

AGORA

NEWSLETTER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

The University of Alabama College of Arts & Sciences Fall 2010 Issue 8

Greetings and welcome to the eighth edition of *Agora*, the Philosophy Department's Annual Newsletter!



Prof. H. Scott Hestevold
Chair

HIGHLIGHTS

2009-2010 was an extraordinary year for the Department of Philosophy, so I welcome you to the eighth issue of *Agora* with a review of *some* of the highlights.

Last year's cliff-hanger. When I wrote to you a year ago, the Department was awaiting the fate of its petition to expand by adding an eighth tenure-track position. The Dean announced in mid-September that our petition had been approved; and the Department launched immediately a search for a political philosopher.

Our new political philosopher. After reviewing 98 applications between Thanksgiving and New Years and then conducting four on-campus interviews, the Department unanimously recommended Rekha Nath for the new assistant professorship. You will learn more about Dr. Nath and her research inside *Agora*.

The Philosophy Today Speaker Series. While on campus to deliver public addresses, each of the four 2009-2010 Philosophy Today speakers conducted a class for one of our advanced seminars. Though this speaker series is secure for another two years, the Department will soon ask friends and alumni for support that will allow the series to continue indefinitely. What's in it for you? A T-shirt perhaps...

T-shirts. If your 2010 National Championship T-shirt is wearing a bit thin, replace it with something snappier from the Department of Philosophy. Photographs and order information are found within. The Department will send a T-shirt to anyone making a donation of at least \$100 to the Department of Philosophy Gift Fund to support The Philosophy Today Speaker Series. Please specify the T-shirt size when mailing donations to the Department.

Philosophy majors. When I arrived at UA 32 years ago, the Department had no more than five majors and was lucky to produce one graduate per year. As the philosophy faculty grew larger and stronger,

the number of majors grew as well. The Department will begin 2010-2011 with 92 majors: a 77% increase over the past three years alone.

Teaching innovations. Torin Alter and Chase Wrenn have developed an innovative computer-assisted version of Introduction to Philosophy that will make its debut in a new 150 seat computer lab this fall. One of the course texts will be *Problems from Philosophy*, co-authored by their colleague, Stuart Rachels, and his deceased father, James Rachels.

Moral Philosophy in Albania. Rachels and Rachels are also the co-authors of the most widely adopted philosophy text, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. The 5th edition of the Albanian edition of *Elements* was recently published.

Books. Philosophy is a discipline in which publishing a scholarly book is an extraordinary achievement. You will read inside about two books published by members of UA's philosophy faculty: Norvin Richards' *The Ethics of Parenthood* (Oxford) and Richard Richards' *The Species Problem* (Cambridge). Also worth noting is that Joshua Ferris cited Dr. Alter's *A Dialogue on Consciousness* (co-authored with Robert Howell; Oxford, 2009) in *The New Yorker's* The Book Bench. Ferris describes *Consciousness* as a "remarkably accessible, often entertaining, primer" on "the mind, the body, and the soul."

This year's cliff-hanger. This coming year should have been the first year in its history that the Department operated with eight tenure-track positions. Unfortunately, the assistant professor hired a year ago announced his resignation effective in August 2010. The Department will begin another year with only seven tenure-track positions, and we are again awaiting the fate of a petition to restore the lost assistant professorship. When we meet again in the 2011 *Agora*, I hope to report that this eighth position was restored and successfully filled with a historian of philosophy.

