

Philosophy Newsletter



June 2018



Horner: Service and the Examined Life

Professor Matt Carlson

The philosophy department is proud to recognize the achievements of Hank Horner '18, whose dedication to community service was recognized this spring when he won both the Raters Award at Wabash Fraternity Day and the Indiana College Career Center Consortium's 2018 Paul W. Gabonay Volunteer Service Award.

Hank's service contributions include fundraising for the Red Cross Foundation to aid in hurricane relief, organizing student days of service in Crawfordsville, and serving as a volunteer basketball coach for a local fifth-grade team.

Horner enthusiastically agrees there is a connection between his study of philosophy and his community service. He explains that he came to Wabash planning to major in economics and minor in business, but that he found himself increasingly thinking about why exactly he was doing that. In a coincidence he describes as "perfectly timed," Horner took both economics and philosophy of commerce in his sophomore year. He says philosophy of commerce really helped him ask a lot of questions that he was already considering in his economics courses. In particular, he says that studying philosophy really pressed him to ask, "Do I want to major in economics because I want to be a good capitalist? Should I want that? How am I going to define a successful life for myself?"

On the basis of his study of philosophy, Horner came to believe that living an examined life, as Socrates enjoins us to do, leads one to realize there is "more to life than just myself." He now conceives of a successful life as one in which he recognizes that he is "always part of a larger community," and his significant work in community service attests to this belief. The philosophy department is proud to have played a role in Horner's development and clarification of his life goals.



Contents

- 2 Sealey Delivers Cotton Lecture
Epistemology and Travel
- 3 A History of J. Harry Cotton and
the Lecture in Philosophy
- 4 Atkins Presents at Workshop
Sodipe Awarded J. Harry Cotton
Prize

Kris Sealey Delivers J. Harry Cotton Lecture in Philosophy

Jaleel Grandberry

After a snow storm, a postponing, and a last minute room change, Professor Kris Sealey, of Fairfield University, finally got to deliver a lecture to a classroom packed with members of the Wabash community in April.

In her talk titled "This Land is Your Land, This Land is My Land: Identity, Difference and the Nation," Sealey offered her thoughts on how we move away from a society that showcases our differences in a negative light. She argued that we, as a nation, often work to align ourselves with some specific identity. By doing this, we make it easy to divide between those we think truly belong and those who do not. This puts our identities in opposition to one another. This form of identification allows for hierarchal structures to exist. Additionally, this categorization does not capture who we are in full.

As a solution, Sealey looks to Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant, who writes about creolization. Creolization is the idea that we are not truly one thing, but a mix and combination of many. He uses the image of rhizomes—plants that do not have one central root, but many places from which they grow—in contrast to root conceptions of identity. Creolization and rhizomes encourage us to see belonging not in terms of being related to a single identity or a root but in terms of multiple ways of being in relation. By adopting this philosophy, we do not sector ourselves off as a society, we understand that we are all unique, being composed of various factors. Sealey believes this will lead to an "understanding of difference that is not a threat," creating a more inclusive environment for all.

This concept was a new perspective for many, demonstrated by the pondering faces in the crowd as they worked to grasp Sealey's ideas. Members of the audience concluded the lecture with questions on how we go about implementing this idea of creolization. Sealey responded that having the conversation and simply allowing ourselves to imagine is the first step.

Epistemology and Travel

Nick Budler '19

In the Spring of 2018 I studied abroad in South Korea. My beliefs about Korea were particularly naïve before I arrived and this made my experience even more remarkable. Of course, I could drink Soju, watch K-dramas, and listen to BTS before going, but the depth and breadth of culture there goes far beyond what is normally comprehended by people who have never been.

In fact, before going I took an Asian studies course, spent time doing research on the Internet, talked to friends who have either been to Korea or who are Korean, and, naturally, watched the Winter Olympics (probably more than I should have). I've also had the privilege of traveling before and figured I'd be just fine winging it. Instead, however, I went on to accidentally insult a security guard on the first day, to know nothing about culturally- and religiously-dictated interactions with locals, and to be largely in the dark about most aspects of Korean life.

This experience revealed something epistemologically curious. Regardless of the efforts I made beforehand, I couldn't manage to gain the kind of depth of knowledge that was needed to avoid the experiences I encountered above. In particular, it seemed that much of the information we rely on in the West (especially on the Internet) is lacking in regard to Korean culture. There's no Yelp there, the best restaurants are often not on maps, and the people I talked to mostly offered generalizations. I used both testimony and the Internet to build a body of information that I quickly learned was full of errors and gaps.

Before my trip abroad I was able to take Professor Carlson's PHI269, a course that focused on epistemological issues of

the Internet. We studied a variety of ways in which testimony makes it harder to gain knowledge than experience does. This led me to realize that, often, the further removed we are from the information we receive (assuming, as I do here, that we can trust our senses), the more difficult it seems to be to justify that information—a key component in having knowledge (justified true beliefs).

