

June 29, 2021

Dear Alumnae and Alumni,

Greetings! I hope that you and yours are well. It's been a very difficult, tragic year for so many and continues to be so, especially around the world. But as summer approaches, there is more than a glimmer of hope, at least in our own country. I hope that things are looking up for you wherever you happen to be. The purpose of this letter is to share some news with you about various happenings and achievements in the Department of Philosophy over the past two years.

Fifteen months with Covid

Like the Fall semester of 2019, the first two months of 2020 ran their normal course until BU abruptly shifted to fully remote teaching, as we all became experts in Zoom meetings and other pedagogically useful online media. As you can well imagine, the pandemic had a tumultuous effect on all the members of the Department and our students. The rush to end in-person meetings, whether in classrooms or offices, was quickly followed by the work of interpreting and implementing safe and equitable policies, including daily monitoring and regular testing of everyone who had reason to be on campus. For the entire 2020-2021 academic year, BU deployed a so-called "Learn from Anywhere" (LfA) format of teaching, a hybrid of in person and online teaching, synchronous and asynchronous. Some students remained at home, attending classes from points all around the world; others came to classrooms on the Charles River Campus, masked like their professors, sitting at desks safely spaced apart. The circumstances were extraordinary but so was the number of students who enrolled in our courses: 1572 students in the Fall of 2020 and 1514 in the Spring of 2021 (numbers that would be high even in normal times).

Our faculty meetings, like most courses, relied upon the use of online video media. But slowly things improved, as faculty and students adapted to new formats. Our graduation ceremony in 2020 was an asynchronous event, composed of Youtube videos made by members of the Department. This year, by contrast, we held a live and, by all accounts, successful "Zoomencement" for the graduating seniors and their families, with remarks by students and faculty members. The pandemic also adversely affected our own self-administration, as we went an entire year with only one staff member, thanks to the hiring freeze that prevented us from securing a replacement for our Senior Program Coordinator who left us for a more senior position in February, 2020. As of January 2021, however, we have a new Department Administrator, ***Cory Willingham***, and as of April we again have a Senior Program Coordinator, ***Claudia Valenti***. I should add that they are both wonderful and wonderfully efficient.

Comings and goings

The past two years have also included some momentous comings and goings. We are delighted to note that ***Peter Hylton***, distinguished senior scholar of the history of analytic philosophy, has joined the faculty. We also note with sadness the passing of our colleague,

Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, **Edward J. Delattre**, in August, 2019.

Recent alums are likely to note the absence of certain names from the faculty. Three colleagues have retired in the past year alone: **Hugh Baxter**, **David Roochnik**, and **Jud Webb**. Hugh's Hoosier friendliness, his knowledge of Habermas, and his remarkable courses on philosophy of law will all be sorely missed. Missed, too, will be David's sagacity, his inimitable offerings in ancient philosophy, and his marvelous capacity to inspire and mentor countless students in the ways of Aristotle and Plato. And there is no way of replacing Jud's vast but unassuming expertise in the history and philosophy of mathematics and logic, from Euclid, Aristotle, and Lambert to Frege, Hilbert, and Husserl. (Personally, I already miss the friendly banter with all three over the fortunes of the B's, the C's, the P's, and the Red Sox.)

Nor is this the final word on retirements. After some thirty illustrious years as a member of the department, including fifteen years of devoted service as the Department Chair, **Charles Griswold** has announced that he will be retiring in the summer of 2023. Charles quite fittingly occupies the Borden Parker Bowne Professor of Philosophy, an endowed chair named after one of the most renowned members in the history of the Philosophy Department. As students' evaluations over the years repeatedly testify, Charles' skill in the classroom is simply non-pareil. At the same time he has been an important and acclaimed contributor to contemporary and historical philosophical discussion of such topics as forgiveness, selfhood, and the "Virtues of Enlightenment." The strengths and renown of the Department of Philosophy today are due in no small measure to his wise and dedicated leadership over the years. He may be retiring, but with a view to continuing his current work on a project tentatively entitled *Philosophical Ruminations: An Invitation* (a series of reflections in podcast form on such topics as wonder, nature-walking, solitude, self-delusion, aging, philosophy, perfectionism, and happiness). On behalf of my colleagues and all the students and others who have had the good fortune to work with Charles over the years, I want to thank him for his service and wish him the best in the years ahead.

