I’ve now finished my third year as chair of the Department, and presiding over our commencement ceremony has been one of my favorite things about the job. But the position does come with one somewhat burdensome expectation: that the chair open the ceremony by trying to answer the eternal question: “Yes, but what is philosophy good for?” The idea has traditionally been that commencement marks the Department’s last chance to assure our students’ parents that by majoring in philosophy, their children have not made a tragic mistake.

At our previous two ceremonies, I did my best to answer this difficult question. But I’m not sure I ever came up with a response that the parents found fully satisfactory. As a result, the problem of trying to figure out what I was going to say this year was a source of some anxiety for me in the months leading up to Commencement. Then I had an unexpected epiphany: throughout the history of philosophy, important progress has often been made on difficult questions when someone found a slightly different way to frame the question. So I thought: maybe the key to answering the question “What is philosophy good for?” is to tweak the question a little bit. In particular, I thought maybe I could reframe the question as: “What is philosophy not good for?”

Suddenly, it felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. The question that had previously seemed all but unanswerable suddenly seemed to have so many good answers, that now the problem was deciding which answer to present. After thinking through some of my options, I decided to say a few things to the parents about one thing that philosophy is especially not good for: it’s especially not good for instilling mental tranquility in those who pursue it.

One reason philosophy isn’t a good source of tranquility has to do with the subject matter of philosophy. The questions that philosophers seek to answer are hard: What is knowledge? What is real? What am I? How should I live? It isn’t just that it’s hard to find the right answers to these questions. It’s that it’s hard to know how we could tell if we had found the right answers. Sometimes, it’s even hard to believe that these questions have right answers at all. And yet it’s even harder to believe that they don’t. The very subject matter with which philosophers work can induce a kind of intellectual vertigo, and in training our students in this most demanding discipline, we have no doubt been guilty of causing them to suffer its symptoms along with us.

A second reason that philosophy is not good for instilling mental tranquility has to do with the culture of philosophy. It’s a bit difficult to describe, but let’s just say that it isn’t exactly touchy-feely. I was invited to join an interdisciplinary reading group a number of years ago where faculty from
various departments got together to read and discuss books. When someone made a
discussion during the periods, people from the other departments would
respond by saying things like “I really appreciate what you’re saying” or “That’s a
really good point.” I would respond by saying things like “That doesn’t follow” or
“Here’s a counterexample.” For some reason, I didn’t get invited back the following
year.

That’s how philosophers interact with
other people. I gave a talk at my own
department a few years ago, and the first
question after I was done began with
“Here’s why I don’t like your argument.”
That turned out to be the easy question. One
of the highest honors that the American
Philosophical Association bestows on us is the
devoation of an entire session to discussing it at one of its annual
conventions. These sessions are not called “author meets admirers.” They are called
“author meets critics.” And for good reason.
In introducing our students to philosophy, then, we have also initiated them into this
quirksome culture, and for the mental
strain that this can cause we are again responsible.

A third reason that philosophy isn’t good
for instilling tranquility has to do with the
method of philosophy. Philosophers commit
themselves to following the argument
wherever it leads, even if it leads to
conclusions we do not wish to believe. When we
think about whether free will exists, whether
our minds could survive the death of our
bodies, whether God could be both
omnipotent and morally perfect, or whether
the lives that most of us lead are immoral,
we philosophers are sometimes led to
conclusions that are disturbing and even
pressing. Worse, we come up with
arguments for these conclusions, and some-
times these arguments are not at all easy to
overcome.

For those who take philosophical
argumentation seriously, this, too, can be a
source of intellectual anguish, and it is, once
again, a distinctive form of discomfort that
we are constantly inflicting on our students.
I teach courses in applied ethics, for
example, and I often have students come up
to me after class and say something like this:
“I can’t find the mistake in the argument you
were talking about today, but I know the
argument’s wrong because I disagree with
its conclusion.” Some students are not bothered by this tension between what they
believe and what an argument seems to
show. They simply note the inconsistency
and move on. But other students are deeply
troubled by the experience. These are the
ones who go on to become philosophy
majors.

By educating our students in the ways of
philosophy, in short, my colleagues and I
and have inculcated in them a state of perpetual
dissatisfaction. One could argue that
this dissatisfaction is a defining characteris-
tic of philosophy itself. It was John Stuart
Mill who famously declared that it is better
to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig
satisfied. And who other than a philoso-
pher could think that a dissatisfied life is
preferable to a satisfied one?