This certainly seems true for untestable information on the Internet. Even in regard to the testimony of people we trust, we can't be sure. One answer to this problem is skepticism (refraining from judgement) towards testimony and information in general. This would mean disregarding available information and not bothering to muster an attempt at justifying your beliefs. Another option, then, is going out and experiencing the world—partially so we can test the epistemological trustworthiness of our beliefs and partly because sometimes it's just not possible to know otherwise, as I learned of Korea.

Whenever possible, then, we should strive to gather information ourselves: both to gain epistemological certainty and knowledge but also as the experience and process of taking in information via our sense perception is extremely valuable and enriching to our lives. Yes, knowledge is important to us and we should care for epistemological reasons, but there are more reasons to experience the world ourselves: it's beautiful, scary, complex, and fascinating—it makes all of life an experience. I won't remember Korea as much for the epistemological certainty it afforded as I will for everything I experienced there.

A History of J. Harry Cotton and the Lecture in Philosophy

The J. Harry Cotton Fund in philosophy was established in 1977 to honor longtime philosophy professor, J. Harry Cotton, who taught at Wabash College from 1947 to 1969. A fund was generously endowed by alumni of the College, who took courses from Prof. Cotton. The initial purpose of this fund was to establish the J. Harry Cotton Prize, given to the senior who has done the best work in philosophy during the year and who exemplifies the qualities manifested by Cotton himself: humanity and scholarship in the liberal arts tradition. In 1984, the Fund also began to sponsor the J. Harry Cotton Lectureship in Philosophy which would bring a distinguished philosopher to campus occasionally. That same year, the first J. Harry Cotton Lecture was given by Gregory Vlastos, a scholar in ancient philosophy from Princeton University. Since that time, every few years, we have invited a philosopher to campus to give this lecture. Thanks to the generosity of our alumni over the last 40 years, we intend to sponsor a Cotton Lecture every year, to ensure that philosophy is represented in the Awards Chapel, and in the mix of excellent speakers and programs at Wabash College.

In preparation for this year's annual lecture, Adriel Trott did some background research on Cotton and discovered some interesting and inspiring facts about his life and work:

James Harry Cotton was born in 1898 and died in 1982. He earned a bachelor degree at the College of Wooster and a Ph.D. at Princeton and honorary degrees from Wooster in 1929 and Wabash in 1938. He left Wooster in the middle of his college years to serve in the First World War. While in graduate school, he was an assistant professor at Wooster and then pastored a Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio from 1928-1940. After taking his doctorate from Princeton and during his time as pastor, he lectured at universities and missions in India, China and Japan. Before coming to Wabash, Dr. Cotton was the president of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. One of his students at McCormick Seminary, Raymond B. Knudsen, who went on to become a pastor and a trustee of Alma College in Michigan, tells the story of Dr. Cotton finding out around Christmas time

that Knudsen's son was sick, calling him into his office and giving him a check to make sure the family had a good Christmas. This kind of humanitarian spirit is evident in much of his life.

Cotton came to Wabash in 1947 and served as the chair of the philosophy department until 1961, when he left Wabash to be a department head at Harvard Divinity School. In 1964, he returned to Wabash from Harvard and taught here until 1969. He published three books, *The Christian Experience of Life* (1933), *Christian Knowledge of God* (1951), and *Royce on the Human Self* (1954) and numerous articles, most notably philosophy of religion and on Josiah Royce. In a recent Presidential Address to the Josiah Royce Society at the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Royce's birth, Prof. John J. McDermott, leading Royce scholar, began with thanks to, and I quote, "the earlier and influential work of J. Harry Cotton." At Wabash, Cotton taught a two semester Introduction to Philosophy course, and is described by one former student as wearing tweed, smoking a pipe as he taught, often rattling off paragraphs of Plato or Aristotle in Greek. He was the president of the American Theological Society and the Indiana Philosophical Association.

Dr. Cotton was a politically engaged academic, advocating for civil rights, free speech for Communists, anti-imperialism and peace around the world before those things became respectable opinions. In 1933, he served as a delegate at the Ohio convention to ratify the 21st Amendment that outlawed the production and sale of alcohol. His wife was an alternative delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1956, where Adlai Stevenson was nominated. Cotton served on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Special Committee on a Righteous Peace in 1943, which was part of an ecumenical effort to seek a firm foundation for peace around the world. He was a member along with Mary McLeod Bethune (civil rights and women's rights activist and influential educator), Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (Baptist pastor and 4th Black person in the 20th century to be elected to Congress, representing Harlem from 1945-1971), Philip Jaffe, Elmer Rice (American playwright) and Mary E. Woolley

(first woman to attend Brown, and first president of Mount Holyoke University) of the American Round Table on India, which supported Indian independence from British rule in coordinated efforts with the NAACP, and was described in the California Senate Special Report on Education as a "communist front." This remarkable cast is mentioned to note the historical significance and radicality of the community with whom Cotton wished to align himself.