The Karbank Success Story

Thanks to the generous support of Steve Karbank, the Department continued to award undergraduates with Karbank Summer Fellowships. In the summer of 2020, eight students received fellowships for projects on topics ranging from deep ecology, Hinduism as a cluster concept, the experience of virtualization, and animating Plato's dialogues (on Instagram) to moral outrage (global and local), advances in modal logic, and the concept of disability. One Fellow, Shanshan Cao, evaluated the pros and cons of studying philosophy academically in a study entitled *To Think or Not to Think: a Meditation on Philosophy PhDs, Careers, and Fulfillment* that she subsequently produced as "My Karbank Film" (see ["To Think Or Not To Think": A Video About Whether To Go To Grad School In Philosophy | Daily Nous](#)"). The nine current 2021 Karbank Summer Fellows are working on such projects as Socrates' *daimon*, moral philosophy and mental health in public schools, the introduction of non-Western ideas to Western academia, living in a refugee crisis, philosophy in everyday life, non-profits focusing on philosophy of race issues, a multi-media exploration of eudaimonia in the pandemic, the philosophical issues involved in capturing and recycling CO₂. For more information on Fellows' projects, please see [Karbank Fellowship | Philosophy](#) on the Department's website. Please allow me finally to express once again our profound indebtedness to Steve Karbank whose support for the Department of Philosophy has enabled these Summer Fellowships and a raft of other initiatives in support of our mission.

What the members of the Department of Philosophy have been up to

I cannot say enough good things about how the members of the faculty coped with the challenges of the pandemic during the past fifteen months, from forthrightly voicing criticism of controversial policy decisions to finding creative ways to teach under utterly novel, potentially quite dangerous circumstances. These difficult conditions notwithstanding, the members of our faculty soldiered on, demonstrating by their actions and words their utmost concern for the safety and well-being of everyone involved. They did so, moreover, while maintaining the high levels of professionalism and teaching for which our Department has always been known. One indication of their success is the number of teaching positions that graduate students have accepted over the past two years. In what is arguably one of the worst job markets in years, at least ten of our graduates managed to find college-level positions, including tenure-track positions at Santa Clara, Wofford, Marian, Florida International, Southern Mississippi, and Union College.

All the while, members of the faculty added to their impressive research profiles. Please allow me to give you a snapshot of the scholarship of our full-time lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors during the past two, pandemic-ridden years.

Full-time Lecturers

Both of our full-time lecturers – **Derek Anderson** and **Ben Crowe** – managed to deliver invited talks and publish while shouldering a demanding teaching load. Derek published the papers “Linguistic Hijacking” in *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, “Rejecting Semantic Truth: On the Significance Of Neurath’s Syntacticism” in a collected edition on Neurath’s life and works, and co-authored “Third-Order Exclusion in Professional Philosophy” for the journal *Symposion*. Ben published papers on Dilthey and Schleiermacher in collections on Dilthey and on 19th Century philosophy, a paper on the philosophy of religion for *The Cambridge History of Philosophy, 1945-2015*, and entries to *The Heidegger Lexicon*, recently published by Cambridge University Press.

Assistant Professors

In the Fall of 2019 we welcomed **Samia Hesni** to our faculty from across the river at MIT where they had received their PhD. They also have a core appointment in BU’s Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program. Drawing on linguistics, the philosophy of language, and feminist thought, they study – among other things – ways that oppression and resistance occur through language. In this regard, their research is at once highly accessible and sophisticated, firmly grounded theoretically but also timely and transformative. They analyze how some forms of language (specifically stereotypes, normative expressions, and social scripts) facilitate oppression and harassment, while other forms (what they dub ‘the language of care’) have the effect of resisting oppression, healing its effects, and promoting inclusion. Samia has published in such esteemed journals as *Mind*, and *Philosophical Review* and has papers forthcoming in *Inquiry*, *Thought*, *Synthese*, and an Oxford University Press anthology on linguistic luck. They have already given numerous invited talks at national and international venues, including a recent keynote at the University of Michigan philosophy spring colloquium. We are simply delighted that Samia has joined our faculty.

