay helped me understand my own arguments and also made me aware of further questions that I could explore. At the end of the day I would recommend participating in the Celebration of Research to anyone who is studying a topic they are truly passionate about.



A philosophy that saddens no one, that annoys no one, is not a philosophy. It is useful for harming stupidity, for turning stupidity into something shameful.

- Gilles Deleuze

# Philosophy of Race at All Campus Brother 2 Brother

by Adam Kashin '18

*On April 6th and 13th, the members of the Malcolm X Institute invited Wabash students to participate in an "All Campus Brother 2 Brother"—a chance to explore how race is defined in our society and deliberate about how race affects our lives on and off campus. They invited the students in Dr. Adriel Trott's class on Philosophy of Race and Dr. Sara Drury's RHET 290 students to help direct the discussion and deliberation. Adam Kashin described his experience as a member of Dr. Trott's class:*

In Dr. Trott's Philosophy of Race course, we have worked this semester to understand how race is perceived and in turn managed in modern society. In our preparation for the discussions on the status of race and race relations, we worked to uncover the various viewpoints from which race as a significant social value is understood; we labored to understand

the ontological value of race, especially because we know that race is not a natural or biological reality. We notice and sometimes acknowledge the pressure we feel not to talk about race, yet problems of race and race relations pervade our experience of the world. How do we explain this?

Dr. Trott taught us the primary ways of conceptualizing race: The constructionist view is the idea that race gains its value and/or reality from the intersubjective interactions between individuals within a society. The realist view refers to the idea that race has a real, natural and undeniable value, that race is a factor that naturally defines one's character and is a determinant of one's actions.

The students who attended the two nights of discussion were a very diverse crowd, representing numerous views and groups on campus. This diversity contributed to a fantastic and ultimately productive discussion by the

end of the second evening. As a student in Dr. Trott's Philosophy of Race class, I was able to notice the rhetoric that conclusively keeps race as an ontological reality and real demarcation of value within our society.

From the first night to the second night the nature of discussion changed, as the discourse shifted from one of identifying how race is defined to one of considering how the problems of race can be fixed, including how we can change the way race is understood as a recognized sociopolitical entity.

These discussions served to bring the reality of race as discovered by these classes to the general populace of Wabash. Students from all over Wabash's campus came to participate in an incredibly fruitful discussion about the nature of race that has served to push the entire campus in a new direction, a direction that in turn should be well received by the greater American polity.

## Reports from Graduate School

by Alex Gillham '13 & Sam Bennett '14

*Two recent philosophy graduates are currently in the PhD program at Purdue.*

*Alex Gillham, class of 2013, is completing his second year in the program, and he sent this update:* The best part about the philosophy department here is the sense of community. One often hears horror stories about PhD programs elsewhere, and many of those stories have to do with there being a lot of competition, rivalry, and enmity among graduate students. Everyone here is quite friendly with one another, and always willing to lend a helping hand. There's no animosity between the continental and analytic types, for example. In general, everyone is extremely welcoming and respectful of one another, which has made things quite enjoyable. I even spend a lot of social time with my colleagues in the department. I can't say enough about how great the people are in the department here. I'm lucky to be in this sort of environment.

I'll be done with course work after this semester, which will be really nice. So I'll start working on a prospectus next semester, which I'll have to defend by the end of my third year. I have no idea what I intend to write my dissertation on

yet, but it'll almost surely end up being about some problem in the ancient tradition. Summer will be really busy for me. I'm teaching Introduction to Philosophy in the Maymester, which starts a few days after this semester ends. I teach until June 12th, and then I'm off to France. I recently won a grant to attend a conference in Nancy on the crossroads between French philosophy and contemporary philosophy of science. It'll be nice to spend some time abroad again. Once I'm back stateside in late June, I'll devote myself to studying for my preliminary exams in the history of philosophy, which I'll take at the end of August. Wish me luck.

*Sam Bennett, class of 2014, is in his first year at Purdue, and he wrote to offer some advice to others who might be thinking about graduate school:* With my first year of graduate work coming to a close, here's the most worthwhile advice that I can share:

Neglect your impulses to assume. Whether you're considering the possibility of furthering the scope of your academic life or ending it after your time at Wabash, do not imagine that you've got a clear picture of what the former might look like. There are philosophical traditions thriving that you may have never thought had any life to them; secondary literature is much more important than you might currently believe; the community is strong and diverse, both supportive and taming, while the work is heavy and sometimes monotonous. Some things were just as I expected them to be, but often I have encountered foreign hues, brushstrokes that frighten and astound, and seminars that seemed so out of my element that sometimes I felt the need to double check my departmental affiliation. All of this within a year....Grad school isn't Wabash, and as obvious as that might seem, it means a lot more than I ever thought that it would.

Fall 2015 Visiting Speaker:

Thursday, September 24, 2015 @ 4:15 PM, Center Hall 215

Prof. Kevin Miles, Earlham College

"Animal Analogies and Politics in Hesiodic Poetry."



