

AGORA

Newsletter of the Department of Philosophy

Coming and Going



This last year was a year of losses, in the sense that two of our faculty left for other universities. Dr. Ken Ehrenberg is now on faculty at the University of Surrey Law school, where he is Director of Research at the Surrey Centre for Law and Philosophy. While we wanted very much to keep Dr. Ehrenberg here, this is a prestigious position, and we understand his departure. Dr. Justin Klocksien, a full-time temporary instructor here since 2008, received an offer for a tenure-track position, and is now at New Mexico State University. While we will miss Dr. Klocksien and his contributions to the department, we congratulate him on getting a tenure-track position and wish him the best.

This year has also been a win. We have gained two new faculty. Chris Nicholson, a graduate of the University of Alabama in 2010, and one of our most decorated majors has returned as an instructor to cover Dr. Ehrenberg's jurisprudence classes. He was a National Merit Scholar and was awarded a 4-year Presidential Scholarship. He also won the ten Hoor award two years, received an Iredell Jenkins Endowed Memorial Scholarships three years, and received the Norvin Richards Award for Philosophy of Law two years. He is currently finishing a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan - to add to his J.D. from Yale University Law school. And

we have also been joined by Dr. Trig Johnson, who comes to us from Florida, and is teaching some of our Introduction to Philosophy courses, as well as some courses we don't normally offer, including a course on Existentialism in the Spring. We welcome both of these new faculty.

The year has also been a win because the McCollough Institute for Pre-Medical Scholars, supported by the largest academic endowment to Arts and Sciences in the last two decades, from alumni Dr. Gaylon and Susan McCollough, will be housed in the philosophy department. What this means is that the department is now engaged in a search for the Director of this Institute, who will be a tenured member of the department. And while the Institute will be an independent program, it is likely that there will also be areas of intersection with the department. The Director will do some teaching in the department, perhaps courses in philosophy of medicine or medical ethics. And there will likely be opportunities for the current faculty to teach in the McCollough Institute. This is an exciting opportunity for the department. With its Philosophy and Medicine Specialization, it already has the only medical humanities program in the state of Alabama, but it will now also host an interdisciplinary

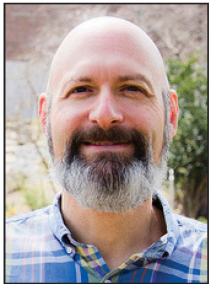
KEEP READING **COMING AND GOING** ON PAGE 4

FACULTY NEWS

Torin Alter

Professor

This past year Dr. Alter gave talks at UCLA, SMU, and four conferences. That helped him improve three papers he drafted last year. He was elected president of the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology. Two of his articles came out, one in *Nous* and another in a collection on Blackwell. And he is trying to teach himself the dulcimer.



Seth Bordner

Associate Professor

Dr. Bordner was awarded tenure and promoted to Associate Professor in March. In April, his paper “If We Stop Thinking About Berkeley’s Problem of Continuity, Will It Still Exist?” finally appeared in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, more than two years after initially being accepted. He continues to work on a variety of topics, especially Berkeley, death, and football. Outside of the Department, he is a Faculty Senator and co-chair of the Community and Legislative Affairs Senate committee, serves on the Faculty Senate Steering committee, and the College of Arts & Sciences Diversity Committee. This past fall, Dr. Bordner was also a senior fellow in the Blount Scholars Program.



Tim Butzer

Instructor

Dr. Butzer’s paper “Bootstrapping and Dogmatism” appeared in the August 2017 issue of *Philosophical Studies*.



Scott Hestevold

Professor

In his 40th year on the UA faculty, Dr. Hestevold is working on a book that integrates a new Leibnizian theory



of space with problems involving boundaries, holes, composition, and the nature of spacetime. During the past year, he and Nita visited their children in Denver and New York, enjoying hiking, kayaking, dinosaur opportunities, art, theater, and dance.