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News Of The Department A Wedding Celebration

With Family And Friends

Sealed With A Kiss



Heather Elliott and I got married on October 24, 2009. It was a wonderful day. Our celebration got a small write-up in The New York Times. Also, our wedding was in the match-up of the week on gawker.com, where we got trounced by a couple who were introduced to one another by Margaret Thatcher. Hmmm. Heather and I are so grateful to our friends, many of whom rose to speak during our Quaker-like ceremony and said the kindest things. *Photographer: Ben Herman*

News Of The Department

Our New Colleague



We were delighted this year to be allowed to add a tenure-earning position to our department: there are now eight, twice as many as when I arrived in 1970. There were approximately a hundred applicants for the new one, a number of whom would have been fine choices. Rekha Nath surpassed them all, and did especially well in her on-campus presentations to

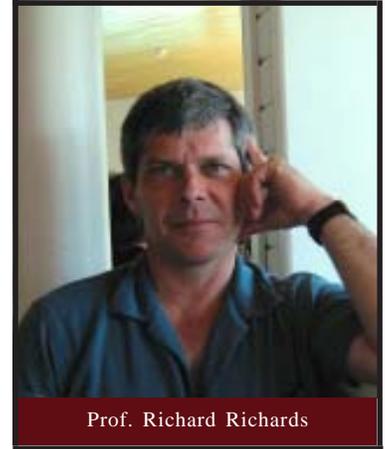
faculty and to students. She's going to be super.

Rekha was born in Toronto, and was raised there and in India, Venezuela, and Michigan. She has a B.A. in philosophy and political science from Michigan and a PhD in philosophy from the University of Melbourne. She has taught philosophy at Melbourne and at Auckland, and has also taught English at Mae Fah Luang University in Thailand under the Princeton in Asia Program. Her specialties are political philosophy, global justice, and normative ethics.

Much work has been done on what it is for a particular society to be just, and thus on when it is unjust for people in a society to fare very differently. Rekha is interested in how this applies across national boundaries, when those who fare very differently live in very different parts of the planet. Can that still be an injustice, or is absolute poverty in other countries only something for which we might have compassion? This is a leading question in contemporary political philosophy, and her ideas about it are intriguing.

Prof. Richard A. Richards

Beginning in the fall, Richard Richards will be Asst. Director of the Blount Undergraduate Initiative. He will continue to teach classes both for Blount and for the Philosophy Dept., and will also continue his scholarly work.



A Teddy Bear Named Norvin.....

E-mail from Francoise DeRocher, an old friend from France.

Hello Norv, Greg and I were spending the summer in my hometown, population 2000. A friend of mine said one day: "My son is so crazy about an American philosopher that he has named one of his stuffed animals Norvin".

I replied that I knew an American philosopher called Norvin, could it be the same person? What were the odds? My friend called her son who said his hero is Norvin Richards, from the University of Alabama.

Batiste is getting a master's in Rennes; he has looked you up on your site, and also Norv Junior, the Kid. I filled in with a few details. He said he was terribly impressed by an article you wrote. He is studying Hard Determinism this semester.

I told the mom that you were a super nice guy and that Batiste should write to you, but he is shy and French professors don't encourage that sort of thing, he said.

News Of The Department

TUSCALOOSA, AL. – Jonathan M. Cobb, a University of Alabama junior from Alabaster, recently won the 2009 Alabama Philosophical Society Undergraduate Essay Contest. His winning paper is "Time and Qualia," which he wrote for an advanced metaphysics class last spring.



"In my paper, I argue that the way that humans experience time is misleading," said Cobb. "We experience time qualitatively. Qualitative

experiences are generally misrepresentative of what's really happening, so our experience of time is misrepresentative of what the structure of time actually is."

Dr. H. Scott Hestevold, professor and chair of the department of philosophy, is thrilled with Cobb's accomplishment. "The department is delighted that Jonathan Cobb has won the Alabama Philosophical Society's 2009 award for best student paper," said Hestevold. "Though many UA students have won this award over the years, I believe that Mr. Cobb is the only student at any institution to have won this award twice."

Cobb presented his paper at Orange Beach at the annual APS meeting October 2-3, 2009. "I'm thrilled," said Cobb. "I actually had more doubt that I would win this year (though I had a better paper), but submitted my paper anyway. I'm looking forward to the conference and I'm very grateful for my professors, family, friends, and especially the lovely Miss Katie Weldon for being so supportive."