# Philosophy Dept. Welcomes New Faculty

Prof. Matthew Carlson is completing his first year as Byron K. Trippett Assistant Professor of Philosophy. Matt completed his PhD in Philosophy with a minor in History and Philosophy of Science at Indiana University in Bloomington. Originally from Washington state, he has both a BA in Philosophy and a Bachelor of Music in Tuba Performance from Oberlin College. He specializes in epistemology and philosophy of logic but also has very broad interests in history of philosophy, philosophy of science, and political philosophy. He gave a talk on the philosophy of mathematics ("Paradoxes and the Infinite") for the math colloquium series on campus in January, and he's preparing a paper on Frege's philosophy of logic for the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of the History of Analytical Philosophy in Dublin, Ireland, this summer. His paper on Quine's philosophy of logic will be in print later this spring in the *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy*. Matt's wife Brea has also joined the Wabash Community bringing her musical talent, as an accomplished flute player in the college orchestra, and her acting talent, as part of the cast in "Guys and Dolls" and "The Beaux' Stratagem."

Prof. Jeffrey D. Gower joined us this year as Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy. He did his graduate work at Villanova University, where he concentrated on continental philosophy, political philosophy, ethics, and the history of philosophy. His topical interests include political theology, the history of the concept of sovereignty, ethical and legal issues concerning the state's response to terrorism, and the relationship between philosophy and literature. While doing dissertation research, Jeff received a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service and spent a year studying at Albert Ludwig University in Freiburg im Breisgau. In Freiburg he enjoyed attending lectures in the same hall where Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger taught. Having grown up amidst the mountains and lakes of the Pacific Northwest, he also enjoyed taking long hikes in the Black Forest. Jeff retains a strong interest in the German language and in German philosophy, literature, art, and film. He has enjoyed working with the Philosophy Club this year. Landing here is a wonderful – and strange – twist of fate: Jeff's father is a member of the Wabash class of '68!



## Fall Course Offerings:

PHI 109: Minds, Bodies, Machines, Helman, MWF 2:10 1/2  
 PHI 109: The Idea of Free Will, Helman, MWF 2:10 1/2  
 PHI 109: Intro to History of Philosophy, Trott, T TH 2:40  
 PHI 110: Philosophical Ethics, Helman, T TH 1:10 PM  
 PHI 140: Ancient Philosophy, Trott, MWF 9 AM  
 PHI 349 / PSC 331: Aristotle's Political, T TH 9:45 AM  
 PHI 270: Elem. Symbolic Logic, Carlson. MWF 10  
 PHI 272: Philosophy of Science, Carlson, MWF 11 AM  
 PHI 345: Continental Philosophy, Gower, MWF 1:10 PM  
 PHI 449: Sr Seminar: Kant's 1st Critique, Helman, MWF 11 AM

## PHI 109: Perspectives On Philosophy

For a number of years, the Philosophy Department has had a new introductory course, PHI 109 Perspectives on Philosophy. This course is organized around a topic that can provide examples of philosophical reflection and inquiry for students who have never had any philosophy. We have used a range of topics, including The Idea of Free Will, Minds, Bodies and Machines, and Friendship. This year we've added two more topics offered by our newest faculty, Jeff Gower and Matt Carlson. Here are their descriptions:

### Self-Reliance

A liberal arts education at a place like Wabash gives young men the opportunity to discover new freedoms and the responsibilities they entail. In college, one has the chance to cultivate a new sense of independence and to learn how to rely on oneself. But what does "self-reliance" really mean? What, or who, is the "self" on whom we are called to rely when Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his canonical essay "Self-Reliance," challenges each one of us with the imperative to "Trust thyself"? In the fall semester, PHI 109 Perspectives on Philosophy: Self-Reliance turned to the philosophical tradition of American Transcendentalism to raise questions concerning selfhood, independence, and nature. Working through texts by Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Stanley Cavell, and Annie Dillard, students gained experience in the difficult art of close, philosophical reading and explored the possibility that authentic selfhood might be cultivated through practices of reading and writing. The authors discussed in the course exemplify how these practices have the capacity to attune us to the overwhelming beauty and force of nature. Through reading, writing, and philosophical dialogue, we put these ideas to the test, attempting to see nature with a heightened sensitivity, as a provocation to see ourselves and others anew.

### Video Games and Philosophy

This course serves as an introduction to philosophy by means of thinking about video games. On the one hand, this means that thinking about video games can help us to shed light on perennial philosophical questions. For example: Who are we? Do we have a choice in this matter? What is freedom, and what does it mean to say that we are free to act as we choose? What is real, and how do we know about it? On the other hand, work in philosophy can help us to consider important questions concerning video games. For instance: Are video games art? If so, what kind of an art form are they? If not, what, if anything, makes it worthwhile to spend one's time playing games? Is it right to blast that zombie with a shotgun? Does it even make sense to think about ethical questions in video games?