

AGORA

Newsletter of the Department of Philosophy

PANDEMIC PHILOSOPHY



Photo courtesy of Nenad Stojkovic via Flickr

It has been two years since the last *Agora*, and it would be an understatement to say that a lot has happened since then. Classes in spring 2020 started in person but finished online as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the United States. Following university protocol, philosophy classes in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 were mostly “hybrid” — partially online and partially in person. Social distancing requirements made it impossible for all the students in each class to meet at the same time and in person, so students typically met in person on some days (with masks), and remotely others. Normal in-person teaching resumed in Fall 2021, but with mask mandates remaining. On Feb. 15, 2022, a month into the spring semester, the university ended all COVID protocols. Since then,

life has been mostly back to normal.

It will likely be some time before we can fully understand the consequences and costs of this pandemic. The loss of face-to-face interaction certainly made learning more difficult, and isolation created many other challenges for students. Teaching was more difficult as well, as instructors had to teach both to the students in class, and to those joining online. Tests and exams simply could not be administered the old way, in class with pencil and paper. And class discussion was a challenge, as those students meeting in person and those meeting online could hear and see each other only indirectly and with great difficulty. For philosophy, which relies heavily on intera-

KEEP READING PANDEMIC ON PAGE 8

FACULTY & STAFF



Torin Alter
Professor



Adam Arico
Instructor



Seth Bordner
Associate Professor



Stephen Davey
Instructor



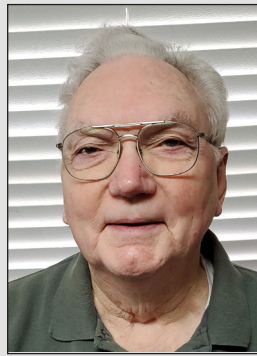
Adrian Erasmus
Assistant Professor



Jennifer Gleason
Instructor



Scott Hestevold
Professor Emeritus



Max Hocutt
Professor Emeritus



Luke Hunt
Assistant Professor



Holly Kantin
Assistant Professor



Ben Kozuch
Associate Professor



Rekha Nath
Associate Professor



Lesley Perkins
Administrative Assistant



Mark Pickering
Instructor



Ted Poston
Professor



Stuart Rachels
Associate Professor



Norvin Richards
Professor Emeritus



Richard Richards
Professor



Eric Solis
Instructor



Chase Wrenn
Professor

FACULTY UPDATES

Torin Alter

Dr. Alter gave talks at Davidson College and at the 2021 and 2022 meetings of the American Philosophical Association (central division) and the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology. Three of his papers came out: two on Russellian monism, in *Analysis* and *Noûs*, both co-written with Sam Coleman; and one on physicalism, in *Thought*. *Erkenntnis* accepted two more on those same theories, one co-written with Derk Pereboom. Dr. Alter's monograph, *The Matter of Consciousness*, is (finally!) forthcoming on Oxford University Press. He adds: "And my kids, pug, and table tennis club continue to flourish."

Seth Bordner

Dr. Bordner published (co-authored with Dr. Wrenn) an article on the practice of vacating wins in response to rule violations (2021) and contributed a chapter to the *Oxford Handbook to Berkeley* (2022). He recently completed a piece for an anthology on college sports and ethics, forthcoming in 2023 from Lexington Books. Dr. Bordner also serves as Undergraduate Director for the Department and as a Faculty Senator on the Academic Affairs Committee. This September, he'll appear as Joseph Pulitzer — alongside both of his children! — in The Actor's Charitable Theater's production of "Newsies."

Scott Hestevold

After a year of retirement, Dr. Hestevold returned to teach Metaphysics and Introduction to Philosophy in 2019-20. After his book was published (*Toward a Directionalist Theory of Space: Going Nowhere*, 2020) he began preliminary work for a follow-up paper on "the edge of the universe," and he refereed several papers for professional journals. Dr. Hestevold currently serves as secretary on the board of directors for Home In Place, a Tuscaloosa nonprofit that serves those committed to aging within their own homes.