So why, I imagine the parents were now
asking themselves, have we inflicted all of
this on their sons and daughters? And why
have their sons and daughters put up with it?
The answer, I think, can be found in the
origins of the word “philosophy.” In the
Greek words philo and sophia, meaning “love
of wisdom.” As with any other form of
love, philosophy has a kind of pure and
immediate value that is intuitively grasped
by those who are caught in its grip, but that
must remain forever inaccessible to those
who have never experienced it first-hand.
Consider, by way of analogy, a different
form of love: the love of parents for their
children. If a childless person asked a
parent, “What’s so great about parental
love?” the parent could try to give a set of
reasons in response, but in the end, I
suspect that the parent would have to give
the same answer that I find myself giving
in response to the question about the
philosopher’s love of wisdom. The answer
is: I can’t explain exactly why, but somehow
it’s worth all the aggravation.

I opened this year’s Commencement
ceremony by focusing on a few things that
make philosophy a particularly difficult and,
at times, aggravating pursuit. This may have
been a somewhat peculiar way to begin a
commencement ceremony. But I did it in
the hope that everyone present would join
me in feeling not only great pride and
admiration for what our students have
accomplished, but a little bit of sympathy
as well. They certainly deserve it.
Interview with Robert Pasnau

Professor Pasnau is a prize-winning scholar of medieval and early modern philosophy and the previous chair of the Department. He recently spoke with David Boonin about his work.

David Boonin: You have a big new book coming out with Oxford University Press called *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1671*. What’s so special about that period?

Robert Pasnau: Well, not too many people have thought that there’s anything special about it—and maybe for me that’s part of the interest. It overlaps two periods that have typically been studied in isolation: the later medieval period and the early modern period. I’m trying to tell a story that runs through those two periods, and to understand how medieval thought changed and turned into what we now think of as the early modern period of the 17th Century.

David: Why do you think the period’s been neglected? It doesn’t get taught much, for example, in the standard sequence of history of philosophy courses.

Bob: Partly, I think, people tend to specialize in one thing or another, and so it’s unusual for anyone to try to write something that crosses over from one period to another. Someone will be a scholar either in early modern thought, or in medieval thought, but trying to write a book that genuinely grapples with both is quite difficult. But I think another part of it is that the period is just obscure—it’s notoriously obscure. Later medieval philosophy is highly technical and dry and goes on for volume after volume. It’s been very daunting for people to try to get a grip on what’s going on in those books.

David: That strikes me as a bit surprising. On the face of it, it seems that a lot of the issues that these theologians discussed are not very directly connected to God or to theology—questions about the mereology of ordinary objects, the persistence conditions for ordinary objects over time, and so on. Do you think they were right to suppose that it was necessary for theologians grappling with the nature of God to spend so much time worrying about such things? Whatever one thinks about God, it seems that God is quite different from simple ordinary objects.

Bob: Yes, and that was a point of controversy in their time. Obviously, God is extremely different, but it was controversial as to whether God is so radically different that there’s not even any point in trying to go from the familiar case of the world around us up to God. But if you think that you can’t go from the familiar world around us up to God, then that’s problematic because it’s not clear how else you would get to any knowledge of God—definitions”) and the other to their Center for Astrobiology ("Philosophical issues in Astrobiology") and delivered a paper, “Common Cause Explanation and the Asymmetry of Overdetermination,” at the biennial meeting of the Society for Philosophy of Science in Practice, in Minneapolis.

John Fisher wrote “The Formalist Model of Nature Appreciation,” a chapter for a book on environmental aesthetics, and another paper on “The Aesthetic Value of Wild Animals.” His entry on “Music and Song” appeared in the Blackwell Companion to Aesthetics in 2009. There, he suggested that by focusing too exclusively on instrumental classical music, philosophy of music has overlooked the philosophical questions raised by the vast majority of the world’s music. He developed this position in “The Concept of a Song,” which he read at an aesthetics conference, prompting heated debate about which was the definitive version of “Hound Dog.” In the spring he did extensive research for an entry on “Popular Music” for the Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music. He also wrote a review of Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature for Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews.

Graeme Forbes chaired the closing afternoon sessions of the conference Propositions: Ontology, Semantics, Pragmatics at the University of Venice in November. In December, he responded at an Author-Meets-Critics session on his book Attitude Problems, at the APA Eastern Division meeting in Philadelphia. In February, he chaired an Author-Meets-Critics session on Penelope Mackie’s book How Things Might Have Been at the APA Central Division meeting in Chicago. In May, he responded to a paper at the first Princeton Philosophical Logic Conference. In July, he gave a keynote talk at the Vagueness Workshop, part of the European Summer School in Logic, Language and Information, in Bordeaux, France. His critical notice of Kit Fine’s Modality and Tense appeared in the Philosophical Review.

