

Wabash Philosophy NEWSLETTER



Spring 2019



Wabash Introduces New Major in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics

Professor Jeffrey Gower

During pre-registration this spring, Wabash students had the opportunity to choose courses with a new designation: "PPE." These courses serve the new, multidisciplinary major in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics that was developed over the last year through collaboration between the Philosophy, Political Science and Economics Departments. PPE was first established at Oxford in the 1920s. It seeks to provide students with a firm grounding in each of the three disciplines while focusing on where these disciplines intersect. Through exposure to three distinct fields, PPE majors not only become familiar with different methods and modes of inquiry but also learn to appreciate the complexity of social problems and to analyze and interpret them from multiple perspectives.

At Wabash, PPE majors will take introductory, intermediate, and advanced classes in Philosophy, Political Science, and Economics as well as classes designed specifically to put these disciplines in dialogue with one another. These PPE-specific classes include Introduction to PPE, which will be taught for the first time in the spring of 2020, and the PPE Senior Seminar, which will be taught for the first time in the fall of 2020.

(continued on back page)

Contents

2

Parens Delivers 2019 Cotton
Lecture

3

Philosophy in the Game Lab

4

Reports from Class of '17

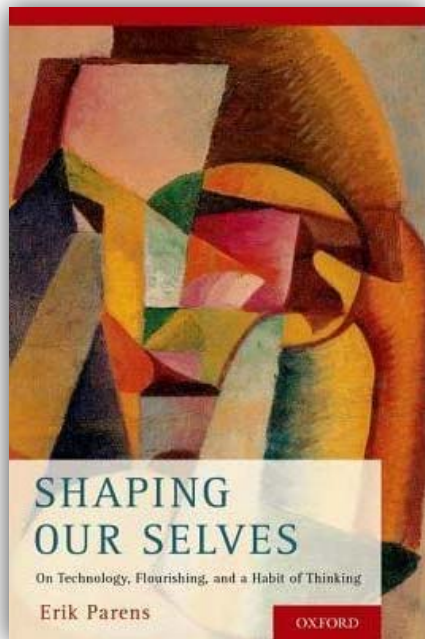
5

Budler Awarded Cotton Prize

Erik Parens Delivers 2019 J. Harry Cotton Lecture

Aaron Webb '20

Dr. Erik Parens, senior research scholar at the Hastings Center, delivered this year's J. Harry Cotton Lecture in Philosophy on the evening of March 27th. His lecture was a homecoming of sorts, as Parens taught at Wabash College near the beginning of his career. With some familiar faces in the audience, Parens presented his talk entitled, "Comprehending Persons: Notes from a Bioethics Research Institute." In addition to his lecture,



Parens visited our bioethics class to discuss his most recent book, *Shaping Our Selves: On Technology, Flourishing, and a Habit of Thinking*, which we read during the weeks leading up to his lecture. Parens' visit ended with a lunch with students in the department. Parens' visit challenged what he has termed "monocular" thinking in hopes that we may think more "binocularly" about ethical quandaries. Though he developed it by considering bioethical questions relating to enhancement, his proposed habit of binocularity can be applied to most other aspects of thought and has the potential to promote more well-considered and reasoned actions.

Dr. Parens first proposed binocularity in *Shaping Our Selves*. Binocularity requires a thinker to consider multiple "lenses" as they relate to the issue of concern. This is opposed to monocularity, in which a thinker only considers one vantage point on the problem in question. The lenses to be considered depend on the issue. Dr. Parens focused on the issue of enhancement, or using medical intervention to raise a person's quality of life above normal or average standards. Applying his habit of thinking, Parens argues we can view the issue of enhancement through two different lenses: the object and subject lens. Using the object lens, one seeks to understand the outside forces influencing a person's experiences. Through the subject lens, we look at a person's ability to freely choose and decide how they make their way in the world. Parens recognizes the impossibility of considering each lens simultaneously but argues that through oscillating between these two lenses, we can achieve a greater understanding of our own personhoods. Parens concluded his lecture with a discussion of action. He explained that although action ultimately favors one lens over others, a process of binocular thinking leading to action is preferred to pure monocularity of thought.

Parens fielded questions following his lecture and a few critical points were voiced, leading to a spirited discussion between Parens and the audience. The questions varied in topic from knowing when binocularity should transition to action, to applying this sort of thinking to tragedies like mass shootings, to the possibility for binocularity to aid in compromises in action. The questions were difficult, but Parens handled each gracefully and answered each honestly even if he could not provide a definitive response. Indeed, it seemed many others in the room were hesitant to state positions with certainty. I believe this hesitancy is Parens' binocularity at its best. When considering multiple lenses, we move away from stating what is right and wrong without reservations and towards generating fruitful conversations where understanding takes priority. Pursuing these deeper understandings should induce us to pause, reflect, and oscillate between lenses when speaking and acting. In these moments of reflection and oscillation, I see hope for more considerate and well-informed thoughts to take root and grow into mature and reasoned action.