In 1944, Cotton gave an address in which he charged students to consider the importance of liberal arts in changing the world. He spoke of an urgency of addressing the liberal arts to the issues facing our shared world that is remarkable for remaining so timely. He said,

"We are now beginning to understand that not only our political freedom, but our academic liberty is in danger; that the very civilization that has nurtured our liberal arts tradition is threatened; that the world can no longer tolerate the luxury of Olympian aloofness on the part of its university people. In other words, the college must be aware of political issues; it must be stirred by the prospects of post-war unemployment; it has a stake in Negro slums and in the labor unions. If the Liberal Arts college persists in its treason it will encounter the usual penalty of this offense—the death sentence. It is for the life of the Liberal Arts tradition that I am pleading."

It is in this spirit of humanity and scholarship that we hold the Annual J. Harry Cotton Lecture each year.

in his book *The Word and Words Made Flesh: A Story of Faith in Practice* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1999).

John J. McDermott, "Josiah Royce: Alive and Well," in *The Relevance of Royce*, ed. Kelly A. Parker and Jason Bell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

Mark J. Englund-Krieger, *The Presbyterian Pendulum: Seeing Providence in the Wild Diversity of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 100n44.

Journal of the Senate, Legislature of California, Report from Senate Investigating Committee on Education, 130.

Fall 2018 Philosophy Course Offerings

PHI 109

Perspectives on Philosophy: Nature

Trott, MWF 1:10

PHI 110

Philosophical Ethics

Hughes, T TH 1:10

PHI 124

Philosophy and Film

Gower, T 1:10-3:55, TH 1:10-2:25

PHI 213

Philosophy of Law

Hughes, MWF 2:10

PHI 240

Ancient Philosophy

Trott, MWF 11:00

PHI 269

**Topics in Epistemology:
Knowledge and Skepticism**

Carlson, T TH 9:45

PHI 270

Elementary Symbolic Logic

Carlson, MWF 10:00

PHI 299

Philosophy of Education

Seltzer-Kelly, T TH 2:40

PHI 345

Continental Philosophy

Hughes, MWF 9:00

PHI 449

**Senior Seminar:
The Philosophy of David Hume**

Carlson, T TH 2:40

Atkins Presents at Workshop

This past December I had the opportunity to present the paper I wrote for Dr. Trott's PHI 449 class at the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) Ancient Philosophy Workshop. Over the course of the semester, the class had been working on a 15-page paper over the difficulty of self-examination through the works of Plato and James Baldwin. At the end of the semester, Adrian Tejada '18 and I were asked by Dr. Trott to present our papers at a workshop at Earlham College. Once Dr. Trott had informed Adrian and me that we would be presenting, we didn't know if we should be excited or scared that we were presenting. The task of writing a 15-page paper for Dr. Trott was frightening enough, but the fact that we had to present it was possibly even more frightening.

In preparation for the conference, Adrian and I had gone over our papers many times reading them aloud to each other, fine-tuning the paper for a new audience.

When we got to the workshop, it was fantastic to meet other philosophy majors from other schools including Antioch and Earlham Colleges. When I went up to present, I was comforted by the smiling faces of those whom I had met during the day, not ready to judge me for what I had written, but excited to hear what I had been working on for an entire semester. Once I had finished, I was reassured in what I had previously thought. Everybody listening was not offering questions to try to stump me, but they were offering questions to help further my thinking in the paper. While Dr. Trott is a fantastic professor, the experience of having three other professors critique my paper was not frightening in the slightest. It was an amazing experience being able to defend my ideas in a way that gave me insight into the shortcomings of my own writing from a new set of voices. While I was hesitant at first to present my paper, I'm glad that I was given the opportunity to present and would absolutely jump at the chance to present again.



Sodiipe Awarded J.Harry Cotton Prize



Immanuel Mitchell-Sodiipe was this year's recipient of the J. Harry Cotton Prize at the Awards Chapel in April. The award is named for longtime philosophy professor J. Harry Cotton, and it is given to the senior who has done the best work in philosophy during the year and who exemplifies the qualities manifested by Cotton himself: humanity and scholarship in the liberal arts tradition. We think Professor Cotton might be particularly pleased with Immanuel's passion for community organizing and grass-roots politics since Cotton was a politically engaged academic who advocated for civil rights, free speech, anti-imperialism, and peace around the world throughout his career. Immanuel is working full-time for the State Employees International Union in Chicago after graduation and hopes to apply to graduate school in the near future.