Holly Kantin

Assistant Professor

Dr. Kantin thoroughly enjoyed her first year at the University of Alabama. In addition to remembering how to drive a car and getting used to life in the south, she continued work on several ongoing projects in metaphysics and medical ethics, and presented papers at two conferences. In the fall, Dr. Kantin gave a talk on euthanasia for non-terminal illnesses at the American Society of Bioethics and Humanities. In July she gave an invited talk at the University of Oslo as part of a workshop on the ethical treatment of individuals who lack the capacity to provide informed consent to clinical care and participation in research. Since arriving, Dr. Kantin has also designed two new courses. In the spring, she taught Philosophy of Mental Health, a course which complements her ongoing research on philosophical issues concerning mental illness. In the spring of 2018, she will teach Advanced Topics in Medical Ethics, a seminar geared towards students who are preparing for a career in medicine. In addition to teaching and doing philosophy, Dr. Kantin has been playing a lot of tennis. She was excited to discover that Tuscaloosa has an active tennis community and has been taking advantage of opportunities to play.



Benjamin Kozuch

Assistant Professor

In the past year, Dr. Kozuch was a finalist for the 2017 President’s Faculty Research Award for best Junior Investigator in the Arts and Humanities. Much of his recent research has focused around producing arguments for our sometimes being mistaken about the content of our con-



FACULTY NEWS

scious experiences. In an article currently out for review, for example, he argues that in many common visual illusions (e.g., the Titchener Circles), we do not actually misperceive the size of objects, but rather just mistakenly think that we do. Also, for the first time in a decade, Benjamin changed the strings on his upright bass.

Rekha Nath

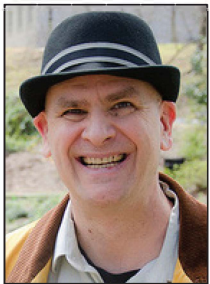
Associate Professor



Dr. Nath has recently begun working on a new project, on the injustice of weight stigma. She gave three talks on this topic in the past year and is nearing completion of a paper on the same. During her sabbatical leave next year, she intends to continue her work on this project. In her free time, she has taken to paddling on the local lakes with her intrepid pug, Scout.

Stuart Rachels

Associate Professor

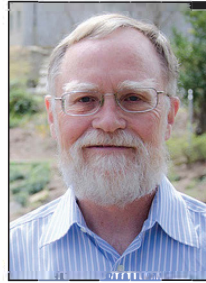


Dr. Rachels wrote and submitted to McGraw-Hill a new edition (the 9th) of the best-selling textbook in philosophy, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, to be published in the spring. He is still working on the 8th edition of its companion anthology, *The Right Thing to Do*. He has received multiple positive inquiries from the president of New in Chess Press, based in Amsterdam, for the publication of his first chess book. However, that discussion is on hold as he works on the philosophy textbooks. This summer, for the first time, he visited the U.N. in NYC, as a guest of the historian Timothy Snyder, who gave a talk mostly to diplomats as part of a week of events celebrating Ukraine. Also this summer, in St. Louis, he spectated at a high-level chess event along with three of the four World Chess Champions of the last 30 years.

Norvin Richards

Professor Emeritus

Norvin Richards' article titled "Parental Love" appeared



in *The Oxford Handbook on the Philosophy of Love*. He continues to work on the topic. He also did an interview on the ethics of parenthood for a series to be aired on Australian Public Radio. He and Janet continue to travel a good deal, this year by boat up the coast of Norway to a group of islands above the Arctic Circle, there to see arctic fox, reindeer and polar bears in the wild.

Richard Richards

Professor

Dr. Richards is in his third year as department Chair. Last



September his book, *Biological Classification: A Philosophical Analysis*, was published by Cambridge University Press. His article, "Evolutionary Naturalism and Valuation," has just been published in the *Cambridge Handbook on Evolutionary Ethics*. He has an article that will appear in the fall issue of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, "Engineered Niches and Naturalized Aesthetics." He is currently working on another book with Cambridge Press, *The Biology of Art*.

Chase Wrenn

Professor



Dr. Wrenn was on sabbatical in spring 2017. With funding from the College of Arts & Sciences, the Capstone International Center, and a prestigious Franklin Research Grant from the American Philosophical Society, he spent March and April as a visiting scholar at the University of Edinburgh working on his next book on truth, tentatively titled *The True and the Good*. Dr. Wrenn presented some of his work in progress in lectures at the University of Edinburgh, the University of St. Andrews, and the University of Glasgow. He also gave the keynote address at the 2017 meeting of the Alabama Philosophical Society, where he discussed some of the work he did in Edinburgh.