Ben Kozuch

Dr. Kozuch has had a number of recent publications, including a piece on whether brain lesion evidence supports metacognition being required for consciousness ("Underwhelming force: Evaluating the neuropsychological evidence for higher-order theories of consciousness," in *Mind and Language*), an article on whether visual experience is necessary for skilled bodily action ("Visual consciousness guides motor action—rarely," in *Philosophical Psychology*), and a contribution to an anthology on whether or not our conscious will actually directs our actions ("Consciousness and mental causation: Contemporary empirical cases for epiphenomenalism," in *Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Consciousness*). Dr. Kozuch also continues to race mountain bikes competitively, having had several recent wins or top

three finishes, and has now started performing locally as a blues guitarist and vocalist (New Orleans Slim No. 4).

Rekha Nath

Dr. Nath published "Relational Egalitarianism" in *Philosophy Compass* (2020) and "Individual responsibility, large-scale harms, and radical uncertainty" in *The Journal of Ethics* (2021). She recently completed a book chapter that is forthcoming in the edited collection *Responsibility and Healthcare* (Oxford University Press). Last year, she taught a new seminar on philosophy and oppression that is the latest addition to the department's regular course offerings. Dr. Nath also serves as faculty advisor to the Philosophy Undergraduate Honors Society, Phi Sigma Tau, which after a nearly two-year hiatus following lockdown has now resumed its usual activities.

Mark Pickering

Dr. Pickering's article "Against the Hybrid Interpretation of Kant's Theory of Punishment" was published in the *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik / Annual Review of Law and Ethics*, his article "Kant's Ontological Phenomenalism" has been accepted for publication in *Kant-Studien*, and his article "Kant on Why Criminal Offenders Must Be Punished" has been accepted for publication in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*. He is working on a proposal for a book on Kant's theory of criminal punishment. Dr. Pickering played Baroque violin in two performances with early chamber music ensembles at UA last year.

Ted Poston

Over the last year or so, Dr. Poston published three articles: "Coherence & Confirmation: The epistemic limitations of the impossibility theorems," in *Kriterion*; "Explanatory Coherence & Confirmation by Coherence," in *Philosophy of Science*; and "The Intrinsic Probability of Grand Explanatory Theories" in *Faith & Philosophy*. He is currently working on a book on confirmation theory and theism.

Stuart Rachels

Dr. Rachels' book *The Best I Saw In Chess* was published. It won the 2020 Chess Journalists of America Book-of-the-Year Award, and it was one of four finalists for the similar award from the British Chess Federation. At the 2021 U.S. Chess Open in August 2021 in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, he received the Frank J. Marshall Award for contributions to chess, an award given each year by the United States Chess Federation. Last summer he competed in his first chess tournament in 28 years, winning two state titles: 2021 Alabama State Blitz Chess Champion and 2021 Alabama State Quick Chess Champion. The fourth edi-

KEEP READING FACULTY ON PAGE 4

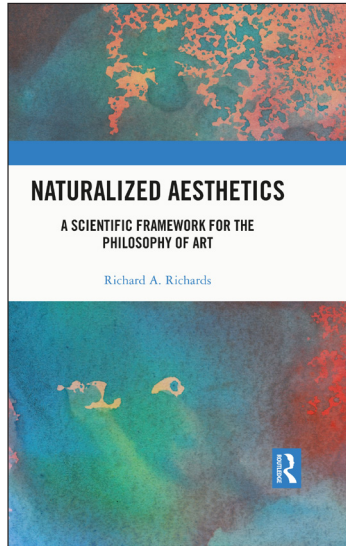
FACULTY UPDATES

FACULTY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

tion of his intro book (co-authored with his father James Rachels) *Problems from Philosophy* came out. He is currently working with McGraw-Hill on the production phase of *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 10th edition.

Richard Richards

Dr. Richards has just completed his seventh year as department chair. This last year he coordinated the development of two new Philosophy Minors, one in Ethics and another in Medical Ethics. These minors will be available to students beginning with the 2022-2023 catalog. This year he published a chapter, “Visual Arts,” in the *Cambridge History of Atheism*, and his latest book *Naturalized Aesthetics: A Scientific Framework for the Philosophy of Art*, is now available from Routledge Press. He is currently working on a new book, *The War on Science*, which looks first at how we might best “follow the science,” based on theories about scientific method, the scientific attitude, the social structure of science and the metaphysical commitments of science. Second, it looks at the many historical challenges to science, from internal bias and corruption, religious dogma, language and literary theories, to politics and ideology.