Ben Hale recently assumed a coeditorship of the journal Ethics, Place, and Environment and will be working with other faculty members to refashion the journal so that it is more responsive to current environ-
because, if you think about it, what basis do
we have for grasping God’s nature other
than trying to run some sort of inference
from the nature of the world around us up
to God? If you just were to think in
completely abstract a priori terms about what
God is like, it would be difficult to get very
far. At any rate, this was a debate that people
had, and I think it’s easy to be sympathetic
with the camp that said you really do have
to start with the created world and to
understand it, and then make your way up
to doing theology. And that was also, I
should say, the way the disciplines of the
time were organized, so that to become a
theologian, you first had to spend many
years studying philosophy. It was
the conventional wisdom of the time that no
one could be a good theologian who hadn’t
first studied philosophy quite intensively.

David: Some of the philosophers you cover in the book are central figures from the canon—
people like Locke, Descartes, Spinoza—but you also discuss a
number of people who are less
well known. I was wondering if
you could pick out one or two of
the more obscure figures who
you think deserve to be better
known than they are, and say
something about who they were
and why they are important.

Bob: Well, it is literally the case
that I talk about some figures
that are completely unknown. I talk
about some figures that I think
have never been written about.

I spent a week in the Bodleian library in
Oxford just calling up old, old books from
their rare book collection, and some of the
books I was calling up I was quite confident
nobody had looked at in hundreds of years.
I felt a certain amount of pressure, actually,
because I was thinking to myself, you know,
“If I don’t find something good in this
book, when’s the next time anyone’s going
to want to come look at it?”

David: And so you found some good stuff?

Bob: Well, I tried extra hard!

David: That sounds like an evasive answer
to me.

Bob: [laughs] I tried. But it’s not easy when
you get this book you really don’t know
anything about, nobody else has written
about this figure, it’s a big book, and you
don’t even know where to look in it for
something that might be interesting. And
it goes without saying, of course, that it’s
all in Latin. So it’s a difficult challenge. But
you asked about figures that stand out
among all the people I talked about. One
of the things I was most impressed by was
the number of really first-rate philosophers
from the 14th Century. They’re not
unknown, but they’re dramatically under-
appreciated. One of them is John Buridan,
who lived in the generation after Ockham,
so the middle of the 14th Century. Ockham
is not a household name, I suppose, but
at least people know about “Ockham’s
Razor.” But Buridan is really not much
studied at all, and he’s just a spectacular
philosopher. Another person I
would put in that
category from
around the same
time is Nicole
Oresme. Oresme
has some reputa-
tion among histori-
ans of science be-
cause he was a
forerunner to the
kind of quantitative
research program
that Galileo would
later make famous.
But Oresme as a
philosopher is re-
ally quite interesting
and impressive, and very little work has
been done on his thoughts; he deserves a
lot more attention than he’s received.

David: Is there a particular idea, either
from one of them or from one of the other
lesser-known philosophers, that contempo-
rary philosophers working in metaphysics
might be especially interested in learning about?

Bob: Well, one thing I find particularly
interesting—both Buridan and Oresme talk
about this—is a conception of identity over
time that is perfectly familiar to us today,
but that I think people hadn’t realized dates
back to this period of time. It’s a picture
on which genuine identity through time—
the very same thing existing at this moment of time and the next moment of time—and then the next moment of time—is extremely rare. According to this view, most of the things that we regard as persisting through time in fact don’t persist. Instead, what you get is one thing existing for a very brief time, and then another thing, and then another thing.

David: Are they talking about ordinary objects when they say this?

Bob: Yes, they’re talking about ordinary objects. They’re talking about animals, for instance.

David: [looking puzzled] Really?

Bob: John Buriden thinks that animals persist through time only for the briefest period—and then when their parts change, or when their properties change, they go out of existence and are replaced by some new object that’s very, very similar to the old one, but not identical.

David: Does this include human animals? That would have some disturbing implications.

Bob: Well, they would get this result for human animals, except they believe that human animals have an immortal, immaterial soul that’s not changeable in that way. So they had an account of why human beings are a special case, because of our immaterial soul, and that immaterial soul is genuinely enduring through time.

David: Did any of them worry about whether this view had moral implications for things like property ownership? If you think you own a particular piece of property, but if it turns out that really what you came to own went out of existence a few moments after you took possession of it, that might pose some serious problems.

Bob: Yes, they considered this as an objection to their view—the objection was that, if this were right, then it would make chaos of various kinds of institutions—social, political, and legal institutions.