He also won the contest in 2008 for his paper "Natural Evil and the Butterfly Effect." Cobb is majoring in philosophy and is a student in the Blount Undergraduate Initiative in the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Philosophy Today Series

PHILOSOPHY TODAY 2009-2010

09/22/2009 @ 7:30 PM in 205 Smith Hall
MIND AND BRAIN
PHILOSOPHY OF MIND IN THE 21st CENTURY
TERRY HORGAN, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

11/17/2009 @ 7:30 PM in 205 Smith Hall
DO TABLES AND CHAIRS REALLY EXIST?
ANNIE THOMASSON, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

03/04/2010 @ 7:30 PM in 205 Smith Hall
CHARLES DARWIN
HAMMER OF THE CREATIONISTS
KEITH PARSONS, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON - CLEAR LAKE

04/13/2010 @ 7:30 PM in 205 Smith Hall
WEIGHING LIVES IN WAR
WHEN IS COLLATERAL DAMAGE EXCESSIVE?
THOMAS HURKA, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Sponsored by the University of Alabama's College of Arts and Sciences and Department of Philosophy, by a grant from Louis W. Perry of La Jolla, and by other alumni and friends of the Department. For further information, contact Dr. H. Scott Hestevold, 348-1912.

The Philosophy Today Poster for 2009-2010

We offered our third Philosophy Today lecture series this year, made possible by funding contributed by Lou Perry and the Dean of the college. These are wonderful events in the intellectual life of the university, and while the speakers are on campus we take full advantage of them: we have them give a second talk for the philosophy faculty, students, and interested others, and often we've been able to time their visits so that they can also do a class in one of our seminars.

Since the speakers are all uncommonly good and distinguished philosophers, what they do in all three settings is wonderful to have. We are extremely grateful to Lou and to the Dean for making it possible, and for also making it possible for us to present a fourth Philosophy Today series this coming year, 2010-2011. We will post the dates and topics on our website (www.as.ua.edu/philos). You are more than welcome to join us—having you here would be an added bonus.

FACULTY ACTIVITIES

Torin Alter was a visiting scholar at NYU's philosophy department while on sabbatical in the fall. He and Robert J. Howell have their second co-written book, *The God Dialogues: A Philosophical Journey* forthcoming September 2010 from Oxford University Press. Some shorter pieces also appeared in a journal and in *The Oxford*



Companion to Consciousness. In addition, he and Chase Wrenn are making good progress developing a drill-and-practice, computer-aided version of the Introduction to Philosophy course. Torin's remaining question is whether it is best to understand his three-year-old twins, Dora and Irving, as cuter than can be conceived or as inconceivably cute.

Scott Hestevold spent more than half his time tending to the business of the Department, but he did make progress on his paper on time, persistence, and special relativity, and this included auditing this past spring almost half of Patrick LeClair's course on Modern Physics. He has begun thinking about space and hopes to return to his work on the nature of mercy later in the summer.



Max Hocutt (Emeritus) wrote two long essays for a popular encyclopedia, one on the history of logic and the other on scientific methods. These are now in press, along with an extended essay on the history of philosophy and a dozen short pieces written the previous spring. Three other articles written last year are in press at



Behavior and Philosophy. A third essay on the nature of morality has been offered to *Philosophy*. He is currently revising two other essays on the same topic.

Stuart Rachels published "Vegetarianism" in *The Oxford Handbook on Ethics and Animals*, but his biggest news by far is that he and Heather Elliott were married this past October. (Heather is an Assistant Professor in the School of Law.)



Norvin Richards placed an article on the ethics of choosing not to have a child because the child's life would not be worth living, wrote another essay on forgiveness for an encyclopedia, found out how much there is to do on a book between the time it is accepted and the time it is published, and did those things.