OUR NEW COLLEAGUES

Trig Johnson is visiting the Philosophy Department for academic year 2017-2018. Educated at Oxford University, the University of Gloucestershire and the University of Virginia, he has



Dr. Trig Johnson
Instructor

taught approximately 40 courses at eight universities and colleges. He has held full-time lectureships in both philosophy and religious studies, as well as teaching positions in general humanities. Philosophy courses taught: Introduction to Philosophy, Aesthetics, Philosophy and Creativity, Ethics and Critical Thinking, Ethical Theory, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Self, Philosophy of Love, Philosophy of Psychology, Philosophy

of Religion, Studies in Philosophy and Religion: Intellectual Atheism, Understanding Socrates, Understanding Plato, Understanding Aristotle, Augustine's Philosophy, Kant's Philosophy, Studies in German Idealism: Hegelian Metaphysics, Introduction to Existentialism, Introduction to Postmodernism. Religious studies courses taught: Introduction to World Religions, History of Christianity, Religion in America, Comparative Religion: Theory and Method, Comparative Religious Epistemology, Comparative Religious Ethics, Comparative Religion: Ideas of Self, Philosophy of Religion, The Psychology of Religious Experience. Humanities courses taught: Introduction to Humanities, Introduction to Mythology, Greek and Roman Humanities, Medieval Humanities, Renaissance and Baroque Humanities, Enlightenment and Romanticism Humanities, 20th Century Humanities, Exploring Visual Arts: Picasso, Dali and Warhol. A musician and songwriter, he hails from a distinguished musical lineage, and has performed original songs at shows with bands like the B-52's, Dave Matthews and Radiohead. His first love is baseball.



Chris Nicholson
Instructor

Chris returned to the University of Alabama this year to teach philosophy of law while also finishing up a Ph.D. at the University of Michigan. He's trying to figure out what people mean when they say they're suspending judgment. He's been thinking a lot about legal and philosophical issues involving artificial intelligence lately.

COMING AND GOING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Pre-Medicine program of study for promising students intending to become physicians.

The intersection of philosophy and medicine is becoming an important area of study. New methods of physical and psychological enhancement, for instance, raise ethical concerns about if and when these methods are appropriate. And what should we do in end-of-life situations where we have the technology to maintain life, but not the quality of life? There is an ongoing debate about what counts as a disease, and what the proper goal of medicine and health systems should be. Is the proper goal of medicine well-being in general? Or is it the treatment of disease? If so, we need objective criteria to decide what makes something a disease. Evidence-based medicine has become increasingly influential in deciding what medical solutions will be recommended and which will be allowed. Of course, everyone wants their medicine to be "evidence-based," but what counts as "evidence"? This is a philosophical question that requires a philosophical answer. And while it is possible the answer to this question may not come from a philosopher, it will certainly would be better answered by a medical professional who also has philosophical training.

The development of the McCollough Institute does not mean that our other specializations will be neglected though. We are currently conducting a tenure-track search for a Philosopher of Law to replace Dr. Ehrenberg and to coordinate and teach the classes in our Jurisprudence Specialization. Currently we have 22 students who have officially declared that specialization, with likely more undeclared. And the Mind-Brain concentration represents another option for our majors and minors. Several of our philosophy classes will also be part of the new interdisciplinary Neuroscience minor. Our three specializations exemplify the broad relevance and value of philosophy to other important disciplines. We hope to continue providing the philosophical training and resources to help our students better succeed in, and contribute to these areas.

ALUMNI NOTES

Craig Alexander (1977) is an adjunct professor at the University of Alabama School of Law, teaching a class on Alabama Civil Practice & Procedure, and is currently serving as Vice-Chair of the Cut Score Committee of the Alabama State Bar's Task Force on Law School and Legal Education. The responsibility of this committee is to evaluate and recommend whether the current minimum score needed to pass the Alabama bar exam should be increased.