Chase Wrenn

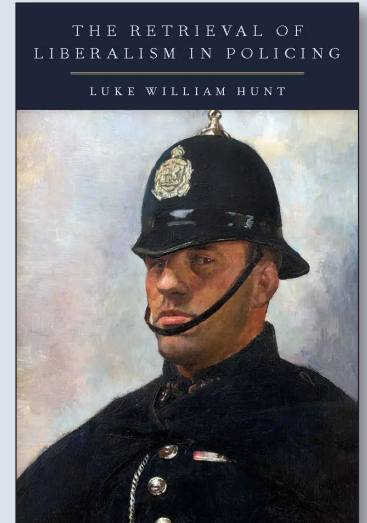
Dr. Wrenn managed to do a lot of philosophy since 2020, despite the pandemic. His book, *The True and the Good*, is under contract with Oxford University Press, tentatively scheduled for publication in early 2023. He published an article (co-authored with Dr. Bordner) on the practice of vacating wins in sports when teams break the rules, as well as a couple of articles on truth, one in *American Philosophical Quarterly* and the other in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. He also gave talks online for groups in the US, the UK, and New Zealand, and helped to organize two international online conferences on truth. Dr. Wrenn also helped to found VICTR, the Virtual International Consortium for Truth Research, which organizes online workshops, lectures, and conferences on the philosophy of truth.

OUR NEW COLLEAGUES

Luke William Hunt joined the Alabama philosophy faculty in 2020 and teaches in the department's Jurisprudence Track. After graduating from law school, he was a law clerk for a federal judge in Virginia. He then worked as an FBI Special Agent in Virginia and Washington, D.C., followed (naturally) by doctoral work in philosophy (University of Virginia). He spent four years on the faculty at Radford University before coming to Alabama.

Luke likes to think he's completing a “trilogy” on legal and philosophical problems in policing: the first book, *The Retrieval of Liberalism in Policing*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2019; the second book, *The Police Identity Crisis – Hero, Warrior, Guardian, Algorithm*, was published by Routledge in 2021; and his third book, *Police Deception and Dishonesty – The Logic of Lying* is under contract with Oxford University Press. Since arriving at UA, he's published articles in law review and philosophy journals such as *Criminal Justice Ethics*, *Intellectual History Review*, *Washington University Jurisprudence Review*, and *University of Florida Journal of Law & Policy*, and has a forthcoming paper in *Criminal Law and Philosophy*. He was recently interviewed by *The New Republic* regarding his work on police informants.

Luke teaches a range of courses in the Jurisprudence Concentration, including two new seminars he designed: “Ticking Time Bombs – Philosophy and National Security,” and “Legal and Philosophical Problems in Policing.” He helps organize the department's Undergraduate Philosophy Research Conference, and he recently started a lunchtime discussion group for students called “Lunch and Law.” Luke and his family (Melissa, a clinical psychologist, and two boys, Henry and Oliver) enjoy long, chaotic road trips.



Luke Hunt
Assistant Professor

FACULTY UPDATES

OUR NEW COLLEAGUES

Adrian Erasmus is from South Africa, where he studied psychology and philosophy at University of Johannesburg. He completed his Ph.D. in History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge before joining University of Alabama as an assistant professor in Fall 2021. At Cambridge, he focused on several conceptual and methodological features of medical science that influence our ability to accurately predict the effectiveness of medical interventions. His current research explores the extended impacts of different biases in clinical research, the role of values in medical inference, and the intersection of epistemic and ethical concerns in medical artificial intelligence. He has taught at the University of Johannesburg, the University of Pretoria, and the University of Cambridge. At UA, Dr. Erasmus teaches in the Philosophy & Medicine track in the Department of Philosophy and the Medical Foundations courses at the McCollough Institute for Pre-Medical Scholars. He is also a senior research associate at the Institute for the Future of Knowledge at the University of Johannesburg, a cross-disciplinary research center devoted to what we know now and what we believe will happen in the future.