Michaela McSweeney, the Department’s redoubtable Director of Placement, is a specialist in metaphysics and philosophy of logic who, besides anchoring curricular offerings in those

areas, has been a popular teacher of our large-lecture style *Introduction to Philosophy* courses. During the past two years she also published papers in *Philosophical Studies* (“Following Logical Realism Where It Leads” and “Theories as Recipes: Third-Order Virtue and Vice”), *Philosophy Compass* (“Logical Realism and the Metaphysics of Logic”), and the *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (“Debunking Logical Grounding”), as well as a handbook article on logic in the *Routledge Handbook of Metaphysical Grounding*. In 2020, she was a Junior Faculty Fellow at BU's Center for Humanities.

Victor Kumar has continued to serve as Director of the *Mind and Morality Lab* that he founded in 2017, upon joining the faculty. In the last two years he has also received the prestigious Boston University Peter Paul Career Development Professorship, research grants (co-led with Rachell Powell) for the “Ethics and Emerging Science Initiative,” as well as awards from the Templeton Foundation and BUCH. In addition to publishing papers in *The Oxford Handbook of Consequentialism* (“The Science of Effective Altruism”), *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Cognitive Science* (“The Ethical Significance of Cognitive Science”), as well as the journal *Nous* (“The Empirical Vindication of Moral Luck”), he co-authored *A Better Ape: The Evolution of the Moral Mind and How it Made us Human*, scheduled for publication with Oxford University Press in 2022.

Marc Gasser-Wingate has served as Director of Undergraduate Studies (for obvious reasons a particularly demanding position during the past two years) but this enormous service to the Department did not keep him from giving invited presentations and publishing papers in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (“Aristotle on Self-Sufficiency, External Goods, and Contemplation”), *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (“Conviction, Priority, and Rationalism in Aristotle’s Epistemology”), and the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (“Aristotle on the Perception of Universals”). This past Spring, Oxford University Press published his study, *Aristotle’s Empiricism*. The College of Arts and Sciences also bestowed on him its Gitner Award for Distinguished Teaching.

Associate Professors

Aaron Garrett, while wearing many hats in the Department’s self-administration, published book chapters on “Hume, Cicero, and the Ancients” as well as “the history of the history of ethics” (no, that’s not a typo); he is also founding editor of *Journal of Modern Philosophy*. In addition to having two co-edited works under contract, *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of the Enlightenment* and *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, he has a book contract from Oxford University Press for a study of the history of ethics in modern philosophy. During the past year, as BU instituted *Learning from Anywhere*, its hybrid model of teaching both synchronously and asynchronously, Aaron served as the Department’s highly resourceful LfA “coach,” conveying policies and best practices to the members of the Department and smoothing out the challenges and difficulties of teaching during the pandemic.

Walter Hopp, our extraordinarily hard-working Associate Chair, published papers on “consciousness” and “perception” for *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, as well as a paper on “normativity and knowledge” for a collected edition on meaning and the promise of phenomenology. During the past year he also became co-editor of *Husserl Studies* and his book *Phenomenology: A Contemporary*

Introduction appeared with Routledge press. In the upcoming summer seminars will be conducted on his book at universities in Austria and China (with Zoom appearances by Walter himself, of course).

Rachell Powell published *Contingency and Convergence: Toward a Cosmic Biology of Body and Mind* (MIT Press) in addition to eight co-authored scholarly articles, including a feature article on “Rethinking Disease” in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, an article on “Rehabilitating ‘Disease’” in the journal *Philosophy of Science* as well as articles in such journals as *Animal Sentience*, *Journal of Experimental Zoology*, *Analyse & Kritik*, and collected editions. Two book chapters (“How the Moral Community Evolves” and “Evolving Measures of Moral Success”) are in press for prestigious collections, both with Oxford University Press. In addition to her next book, *Genetic Engineering and the Future of Human Nature* (under contract with Cambridge University Press), Rachell is half-way through a book manuscript, tentatively titled “Alien Minds: Invertebrate Intelligence and the Evolutionary Meaning of Life.” While conducting this considerable research, Rachell has also been the Director and Co-Principal Investigator of a grant from the Templeton World Charity Foundation.