Jared Culver (2010) who graduated with a degree in Philosophy and received his J.D. from the University of Alabama Law school in 2013, is now working as a policy analyst at the Department of Homeland Security. He also is an adjunct lecturer at Georgetown University School of Law.

Anthony Rivera-Rodriguez (2013) is living in Washington D.C. and working as an assistant to the chief of staff for California Senator Dianne Feinstein.

Ellen Coogan (2014) writes, "I am finishing my law degree and applying to information privacy and open government fellowships. Last summer, I worked at the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) in Washington, D.C. While I worked there, I wrote a FOIA request to the NSA for documents on Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election, drafted part of an FTC Complaint about Google's new advertising product that uses credit card data to link

brick-and-mortar store purchases to online ad clicks by using credit card information, and helped craft arguments for a lawsuit against Vice President Pence and Kris Kobach's voter fraud commission to restrain their unlawful data collection request. It was an exciting summer, and I'm looking forward to beginning my career as a lawyer. I also became

an aunt in March, which has been even more exciting! My nephew was named Bertrand James Wiman, with his first and middle names coming from Bertrand Russell and James Clerk Maxwell, and he is already very interested in computers, imitating his programmer parents."

Tyler Brockett (2015) is in the first year of a Ph.D. program in Anthropology at Wayne State University in Detroit. He will be working with his adviser on figuring out how to successfully replicate a math enrichment program in inner cities with educational problems.

Ben Lucy (2015) was accepted to the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia where he is also a law student, expecting to graduate in 2020.

Rebecca Kerley (2016) is studying law at the University of Virginia and considering a dual degree program in either economics or philosophy.



Two of last year's graduating philosophy majors, **Maria Gerasikova** (2nd from right) and **Bobby McClure** (2nd from left) competed in National Qualifying Ballroom competitions sponsored by USADance and the World Dancesport Federation. Both Maria and her partner David Crump (on right), and Bobby and his partner Blair Ely (on left), won multiple events at the Southeast Dancesport Championships in Birmingham, February 3–5. Maria and her partner also competed and won multiple events at the Gumbo Dancesport Championships in Baton Rouge, La., held June 23–25.

Let us know how you are doing! Reach out by phone, email, or on Facebook — search for and join the UA Philosophy Majors & Minors (Past & Present) group.

The McCollough Institute for Pre-Medical Scholars

On April 21, 2017, Dean Robert Olin and the College of Arts and Sciences announced the largest academic endowment to the college in more than two decades, from two prominent Alabama alumni, Dr. E. Gaylon and Mrs. Susan N. McCollough. The gift is intended to establish an interdisciplinary pre-medicine program, similar in design to the Blount Scholars program, and housed in the Philosophy Department. An excerpt from the University of Alabama press release:

TUSCALOOSA, Ala.—Two prominent University of Alabama alumni, Dr. E. Gaylon and Mrs. Susan N. McCollough, have gifted the College of Arts and Sciences with its largest academic endowment in more than two decades – for the purpose of creating two unprecedented initiatives: The Dr. E. Gaylon McCollough Institute for Pre-Medical Scholars and the Susan N. McCollough Art Biennale.

The gift was formally announced at a news conference today.

The Institute, which is slated to be considered by The University of Alabama Board of Trustees in June 2017 and welcome its first class in the 2019-2020 academic year, seeks to attract the best and brightest students in the country.

The McCollough Institute for Pre-Medical Scholars will offer innovative interdisciplinary pre-medical training focused on academic excellence, applied analytics, leadership, community service, scholarly research and ethical professionalism.

“Susan and I have long been committed to the pursuit of excellence. We have dreamed of creating unique educational experiences in an academic environment that enlighten the mind and buoy the spirit,” Gaylon McCollough said. “We envisioned a broad-based course of study, uniquely designed to prepare aspiring physicians for the scholastic and professional challenges that lay ahead and a venue through which scholars pursu-



Photo courtesy of the University of Alabama

Pictured from left to right, Mrs. Susan N. McCollough, Dr. E. Gaylon McCollough, UA President Dr. Stuart Bell, and Dean Robert Olin.

ing careers in art could see their works appreciated by individuals from all walks of life.