Richard Richards placed his book, *"The Species Problem"* at Cambridge University Press and did the post-acceptance work needed to ready it for publication, placed two articles and had a third published. He gave a paper titled "Functional Analysis and Character Transformation" as the keynote address at the Duke University colloquium on evolutionary development. He gave a second talk at E. O. Wilson's 80th Birthday Celebration at Florida State University, on "Subjectivity and Subspecies: Wilson and Mayr on the Trinomial." He gave a third, "Evidence and the History of Science: Darwin, Taxonomic Facts and Branching Evolution," at the University of Toronto. He also helped organize Alabama's own colloquium on E.O. Wilson's work and gave a fourth talk there, "Consilience: Twelve Years Later."

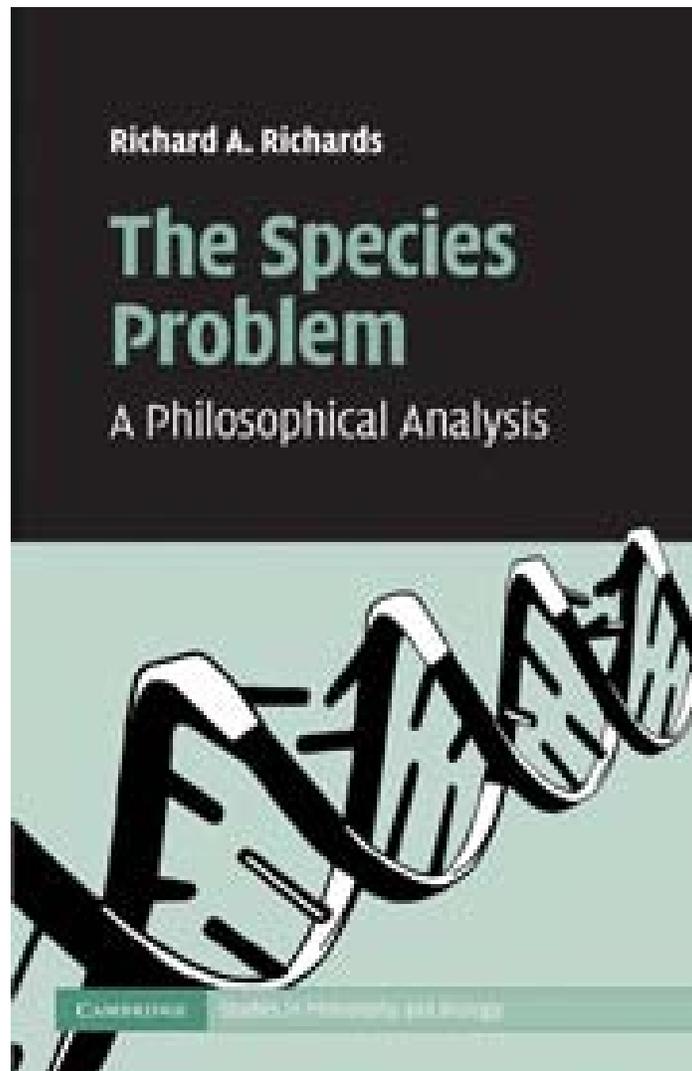
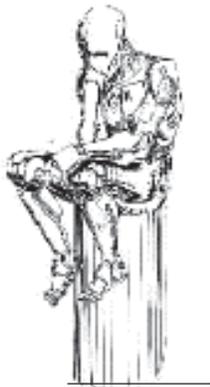


Chase Wrenn had "The Unreality of Realization" published in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, has "True Belief is not Instrumentally Valuable" coming out in an upcoming collection, had "A Puzzle About Desire" accepted by *Erkenntnis*, had "Practical Success and the Nature of Truth" accepted by *Synthese*, and continues to work on a book on truth.