Adrian Erasmus
Assistant Professor

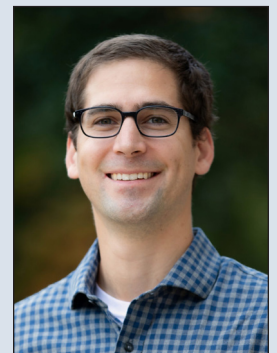
Jennifer Gleason joined the department in the Fall of 2021, having recently completed her Ph.D. at Ohio State University. Her papers “The Independence of Mental Disorder from Dysfunction: Part I” and “The

Independence of Mental Disorder from Dysfunction: Part II” are under review. She is currently finalizing “The Independence of Mental Disorder from Dysfunction: Part III” and writing another paper titled “(What) Is Mental Disorder? (What) Do We Want it to Be?” Once these are finished, she has several future projects in mind. Dr. Gleason continues to enjoy teaching courses in medical ethics.



Jennifer Gleason
Instructor

Eric Solis joined the philosophy department in the Fall of 2021. While teaching at Alabama, he is also ABD at Cornell University, working on a dissertation on law and virtue in Plato and Aristotle. Eric studies ancient philosophy broadly, and is especially interested in ethics, politics, and moral psychology. He spends his time thinking about questions like “What are virtue and vice?” “How does character change (for better or worse) happen?” “What contributions do social, educational, and political institutions have on our moral development?” His teaching interests are broad, and he enjoys thinking and talking about anything philosophical. Though he is perpetually pondering, he also enjoys spending time with his family, friends, and Zeus (his dog).



Eric Solis
Instructor

ALUMNI NOTES

Adam Mills (2012) is a trial attorney for the EEOC in Atlanta’s District Office. He lives in Decatur (GA) with his wife and two kids, Hank and Bea.

Ben Lucy (2015) recently joined a law firm in Washington, D.C. as a litigation associate. His practice focuses on corporate litigation in the Delaware Court of Chancery, where he recently completed a clerkship with Vice Chancellor Travis Laster. Ben claims to have successfully advocated for the first-ever use of the word “epistemic” in a Delaware corpo-

rate law decision. See *BCIM Strategic Master Fund, LP v. HFF, Inc.*, 2022 WL 304840, at *37 (Del. Ch. Feb. 2, 2022); see also *id.* at *38 n.28 (quoting extensively from a paper taught in Dr. Richard Richards’ philosophy of science course).

Matt O’Brien (2015) is leading efforts at Shipt to quantify and decrease fraud across the enterprise. He writes, “I’m also pecking the ear of the data science executives on data ethics concerns like fairness and transparency, but that is still

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ALUMNI NOTES

ALUMNI CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

in its infancy at the moment. In my spare time I'm playing gay softball in Birmingham and am the paw-rent of my child Elle."

Eric Roddy (2016) completed his MD at UAB Heersink School of Medicine and is a first-year neurology resident at the University of Louisville.

Lucas Nelson (2018) recently completed his MD at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine in Rochester, Michigan. He is currently a resident in Emergency Medicine at Ascension Resurrection Medical Center in Chicago, IL. One of his "fun facts" he still shares during icebreakers is that he majored in philosophy, and he still tries to keep up with medical ethics, which is not hard to do in the emergency department. During his residency, he hopes to get involved with his hospital's ethics consult service and help better integrate it with the emergency department. He lives with his wife Stephanie and their corgi-mix Charlie.