Allen Speight put his enormous leadership skills to work as the Department’s Chair for five years, ending in the summer of 2019. In the past two years he continued in his role as Editor-in-chief of *Boston Studies in Philosophy, Religion and Public Life*. During this time he also published two co-edited collections, *The Future of the Philosophy of Religion* and *Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Philosophy*, and published six book chapters on topics ranging from “Kant and Benjamin on Hope and History” and “Hegel and Existentialism” to “the Future and Past of Art, Religion, and Philosophy.” After postponements the last two years due to the pandemic, Allen is scheduled finally to give the invited keynote lecture at the Society for German Idealism and Romanticism at Södertörn University in Stockholm.

Susanne Sreedhar co-edited *A New Modern Philosophy: The Inclusive Anthology of Primary Sources* (Routledge), along with book chapters on such themes as “Locke on Marriage” and “Interpreting Hobbes on Civil Liberties and Rights of Resistance” in editions on Locke, Hobbes, and women in early modern philosophy. She also published an article on “Hobbes on Sexual Morality” in *Hobbes Studies* and “The Curious Case of Hobbes’ Amazons” in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* and she is currently completing a book *Hobbes on Sex*, under contract with Oxford University Press. Susanne has also created new courses for the Kilachand College (“The Ethics of Food”) and the Core Curriculum (“Unmaking the Modern World: The Psychology, Politics, and Economics of the Self”) as well as a new graduate seminar “Hobbes’s Political Theory.” Susanne’s gifts as a teacher and scholar have not gone unrecognized. In 2020 the College of Arts and Sciences bestowed on her the Neu Family Award for Excellence in Teaching and this past year she was awarded both an External Faculty Fellowship by Wellesley College’s Newhouse Center for the Humanities and a Jeffrey Henderson Senior Research Fellowship by BU’s Center for the Humanities. Following a sabbatical next year, she will be taking up duties as Director of the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Program at BU.

Daniel Star continued to conduct the enormously successful Ethics Seminar, funded by BUCH, while serving very ably as the Department’s Director of Graduate Admissions. In addition to making several conference presentations on such topics as “Difficulty and Moral

Knowledge” and “Photography and Artistic Luck” over the past two years, he worked as associate editor of the *International Encyclopedia of Ethics* and co-edited the *History of Ethics: Essential Readings with Commentary* with Wiley and the *Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity* with Oxford University Press. He was recently elected to the BU Faculty Council and became Co-president of the BU chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

Full Professors

Tian Yu Cao has published a revised and expanded second edition of *Conceptual Developments of 20th Century Field Theories* (Cambridge), an introduction to a new edition of Einstein’s *Relativity* (Minkowski Institute), and an article on “The ICT Revolution and the Immaterial Labor” in the journal *Science and Society*. In addition to completing his book *Scientific Realism in the Post-Kuhnian Era*, he is currently working on a project entitled *The gravitational origin of the quantum: a new picture of the physical world* where the aim is to move from investigating the empirical and conceptual origin of the quantum to exploring its metaphysical origin, via clarifying the mathematical formulations of the physical foundation of the quantum.

Alisa Bokulich, Director of the Center for Philosophy & History of Science, published papers in *Philosophy of Science* (“Calibration, Coherence, & Consilience in Radiometric Measures of Geologic Time” and “Towards a Taxonomy of the Model-Ladenness of Data”) and *Biology & Philosophy* (“Understanding Scientific Types: Holotypes, Stratotypes, & Measurement Prototypes”) along with a book chapter (“Losing Sight of the Forest for the Y: Beyond the Wavefunction Hegemony”) for a collection on hydrodynamic representations of quantum mechanics. In addition to co-authoring “Data Models, Representation, and Adequacy-for-Purpose” (a paper that develops a new philosophy of data, looking at data reuse and data repurposing), she co-authored with her graduate student, Aja Watkins, an encyclopedia entry (“Data Models”), and with Federica Bocchi, another graduate student, a book review (“Tracing the Steps to ‘the Scientific Method’”). She continued to serve on the Governing Board of the Philosophy of Science Association, on BU’s Natural Sciences Task Force, and as Chair of the Underrepresented Philosophy of Science Scholars Initiative & Mentoring Program. For the 2021-22 academic year she has been awarded a Radcliffe Fellowship at Harvard’s Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, where she will be completing a book on the philosophy of the geosciences.