Philosophy in the Game Lab

Professor Matthew Carlson



Over the past few years, I've been teaching an introductory course on videogames and philosophy. At first, it might not be clear what connection there could be between the most venerable inquiries in human history and a medium that is barely fifty years old, but the central idea of this course is that we can think about each of these topics in a way that sheds light on the other. One way that we do this is by playing and carefully analyzing recent games that raise classic philosophical questions in gripping and immersive ways. *The Walking Dead*, for example, asks us to consider what we should do in situations where our moral concern for people close to us is in conflict with our own self-interest. *Spec Ops: The Line* asks us to inhabit the experience of a soldier and consider what it means to consider someone an ally or an enemy. Games like *Portal*, *BioShock*, and *The Stanley Parable* raise questions about what it means to be free, and what it means to treat ourselves and other beings as agents, as opposed to mere objects. And all of these games indirectly raise philosophical questions concerning art: Can a videogame be a work of art? And what are the special aesthetic possibilities of an artwork that is, like a videogame, interactive?



Each of the games just mentioned provides an inroad to philosophical questions, but to move beyond mere questions, we consider classical and contemporary philosophical texts to help us to understand these questions with a greater degree of depth and nuance. The questions raised by *The Walking Dead*, for example, lead us to classic treatments of ethics in the work of Hobbes, Kant, and Mill. *Portal* provides a dramatic illustration of some of the central themes of Descartes' *Meditations*, including questions concerning who and what we are, and how we can be in a position to know anything about the world around us. *BioShock* leads us directly to ancient questions concerning free will and moral responsibility, as well as much more contemporary issues concerning, for example, the ethics of human biomedical enhancement.

This year, I've had the opportunity to teach this course in a new space: The newly outfitted Game Lab in the Lilly Library. This space has been great since it has allowed us to play through sections of games in class together, analyzing their philosophical content in real time. This space has allowed me to teach the course in a much more interactive way. And this has been very rewarding and useful in part because it fits so well with my conception of philosophy as an *activity*; a way of thinking about the world and our place in it. Accordingly, the main idea of this course is to introduce students to the practice of *doing* philosophy by helping them to think philosophically about things that they would otherwise just do for fun, like playing videogames.

2019 – 2020 Visiting Speakers

Monday, September 23, 2019 @ 7:30 PM, Baxter 101

**Professor Jonathan Maskit, Denison University
PPE Speaker Series Inaugural Lecture**

Friday, October 18, 2019 @ 4:15 PM, Center Hall 215

**Professor Jacob Stump '11, Northeastern University
"Philosophy as a Way of Life"**

Thursday, February 20, 2020 @ 7:30 PM

**Professor Thi Nguyen, Utah Valley University
J. Harry Cotton Lecture in Philosophy**

Fall 2019 Course Offerings:

PHI 109: Humans in the Age of Robots (Trott)

PHI 109: Friendship (Hughes)

PHI 109: Science Fiction and Philosophy (Hughes)

PHI 110: Philosophical Ethics (Hughes)

PHI 218 / PPE 218: Philosophy of Commerce (Gower)

PHI 219 / PPE 228-01: Environmental Philosophy (Gower)

PHI 219 / PPE 228-02: Feminist Philosophy (Trott)

PHI 240: Ancient Philosophy (Trott)

PHI 270: Elementary Symbolic Logic (Carlson)

PHI 299-01: Philosophy of Music (Carlson)

PHI 299-02 / PPE 228-03: Philosophy of Education (Seltzer-Kelly)

PHI 345: Continental Philosophy (Hughes)

PHI 449: Senior Seminar: The Philosophy of David Hume (Carlson)

Reports From Class of 2017 Graduates

Two recent philosophy graduates reflect on the impact of philosophy on their careers

Buddy Lobermann '17

When I was going through the tumult of deciding my next steps after graduation, the thing that did the most to help me figure it out was my philosophy degree. After I graduated in 2017, I went back home to Los Angeles without a real plan. I knew I wanted to do work that I felt made a real difference for people who need it, and I was hesitant to explore a graduate degree given that undergrad was expensive enough. After getting along with a job at a movie theater, I managed to secure a staff position on a statewide political campaign in California. After we successfully cleared the primary, I moved to Bloomington, IN to begin my first year of law school at Indiana University. Since starting here, I can think of no background more useful than my philosophy education.

During my orientation at IU, a law professor told us that the point of law school would be to break us down and get us out of the habits we had learned in our previous schooling, so that we could be built back up as lawyers. I found that this work had already begun in the course of my philosophy education. Of course, I was not being built up to be a lawyer in my time at Wabash, but I was already familiar with what it was like to have my assumptions checked. Not knowing how to process this sort of challenge is probably the biggest stumbling block a person can hit in their intellectual and personal development, and it can be especially pernicious in law school, where we are aspiring to wield a great deal of power by virtue of our professional expertise. Studying philosophy, perhaps above all, is a great exercise in learning how to learn. This has been immensely enabling to me as a law student.