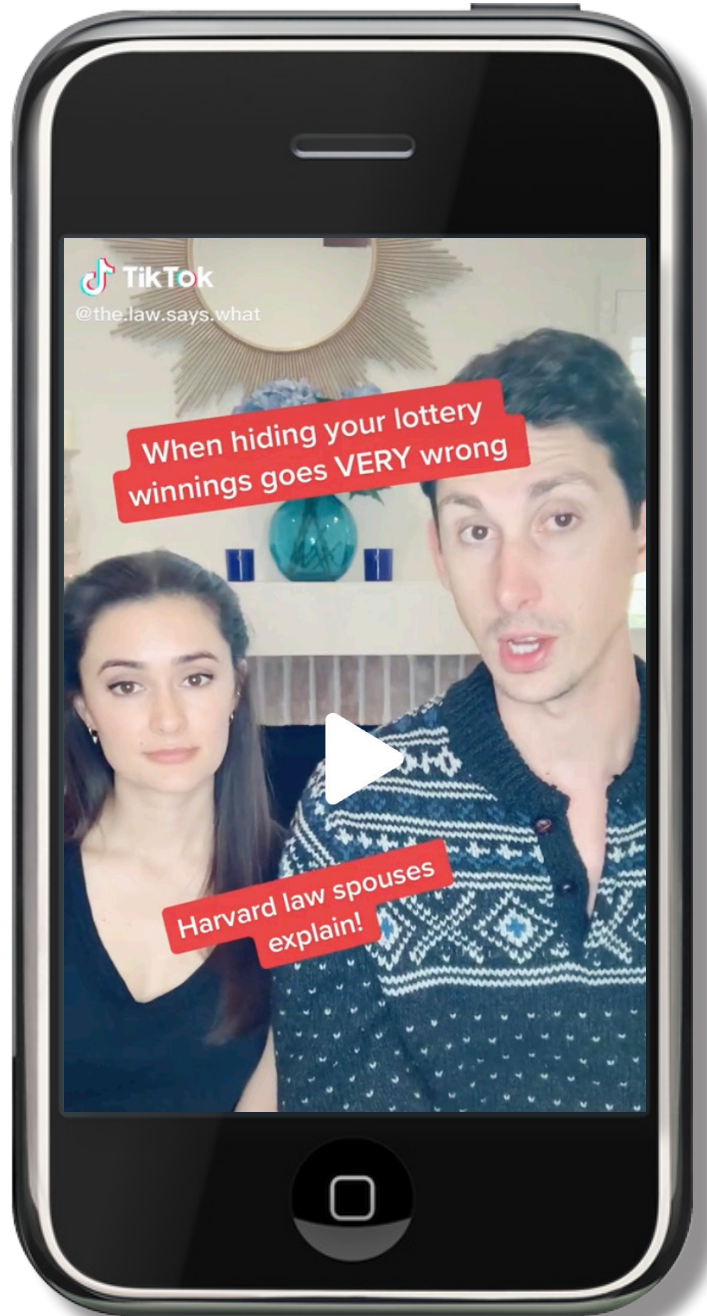
Danielle M. Pacia (2019) received her Master of Bioethics from Harvard Medical School in 2020 and is currently working as a research project manager at the bioethics thinktank The Hastings Center. She is particularly interested in public health ethics, specifically on the topics of reproductive health and community healthcare access. She hopes to apply to Health Policy Ph.D. programs in the near future.

Andrew Byrd (2021) is currently pursuing graduate coursework in History at the University of Alabama. His research interests include power and gender in modern Europe with an emphasis on France.

Eric Carr (2021) is nearly half-way through the Masters Program in Philosophy at GSU and working on a paper for conference submissions titled "Intergenerational Inequality, Broadly Construed." Soon he will be teaching a Critical Thinking course before graduating and moving on to law school.

Mackenzie Barrett (2022) has received the University Graduate Fellowship to attend Vanderbilt University for the joint Ph.D./JD program in Law and Economics.

Let us know how you are doing! Reach out by phone, email, or on Facebook.



RISING STARS

If you've spent any time on TikTok lately, chances are you've come across "Harvard Law spouses" **Ashleigh Ruggles-Stanley** (2015) and her husband Maclen Stanley's videos examining legal cases and decisions in the news. With nearly 900,000 followers, their videos have amassed more than 23.8 million likes on the platform. Follow them at @the.law.says.what on TikTok and on YouTube.