David: Yeah, that’s exactly what I was wondering about.

Bob: The reply was in effect a reply in the philosophy of language—the idea is that we need to reinterpret our language so that a term like “David Boonin” doesn’t just refer to, say, a single entity, but can refer to a sequence of one thing after another. Now, as I said, “David Boonin” is not so bad a case because you’ve got a soul on this view, and the soul endures in a stable way. But they compare other animals to a river: the familiar example of a river flowing through a bed, and the river itself is always changing. And they want to say that animals are much more like rivers than we realize. So they would say that people can talk about the Mississippi, for example, and we know what they’re talking about, and even though the thing that is the Mississippi, the body of water, is constantly changing, there’s no obstacle to referring to that over time. And so we do the same thing with, say, Sophie the dog. Even though, strictly speaking, there is no one thing “Sophie” that endures, we can talk about Sophie as a sequence, and that’s fine.

David: I wonder if people would still care as much about their pets if they came to think that Sophie’s just a sequence. In any event, let’s talk a little about your next big project: you’re heading off to Morocco in the spring; this is not just some big boondoggle, is it?

Bob: It’s a boondoggle for my wife. My wife’s a lawyer and her law firm gives the project: you’re heading off to Morocco in Morocco, site of Pasnau boondoggle

Dan Kaufman was granted tenure in the most painful way possible. [The process involved a medieval device known as “the pear of anguish.” Enough said.—ed.] He gave talks at the University of Toronto, the University of Massachusetts, and Barnard College. He has forthcoming papers on “Locke on Identity” for the Blackwell Guide to Locke’s Essay and “The Real Distinction Argument and its Importance” for the Cambridge Critical Guide to Descartes’ Meditations. He continues to edit the Routledge Companion to 17th-Century Philosophy. Reviews of his live musical performances refer to him as “a brilliant eccentric” and “the musical equivalent of Colonel Kurtz,” as well as

Alison Jaggar’s book Abortion: Three Perspectives, co-authored with Michael Tooley, Philip Devine, and Cela Wolf-Devine, was published by Oxford University Press. Two of her articles also appeared: “Susan Moller Okin and the Challenge of Essentialism” in Toward a Humani stic JUSTICE and “L’Imagination au pouvoir: Comparing John Rawls’s Method of Ideal Theory with Iris Marion Young’s Method of Critical Theory” in Feminist Ethics and Social and Political Theory. The latter was reprinted in Dancing with Iris: Between Embodiment and the Body Politic in Iris Marion Young’s Political Philosophy. Alison gave six talks, including one at the University of Oslo and plenary addresses at the Mid-West Women’s Studies Association and the 25th anniversary conference of the journal Hypatia. In May-June, she spent a month at the University of Oslo working with CU alumnus Theresa Tobin on a book tentatively titled Ethics across Borders. Alison’s ongoing research includes participating in a multi-disciplinary, international project to develop a new gender-sensitive global poverty measure. The project is funded by several sources, including a large grant from the Australian Research Council.
David: I see. But you're supposed to go do work.

Bob: Right. We philosophers, you know, are very serious.

David: So what are you going to be—allegedly—working on?

Bob: [laughs] I'm going to be studying Islamic philosophy. First of all, I'm going to be studying the Arabic language, quite intensively, because these texts were all written in Arabic. There's a great deal of interesting philosophy among medieval Islamic authors.

David: And is there anything in particular that you're looking for as a specific research project?

Bob: The figure I'm particularly interested in is Averroës. Averroës spent some of his life in Morocco, which makes that a natural place to go work on him. There are quite a few scholars there who work on Averroës. I'm also interested in Avicenna, who is probably the greatest of all Islamic philosophers. Both of these figures have received some attention from scholars, but there's really a need for a lot more work to be done. So I hope to be able to learn enough of the Arabic that I can look at the material in the originals and make a serious contribution to the scholarship in that area.

David: Now you presumably could have gone on publishing more about the various figures that you've already studied without moving on to look into the Islamic tradition. Was there a particular reason that you wanted to move on and look at this different group of figures?

Bob: I seem to be, by temperament, one of these people that likes to do something, write it up, and then move on and do something different. Philosophers seem to vary quite widely in that way. Some are like me, and then others like to sink their teeth into one very specific problem and work on it their whole career. These are two different mindsets in philosophy. It's not exactly that I lose interest in a particular area. I can imagine continuing to work on what I have been working on. It's that I feel this pull toward exploring new areas that I don't know anything about. I like a challenge.