“We are convinced that the Institute for Pre-Medical Scholars at The University of Alabama will be the fulfillment of a major part of our vision and place our alma mater at the top of institutions attended by the most promising of tomorrow’s physicians and surgeons.”

Similar to other living-learning communities on campus, the McCollough Institute for Pre-Medical Scholars will provide tomorrow’s physicians the opportunity to live with a cohort of students with similar interests—in this case, the pursuit of a medical career.

“We are truly thankful for the generosity shown by Gaylon and Susan McCollough,” said UA President Stuart R. Bell. “They embody The University of Alabama spirit in so many ways, including their commitment to education, leadership and service. This gift is an excellent way to share their success with future generations of pre-medical and art students.”

McCollough Pre-Medical Schol-

ars will engage in freshman foundations courses, biweekly convocations, independent research and seminars and also be encouraged to take a wide variety of interdisciplinary classes, in addition to small seminar classes open only to students involved in the Institute.

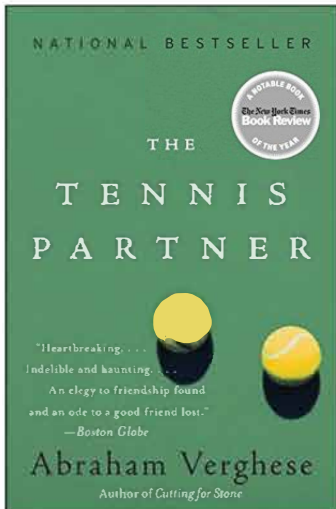
The McCollough Institute will also provide opportunities for concentrated mentorship by limiting the number of freshmen admitted to 40 per academic year, with no more than 160 students in the program at one time.

“We are incredibly grateful for the continued generosity of the McColloughs and of their dedication to our students,” said Dr. Robert Olin, dean of the UA College of Arts and Sciences. “Susan and Gaylon have been great friends of the College with the establishment of the McCollough Medical Scholars Forum and now these one-of-a-kind initiatives.

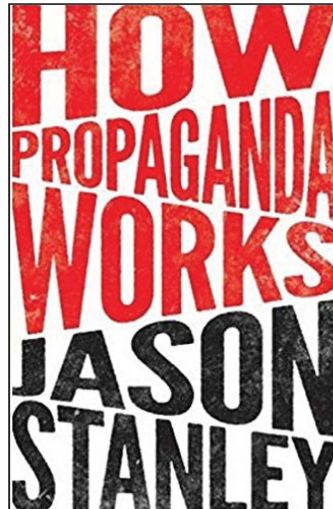
“Their vision of providing a comprehensive, pre-medical education—one that actively incorporates the humanities—is extremely powerful and will benefit our graduates for years to come.”

THE DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDS

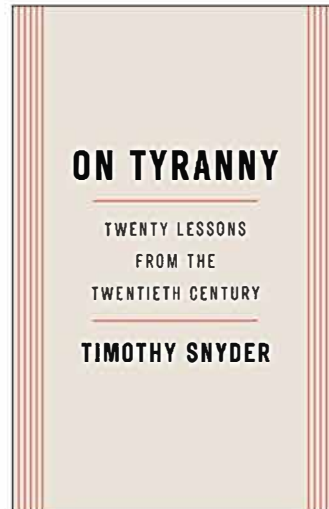
Check out these favorite titles of our faculty!



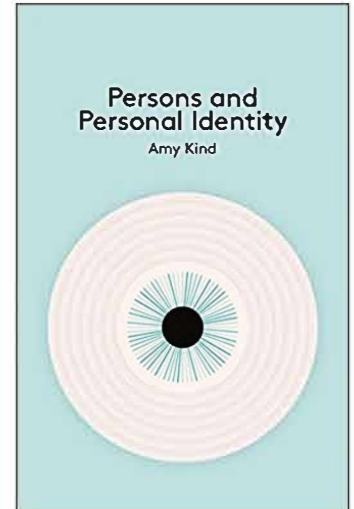
Dr. Kantin recommends
The Tennis Partner by
Abraham Verghese, and
Rebecca Skloot's
*The Immortal Life of
Henrietta Lacks*.