FACULTY ACTIVITIES

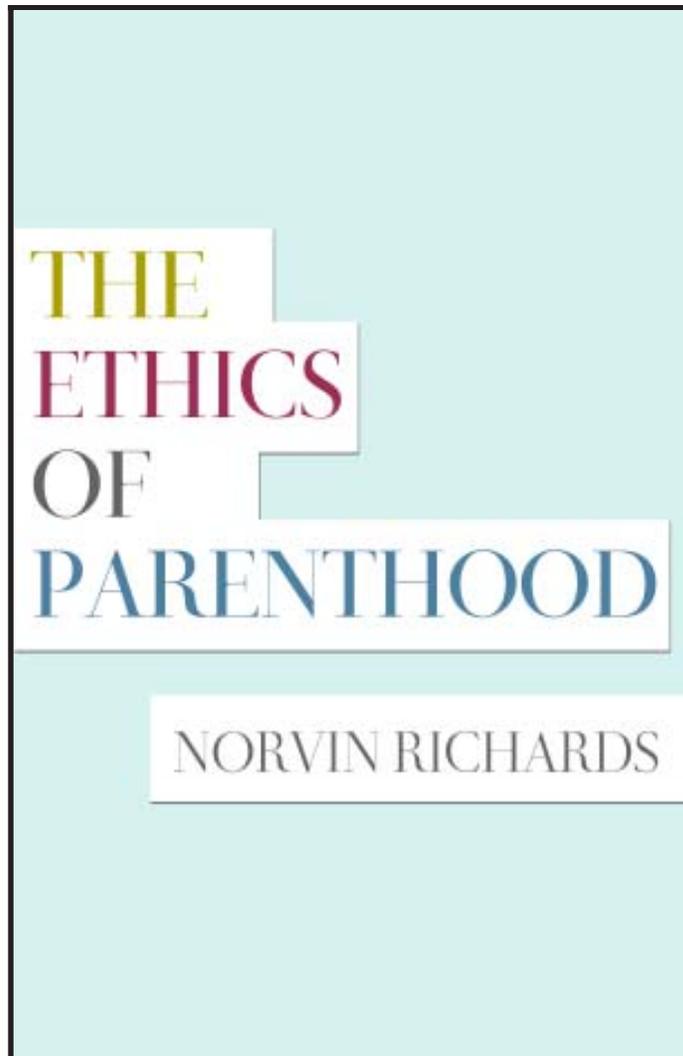
NEED A GOOD READ?



There is long-standing disagreement about how to divide biodiversity into species. Over twenty different species concepts are used to group organisms, according to criteria as diverse as morphological or molecular similarity, interbreeding and genealogical relationships. This, combined with the implications of evolutionary biology, raises the worry that either there is no single kind of species, or that species are not real. This book surveys the history of thinking about species from Aristotle to modern systematics in order to understand the origin of the problem, and advocates a solution. It also considers related topics such as individuality and the metaphysics of evolution, and how scientific terms get their meaning. This important addition to the current debate will be essential for philosophers and historians of science, and for biologists.

FACULTY ACTIVITIES

Still NEED a GOOD READ?



This book explores the moral relationship between parents and children from slightly before the cradle to slightly before the grave. It develops a unique version of the view that biological parents ordinarily have a right to raise their children, then applies this view to cases including those of Baby Jessica and Baby Richard, prenatal abandonment, babies switched at birth and sent home with the wrong parents, and families separated by war or natural disaster.

The book also contends that children have a claim of their own to have their autonomy respected, and that this claim is stronger the better the grounds for believing that what the child's actions express is a self of the child's own (an idea the book explains). A final set of chapters concern parents and their grown children. Views are offered about what duties parents have at this stage of life, about what is required in order to treat grown children as adults, and about what obligations grown children have to their parents.

News Of Philosophy Alums

Carl Sosnin (MA program) and Margie Brooke (MA 1977) joined us for dinner and Thomas Hurka's talk in the *Philosophy Today* series, "Weighing Lives in War: When is Collateral Damage Excessive?" Both are doing well, and it was great to see them again.