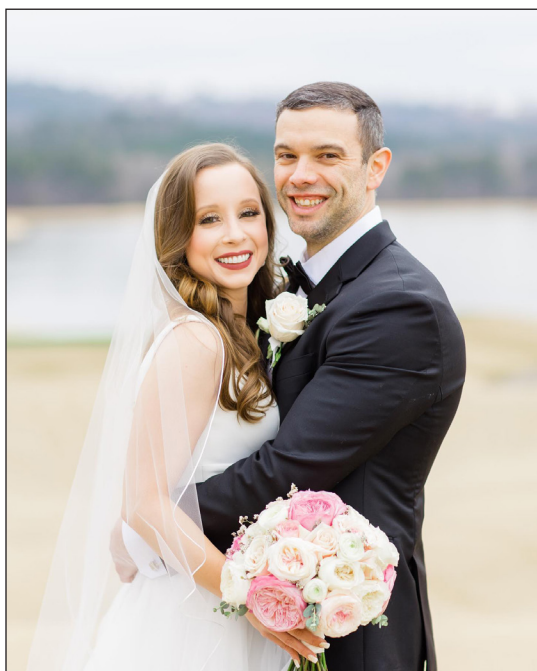
ALUMNI NOTES



Since graduating from UA in 2012, **Hannah White** received a BFA in Art Education from Georgia State University and an MA in Art, Education, and Community Practice from New York University. She currently teaches art at a middle school in Brooklyn, which is simultaneously fun and exhausting. Hannah and her partner were married in June and recently bought a house on Long Island.



Kaya Arroyo-Switzer (2013) married fellow UA alumnus Jake Switzer in April. She works as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York.



Left, **Hannah (Darby) DellaSala** (2015) married husband Anthony in March 2022. She is an associate attorney at Carr Allison in Birmingham, AL.

Right, **Greg Sikes-Mitchell** (2014) and his wife Paige were married in April 2022 and are expecting their first child in November. They will be stationed at Fort Riley, KS after Greg graduates from the Army's Explosive Ordnance Disposal School.





Photo courtesy of Mobilu in Mobili via Flickr

A display of white flags on the Mall in Washington D.C., memorializing the more than 700,000 Americans who had died of COVID as of October 2021.

PANDEMIC CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tion and discussion, these circumstances were far from ideal, and required additional efforts for both student and instructor. Nonetheless, from my position as chair, it became clear that the philosophy faculty devoted a tremendous amount of time and effort to make our classes work as well as possible in these difficult times. I am grateful for all their efforts and believe our students are as well.

But obviously the pandemic story isn't just about our efforts to provide the best philosophy education possible. The global response to the spread of COVID-19 also raised a series of philosophical questions — questions that as philosophers we might be expected to address. Some of the philosophical questions raised are epistemic, pertaining to what we think we know and how we came to have this knowledge. From early in the pandemic, epidemiological models were used to predict its spread and costs. Given some particular behavior or policy, for instance, how many hospitalizations and deaths should we expect? One model in particular, the Imperial College London (ICL) model, was widely used in formulating policy by predicting the outcomes given different scenarios. There is little doubt that this turn to epidemiological models was necessary, but as philosophers of science have long been aware, models necessarily misrepresent the systems modeled. Models of the solar system, for instance, might misrepresent the sun, earth, moon, and planets as spherical point-masses. And the evolutionary tree of life misrepresents the history of life as a single, branching and non-reticulating tree, ignoring the hybridization, introgression and horizontal gene transfer we see across biodiversity. Just as we cannot represent all the complexities of the solar system and evolution of life accurately in a model, we cannot represent all the complexities in disease transmission accurately in an epidemiological model. But if

so, what should we include in such a model? How should it be structured? And what if we simply don't know enough to assign values to the variables? Should we just guess? If so, on what grounds? Notice that these are not trivial questions as how we answer them may have implications for life and death. Notice also that we need answers to these questions even if we believe we have the best model, if only to be sure that we actually have the best model.

A second series of philosophical questions seem to engage topics we might associate with political philosophy. It is now apparent that COVID-19 was much more deadly for the aged and those with comorbidities than for the young and healthy. But many of the responses to the pandemic, in particular the lockdowns and closures, seem to have affected the young more than the old. As schools were closed and schooling went online, the very youngest students, those just learning to read and write for instance, seemed to be affected the most. It appears that they had more difficulty adjusting to online teaching than older students, and they were more likely to be in their critical learning periods. This has led to worries that the school closures will lead to long-term deficits in their reading, writing and math. Given these worries, we might ask if we were justified in adopting policies that harmed these children, who were at relatively little risk, in order to protect those more at risk? And consequently, we might wonder how to respond to this disparity, as guest speaker Dr. Kal Kalewold did in a recent department talk. Moreover, it is likely that the poorer children, who often have fewer opportunities for home schooling or tutoring were harmed the most. And beyond this, there are the psychological and emotional harms resulting from social isolation that may be more severe for children. As with the epistemic questions, we should have answers to questions about costs and benefits, even if we

believe our responses to the pandemic were appropriate and necessary.