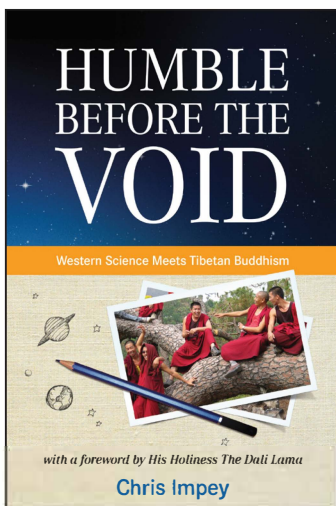
Dr. Wrenn recommends
How Propaganda Works
by Jason Stanley, along
with Simon Blackburn's
Truth and Patrick Lynch's
The Internet of Us.



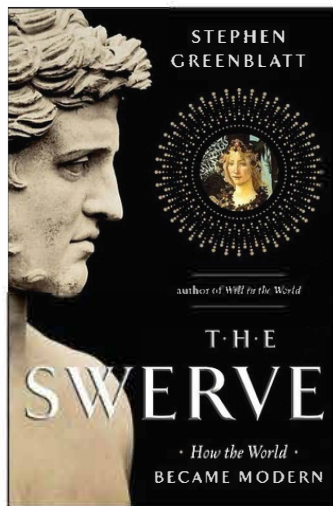
Dr. Rachels
recommends
Timothy Snyder's
On Tyranny.



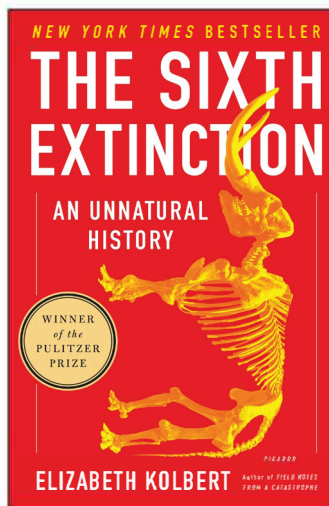
Dr. Alter recommends
*Persons and Personal
Identity* by Amy Kind,
along with
Riad Sattouf's graphic
novel *The Arab
of the Future*.



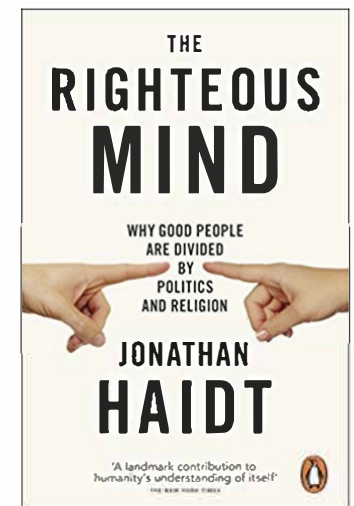
Dr. Hestevold
recommends
Humble Before the Void
by Chris Impey, and
Brian Greene's
The Fabric of the Cosmos



Dr. Bordner
recommends
*The Swerve: How the
World Became Modern*
by Stephen Greenblatt,
and Neal Stephenson's
Seveneves.



Dr. Nath recommends
The Sixth Extinction by
Elizabeth Kolbert, along
with Ta-Nehisi Coates's
*Between the
World and Me* and
Michelle Alexander's
The New Jim Crow.



Dr. Richards
recommends
The Righteous Mind by
Jonathan Haidt, along
with Robert Sapolsky's
*Behave: The Biology of
Humans at Our
Best and Worst*.

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Simplicity: The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel

Peter Achinstein
Johns Hopkins University

Oct. 5, 2017



Complexity and the Explanation of Intelligence
Christopher Mole
University of British Columbia

Nov. 2, 2017



The Rationality of Perception

Susanna Siegel
Harvard University

Nov. 20, 2017



Hell is Social Networks: Five Moral Dangers of Life Online
Robert H. Howell
SMU

April 5, 2018

2017–2018
Philosophy
TODAY

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on UA's iTunesU channel!*