Ann Coyle (1988) and her son Dylan joined us for several of the *Philosophy Today* speakers. Dylan is going to Narashino for two weeks as part of the Sister City Student Exchange Program. Only 12 Tuscaloosa high school students were chosen to be part of the program, on the basis of grade requirements, an essay, and a presentation to a panel followed by an interview. Dylan's presentation consisted of a short movie he'd made that also included his own original score. This is a highly interesting kid: why are we not surprised?

Hank Cribbs (1990) returned for Homecoming this fall. We met him and his children, Carly and Cole, at a table on the Quad where Scott Hestevold was doing some close-up magic. (I think Carly and Cole wondered why he didn't teach their dad *that* instead of philosophy.) They are neat kids, and Hank has a good life teaching high school in a small town near Tulsa.



Martin McDowell (1992) is still with the State Department. He is in language training in northern Virginia, preparing for his next 3-year assignment in Slovenia.

Amy McManus (1993) and Andrew Odewahn now have a second handsome son baby James born February 3, 2010. "He weighed in at 9lbs.10oz., and measured 22" long. Looks like he won't be the little brother for long!"



Ryan Turner (1994) lives in Sacramento and is a credit manager for Case New Holland (agricultural & construction equipment manufacturer, parent company is Fiat.) "I call on financially challenged dealerships so in the current economic environment I am very busy. I think my philosophy background assists me in dealing with difficult situations, primarily problem solving skills." His other interests include running, skydiving and hot air ballooning. "I didn't realize I would enjoy skydiving so much, caught the bug."

Michael Casiday (1997) has received tenure as Lecturer in Historical Theology in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter.



Amy Henry Denger (1998) will begin doctoral work this fall in Environmental Studies, at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Gabe Walvatne (2003) is an attorney with Miles & Stockbridge in Baltimore. He has also just completed two feature films, in both of which he was the male lead: in one he got to fight with a sword, and in the other he was a bartender and lounge owner whose singer fails to show up one night, see, and then...but I don't want to spoil it.

Robin Preussell (2003) clerked for R. David Proctor, U.S. District Judge of the Northern District of Alabama and for William H. Pryor, U.S. Circuit Judge for the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, and is now in the Corporations Business and Banking Department of Fulbright & Jaworski, LLP, in Houston. She and Tim Phillips will be married this coming April. Robin reports that "In my days at Yale, I was continually surprised by my ability to keep up with the Ivy grads (the majority of my class), and I attribute much of my success to the skills and knowledge that I gained in my philosophy and Blount classes (the majority of which were taught by philosophy professors.) Especially at Yale, where most of the classes are more "open discussion" rather than strict "Socratic Method, I think the Department's similar approach was most helpful."



Parker Sweet (2004) and Derek Tokaz (2005) came down after a legal conference in Birmingham. We had dinner and great conversation about law school at Alabama and at NYU, about life as a lawyer, and about kayaking amongst crocodiles (wait—did I just say the same thing twice?) Parker is in practice in the Mobile area. Derek practiced with a firm in New York City, and is now in Huntsville studying for the Alabama bar.

News Of Philosophy Alums

Matthew Satcher (2006) has completed medical school at UAB. In July, he will begin his residency in Tuscaloosa at the University Medical Center. He says "I think fondly of my time working with all of you, especially when I get a call at 3 a.m. to go to the emergency department to admit a patient. I can't imagine having majored in anything other than philosophy, and the things I learned while there definitely influenced my choice to pursue primary care and family medicine for my residency."

Chase Espy (2007) finished law school at Alabama and will clerk this coming year for Judge Ed Carnes of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. The next year, he hopes either to clerk for Senator Sessions on the Judiciary Committee, or to work for the Department of Justice.

Mark Manuel (2007) has one more semester at Regents University, and continues to work for the Christian Broadcasting Network.