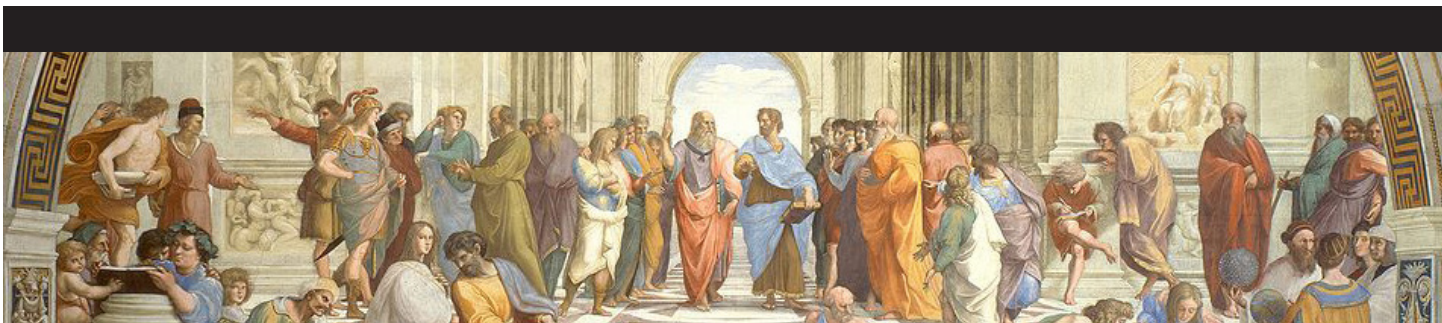
A third set of philosophical questions (in ethics or meta-ethics) asks about the ultimate goal or justification of pandemic policy. Is the preservation of life the only consideration? If so, then we might justifiably sacrifice much of what makes life worth living in order to save lives. Or is well-being in a broader sense also relevant. What would that include? Psychological, emotional or financial well-being? And what about autonomy and individual rights? Do we have some obligation to preserve the ability of individuals to make decisions themselves about their own health and life, even if it conflicts with some social good? Or does the authority of the state and its medical institutions overrule individual autonomy. For some countries this question extends to the authority and role of police in enforcing administrative policy. This raises questions about political authority, legitimacy and policing. Once again, we need not believe that our policies were actually mistaken to believe that we needed more public debate, here about the philosophical goals and foundations of our policies.

Whatever the case, the philosophy department can perform a valuable service by contributing to the critical thinking and future discussions about public health and medicine. It is now better positioned to do so through its most recent hire. Beginning Fall semester 2021, a philosopher of medicine, Adrian Erasmus, joined the department. He completed his Ph.D. at Cambridge University under the supervision of one

of the most prominent philosophers of medicine today, Jacob Stegenga. Dr. Erasmus teaches philosophy of medicine and philosophy of science courses for the department as well as some courses for the McCollough Pre-medical Institute. He writes about and teaches medical epistemology, a broad field concerned with the nature and justification of medical knowledge.

We will also be in a better position to contribute to public debates about philosophical issues in medicine if we move forward with a specialized master's program in philosophy, medicine and ethics. With such a program we could explicitly address the questions and issues raised by the pandemic, not just in our philosophy classes, but also within the broader university community and in the public square. This spring the department voted to pursue a specialized master's degree program with three concentrations that reflect our specialized bachelor's degrees. Along with the philosophy, medicine and ethics concentration will be a law, ethics and society concentration that builds upon our current jurisprudence major, and a mind and brain concentration that builds upon our mind and brain major. Such a graduate program will give our students opportunities for more advanced study (perhaps through an accelerated master's program) and has the potential to expand the reach and influence of the department, and perhaps most significantly, to contribute to public discussions about such important concerns as health policy and the pandemic.

— Richard Richards



Why Is There No Right To Be Forgiven?

Miranda Fricker
The Graduate Center, CUNY
Oct. 20, 2021



Who We Grieve For — And Why

Michael Cholbi
University of Edinburgh
Nov. 15, 2021

Presidential Accountability and the Rule of Law

Claire Finkelstein
University of Pennsylvania
March 7, 2022



Reckoning With Monuments: A Values-Based Framework

Sandra Lynne Shapshay
Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY
March 24, 2022



2021–2022 Philosophy TODAY

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