As I begin to approach the end of my first year as a student, I find myself in a strong position, largely due to that advantage I enjoyed from my philosophy education. I'll be spending my first summer working in the Office of the Indiana Attorney General. When I return for my second year, I'll be involved in the leadership of the school's Inmate Legal Assistance Project, and the Environmental Law Society. I'll be at the forefront of the kind of work I dreamed of doing when I applied to law school, and I'm only one year in. I'm still working through my options on what to do when I'm done with law school, but I could hardly be on a better footing to make the best possible decision, and I owe much of that to the critical rigor I learned in the Philosophy Department's classes, and I owe much more to the mentorship I got from Professor Carlson. So while my philosophy degree has not yet spared me from the plague of higher education debt, it has, two years out, put me on the path to a bright future.

Charles Dillahunt '17

My ability to perform well in my professional career stems from studying philosophy at Wabash College. It set me apart from my peers in a unique way, and I am indebted to my former professors for the growth I attained in my time at Wabash. I think my philosophy major was particularly valuable because it taught me how to think outside the box, express my thoughts clearly, and question everything in a way that prepared me for a variety of circumstances in every part of life.

When I was a student at Wabash, people would often ask, "What're you going to do with that degree?" My answer to that question was always: "Anything I enjoy; philosophy majors have no limits to career choice." Part of the reason for this is that every profession has a philosophy behind it, and it's up to the individuals in those fields to not only create it, but also implement it daily. I've worked in the Healthcare, Non-Profit, and Sports Marketing fields as a result, and have been able to easily adapt to each as a result of my philosophical way of thinking.

Philosophy has taught me to ask good questions to help ensure that I am always working towards achieving business goals. From studying Aristotle, I learned to ask, "Is the task I'm performing beneficial to my end goal of being self-sufficient? If it isn't, how can I become more prepared so that I'm working more efficiently toward the mean or end goal?"

I also learned from Friedrich Nietzsche, my favorite philosopher, to follow my own path in life, because everyone's own creative genius lies inside of them. I learned to look inwards for creativity, leaving my own stamp on my work, rather than just follow the lead of others who have come before me all the time.

These are traits that have served me especially well in the sports industry. As the Inclusion and Diversity Engagement Coordinator for the PGA of America, one of the largest sports organizations in the world, I'm responsible for all communications for the Inclusion and Diversity Department. That includes our website, PGAImpact.org, press releases, and all workforce diversification social media channels (@PGAWORKS) across all social media platforms. Each month, I create content plans, gather live content at golf events, and interact with major players in the golf industry whom I've looked up to for years. To perform this job successfully, you have to be able to be creative and prepared in a way that is distinct from those who came before you. My employers have noticed, and yours will as well.

"As a leader, I have a deep respect and appreciation for those that have studied philosophy. Rather than teaching you what to think, philosophy teaches you how to think, and even how to think about thinking. In addition, how to properly form an argument, use logic, be skeptical, and deploy reason. I am glad that Charles has these features as part of his background and believe it will serve him well throughout his career, regardless of his chosen profession."

– Ryan Cannon, PGA REACH Senior Director at the PGA of America

"We are excited and energized about Charles joining our team at the PGA of America. His education and background in philosophy is a very impactful addition to our efforts to advance greater inclusion in the game of golf, the industry's workforce, and supply chain. He brings a new lens and perspective to the table."

– Sandy Cross, Chief People Officer at the PGA of America

Budler Awarded J. Harry Cotton Prize

Nick Budler was awarded this year's J. Harry Cotton Prize at the Awards Chapel in April 2019. This 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 that Nick is very deserving of this award. In addition to distinguishing himself in scholarly work in philosophy, Nick has employed his philosophical background to write essays that directly address humane concerns. His "Shades of Blue," written after the suicide of his father, was published in the Fall 2018 issue of the Wabash Magazine, and he submitted his essay, "Cry Like a Man," to the 2019 essay contest for the Elie Wiesel Foundation Prize in Ethics. In this essay, Nick made use of his study of Hume and theories of masculinity to resist a stoic and overly rational masculinity and develop his own understanding of the importance of emotion and connections to others in the work of grieving. Nick is planning to pursue an M.A. in Communication and Technology after graduation.



WABASH
COLLEGE

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New Major in PPE

(continued from page one)

Co-taught by two faculty members from different departments, these courses will give students the opportunity to integrate the knowledge, methods, and habits of mind initially cultivated in their discipline-specific coursework. The curriculum has also been designed to support students as they develop their own intellectual point of view and discover those concrete social problems that claim their attention and call for further investigation. Work in the Senior Seminar will culminate in a capstone research project.

There is substantial student interest in the new major, and we look forward to

graduating the first PPE cohort in 2021. A robust extracurricular program including public speakers and other events will build unity among the cohort and give PPE a center of gravity. The first event is already on the calendar, and Wabash PPE is pleased to be hosting Dr. Jonathan Maskit of Denison University who will visit Prof. Gower's Environmental Philosophy class in September and give the inaugural lecture in the PPE Speaker Series.

The Philosophy Department is excited to continue its close collaboration with Political Science and Economics as we implement the new program. We look forward to this new opportunity to expose more Wabash students to philosophy and to foster the life of the mind.