John Richards (2007) and Margaret Kelsey Merchant were married April 17. John works for the Department of Human Resources in Bibb County.

Brad Watson (2007) finished a semester early at the Jones School of Law, passed the bar in February, and has opened an office in his hometown of Albertville.

Gabby Watson (2007) spent the first year after undergrad working for a law firm, then started at Jones as well. The plan is for her also to finish a semester early, take the bar next February, and then join Brad in the practice. (makes him senior partner, but I bet he can be kept in line.)

Brandon Gunn (2008) began law school at Pacific University but decided to follow a different course. In the fall, he will begin graduate work in history at South Alabama with the goal of teaching either in high school, or in a community college.

Deborah Anderson (2009) worked for a year as an accountant for Price Waterhouse Coopers. She is still in Boston, and plans now to take courses in legal studies from the Harvard Extension School while applying to graduate programs in business. She hopes to focus on business ethics, and I predict she will become one of the best people in that field.



John Cockrell (2009) has been working as a Regional Coordinator for Impact Alabama, and will either continue that or attend law school at Alabama. As of Christmas Eve, he and his girlfriend Jordan are engaged, and at last contact she was wait-listed for medical school at UAB.

Alonso Heudebert (2009) is pursuing a Master's in Public Health at UAB. We had lunch one day this fall, and things are going well for him even in the class where he blew his cover and became known as "the philosopher."

Natalie Mitchum (2009) has finished her first year at Cumberland, and reports that "I absolutely love law school...There are moments when I look like I know what I'm talking about, though I still get so excited my tongue gets caught in a knot if I'm not careful..."

Steve Scoggan (2009) and wife Ashley are headed for Durham, where Steve will start the J.D. program at Duke. He mentions that law school students at Duke are free to take grad courses in any department on campus. He hopes to take advantage of that and also to work in his second year in their

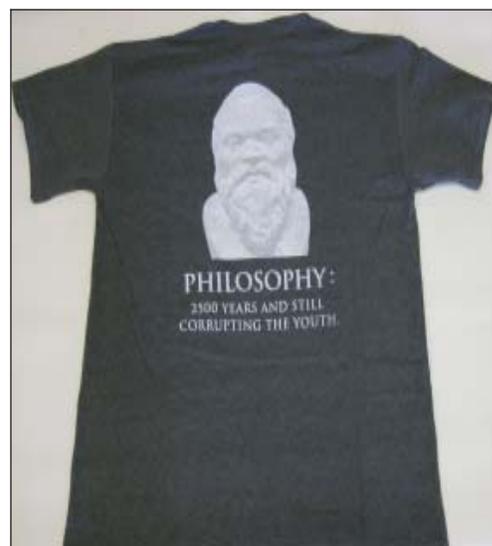
Guantanamo Defense Clinic, on habeas corpus and human rights issues involved with detainees.

Brittany Burgess (2009) will start this fall at the Cumberland School of Law, and is currently enrolled in a summer program there "to give myself a heads-up on what is to come...and also to recharge my brain after working in the mind-numbing retail business for almost a year." She sent a wonderful thank-you note that warmed my otherwise cold cold heart, expressing thanks for skills she gained from our prelaw courses that put her miles ahead of her fellow students and give her confidence for her law-school studies. Just what we are hoping to provide!

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Philosophy T-Shirt!
Go on, you know you want one...

\$15 and it's yours! Indicate size (S, M, L, XL) and send a check for \$15 made out to The University of Alabama c/o Ms. Dorothy Bazemore, Department of Philosophy, Box 870218, Tuscaloosa, AL, 35487. The shirt will probably reach you in time for that next formal affair.



Please send your news to
nrichard@tenhour.as.ua.edu or to
Norvin Richards, Box 870218,
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487.



This Year's Graduates



Alana Crowe will take a year off to travel and work for Nidek Medical Company in Birmingham before applying to



left to right: Norvin Richards, Alana Crowe, Scott Hestevold

law school. She will begin her year by traveling to Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, Germany, Dubai, and India. Wow!