Juliet Floyd, current President of the Society for the Study of the History of Analytical Philosophy, gave the 2019 Vienna Circle Lecture and the 2021 Ruth Manor Memorial Lecture at Tel Aviv University. She also recently appeared on BBC radio (“Free Thinking”) celebrating the 100th anniversary of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. Her most recent publications include “Sheffer, Lewis and the Logocentric Predicament” (Palgrave), *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mathematics* (Cambridge Element), and, with Felix Mühlhölzer, *Wittgenstein’s Annotations to Hardy’s Course of Pure Mathematics* (Springer). She collaborates in internationally-networked research in philosophy of emerging media and popular culture with colleagues in BU’s Division of Emerging Media, the BU Cyber-Alliance, and the Rafik B. Hariri Institute. She has also contributed to, and co-edited, three related volumes: *Stanley Cavell’s Must We Mean What We Say? at Fifty* (Cambridge), *Perceiving the Future Through New Communication Technologies: Robots, AI and Everyday Life* (Springer Nature/Palgrave,) and *Who Cares? Individual Freedom vs. the Hidden Persuaders* (under review at Palgrave).


Paul Katsafanas, Director of Graduate Studies, was promoted to full professor in March of this past year. Before the pandemic struck, he delivered invited papers at the University of Vienna and Princeton. During the past two years he published three papers: “Fanaticism and Sacred Values” in *Philosophers’ Imprint*, “What Makes the Affirmation of Life Difficult?” in the *Cambridge Critical Guide to Nietzsche’s ‘Thus Spake Zarathustra,’* and “Group Fanaticism and Narratives of Ressentiment” in a Routledge collection on the philosophy of fanaticism. He devoted the bulk of his scholarly activity to drafting the manuscript of a book entitled *The Philosophy of Devotion: Nihilism, Fanaticism, and the Longing for Invulnerable Ideals*.

Sally Sedgwick published several papers on Hegel during these last couple of years, but has been devoting most of her research effort to finishing her third monograph, tentatively titled, *Time and History in Hegelian Thought and Spirit*. She was recently appointed to the Board of Advisors of the *Research Center for Classical German Philosophy* and *Hegel-Archiv* (Bochum, Germany), and to the Editorial Committee of the *Hegel Bulletin* and Editorial Board of the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. This spring, she gave several papers (on Zoom): “Hegel’s ‘Philosophic’ Approach to World History” (to the Harvard Workshop on Moral and Political Philosophy), and “Consolations of World History: Kant versus Hegel” (to Johns Hopkins and the Ruhr-Universität Bochum).

Change is inevitable and you see it in the comings and goings of the Department over the past two years. But, as the extensive achievements just reviewed attest, there has also been a constant: a steadfast commitment to its mission of excellence in education and research, as stated on the opening page of the Department’s website ([About | Philosophy](#)). But we are also aware that we depend upon resources that we cannot ourselves provide. With that in mind we do not want to end this letter without expressing our deep gratitude to all of you who have made contributions to the Department or supported it in other ways. If you’d like to contribute in the future, please click on [Giving | Philosophy](#) for the secure online form and do not hesitate to let us know if you have any questions.

As of July 1, Professor Sedgwick will be taking over as the Department Chair. It’s obviously been a turbulent time, certainly not what I expected when I agreed to serve as a kind of interim Chair two years ago. But our Department is in strong shape; we have an incredible cohort of masterful scholars and teachers, and Professor Sedgwick possesses all the qualities necessary to lead the Department to even greater success in the years ahead. Allow me finally, speaking for my colleagues, to conclude with the hope that you stay in touch with your favorite professors and let us know what you are up to. If you are in the vicinity, don’t be a stranger. You can still find us on the upper floors of 745 Commonwealth (Martin Luther King’s old haunts) and we would love to catch up.

Sincerely,



Dan Dahlstrom
Chair, Department of Philosophy