Jared Culver will begin law school at Alabama this fall.

Laura Dover will begin medical school in the fall at UAB, in a program that will lead to both a degree in medicine and a Master's in Public Health.

Daniel Drake will attend Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., to prepare for full-time Christian ministry.

Corey Godsey was offered a scholarship at the University of Mississippi School of Law, and will either go there or attend law school here at Alabama.

Ben Hohman and his sister Xiamara are spending the year in Lanxi, China, teaching English at a local high school. Ben will be applying to Master's programs either in Catholic Theology or Philosophy, with plans to begin that study the following year.

Jack Huguley was admitted to several law schools, including his first choice, but will work for a year before doing whatever comes yet. He so enjoyed teaching logic for us as a TA that it might not be law school after all.

David Lindsay is deferring law school for a year. He began the summer with travels in Australia, after which he will work in Chicago.

Eric Logan will work for a year before attending law school.

Barrett Lyle will attend law school next year either at Georgia or at Vanderbilt.

Chris Nicholson will attend the Yale School of Law, where the Dean of Admissions told him "We have a history of getting very strong philosophy majors from the University of Alabama." (!) With Chris as the next stage of that history, it is about to get considerably stronger.



left to right: Norvin Richards, Mayme Nicholson, Chris Nicholson, Scott Hestevold

Will Schildknecht will work for Teach for America this coming year, teaching mathematics at the middle-school level in southern Louisiana.

Miland Simpler will begin law school this fall at Alabama.

Dain Stewart will begin law school this fall at Cumberland, where he will be on full scholarship.

David Ferguson, Jonathan Kohan, Jesse Lejeune, Korey McLeod, Kevin Peterson and Stephen Underwood also graduated, but we do not know their plans.

Honors, Prizes and Awards



Honors

David Lindsay was the University's nominee for a Rhodes Scholarship.

Chris Nicholson graduated with Honors in Philosophy. He wrote his senior paper, "Why Life Does Not Need to be Explained," under the supervision of Professor Scott Hestevold and ably defended it in an oral exam conducted by Professors Scott Hestevold, Chase Wrenn, and Richard Richards.

Departmental Awards

The Iredell Jenkins Endowed Memorial Scholarship

Winner - Chris Nicholson

Second Place - Joshua Quick

Honorable Mention - Jonathan Cobb, Alana Crowe

The Marten & Marie ten Hoor Prize

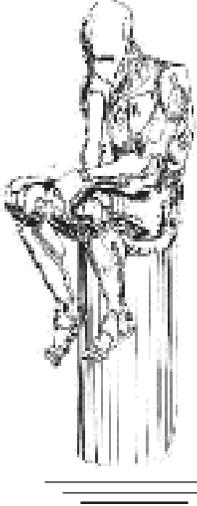
Winner - Chris Nicholson

The Norvin Richards Award In Philosophy & Law

Winner - Chris Nicholson

Honorable Mention - Miland Simpler

Thanks!



We are grateful to **Lou Perry** for his continuing financial support of the *Philosophy Today* series, to **Beverly and Steve Davis** for having endowed a small fund that helps pay for academic travel by our faculty, and to an anonymous donor (and former winner of the prize) who added to the fund awarded as the ten Hoor prize. We greatly appreciate the support, and the chance to do good things with the money. Thanks!

We welcome your support too, of course. You can lend it by mailing us a check made out to the University of Alabama. Feel free to designate something in particular that you want to fund or help fund, or to leave the choice to our fertile brains. Or we'd be glad to discuss ideas with you. We are Prof. Scott Hestevold, at 205-348-5942, shestevold@bama.ua.edu and Prof. Norvin Richards, at 205-348-1906, nrichard@tenhoor.as.ua.edu.



ten Hoor Hall

Photographer: Norvin Richards