David: I'd say that that's admirable, but that would be self-serving, because I tend to do the same thing. So instead, let's briefly turn to two other subjects. First, I wanted to ask about the annual Summer Seminar that you first organized shortly after you came to CU—that's been a big success for the department and for the students who participate. How did that come about?

Bob: I came from a small school in Philadelphia—St. Joseph's University—and had a brilliant student there. I had always felt quite bad for him because, at a small school like that, he had very few opportunities to take sophisticated classes of the sort that would really push him and give him a way of sensing just what kind of skills he had in philosophy. So when I came to Boulder, it occurred to me that this would be the perfect place to have a summer program that brings together students from around the country like this student I had in Philadelphia. I started it referring to his music as “the darkest stuff coming out of Denver or anywhere else.”

Kathrin Koslicki had her book The Structure of Objects published by Oxford University Press, while her “Natural Kinds and Natural Kind Terms” appeared in Philosophy Compass. Her entry, “Structure,” is forthcoming in the Handbook of Metaphysics. She continued work on the nature of ontological dependence. She presented a paper at the Eidos Metaphysics Conference at the University of Geneva, gave a colloquium at the University of Alberta, and participated in the Arizona Ontology Conference and CU’s Works-in-Progress series. She taught the undergraduate Introduction to Ancient Philosophy and the graduate Proseminar in Metaphysics. She organized the 2009 Colorado Conference on Dependence in March, bringing together approximately 20 renowned philosophers from the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia.

Mitzi Lee took over as Director of Graduate Studies and spent much of the fall getting to know the students better and figuring out how the program works. Her book Epistemology After Protagoras (Oxford, 2005) was selected for an Author-Meets-Critics session at the APA Eastern Division meeting in Philadelphia. Mitzi spent the spring of 2009 as a visiting professor at Harvard, returning to her old grad student stomping grounds. She thought the Harvard students were great, but was very happy to return to Boulder in June! She spent much of the spring working on a new project on justice and the laws in Aristotle’s moral and political philosophy, and presented her work at Yale in April. She was awarded a CU LEAP Associate Professor Growth Grant in the summer of 2009.

Claudia Mills won a campus-wide Boulder Faculty Assembly teaching award. She was also a keynote speaker and participating faculty member at the Undergraduate Ethics Symposium sponsored by the Prindle Institute for Ethics at DePauw University in Indiana in April, where she presented her paper “Artistic Integrity.”

Bradley Monton has a new book out: Seeking God in Science: An Atheist
up my first year here, and it’s gotten to be bigger and better every summer—bigger in the sense that it gets to be better known, with more applicants and stronger students coming. It’s been a great experience for me, and I think it’s meant a lot to a lot of the students who have gone through it and have gone on to really good Ph.D. programs in philosophy all over the country.

David: Are there things about it that you’ve enjoyed that are different from what you get out of teaching in a normal academic semester?

Bob: Two things come to mind. First of all, the students are really quite special because they are all very serious about going to graduate school, and all committed enough to give up three weeks of their summer to come to Boulder and do philosophy, pretty much 24-hours a day. They’re smart, they’re energetic, they’re motivated, and so that part of it is a lot of fun. The other part is that it’s a team-taught class. Of the fifteen class meetings, I only teach a couple of them per summer, and so the rest of the time it’s my colleagues teaching. I try to go to as many of their sessions as I can and I really learn a lot about what my colleagues are doing. I’ve probably learned more about my colleagues’ work from this Seminar than I have in any other way.

David: I wanted to ask you a few questions about your interest in the history of philosophy more generally. When you were an undergraduate, did you come to be interested in philosophy by first becoming interested in the history of philosophy, or did you become interested in the history of philosophy after you first became interested in philosophy?

Bob: It was a fairly long road for me to philosophy. I started off thinking I would be an English major, but I really couldn’t stand these amorphous conversations about literature, and so then I drifted over toward history, but all I really cared about in history was intellectual history. And then I just kind of stumbled upon philosophy. And it didn’t take me long to figure out that that was really what I cared about, but because I was coming at it from literature via history into philosophy, I was predisposed to think of it in very historical terms. And as it happened, I was an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, which was a very historically oriented department. It never occurred to me, really, to do anything other than the history of philosophy.

David: And then I have a question about why you think philosophers in general should care about the history of philosophy. When I was in graduate school, we were all required to take a pretty large number of history of philosophy classes, and I was happy with that; I always enjoyed history of philosophy. But I remember one of my fellow students said he didn’t think we should have to take any history classes at all, and what he said was, “I don’t care about old ideas; I care about true ideas.” What would you have said to him?

Bob: I quite agree. I only care about true ideas; I don’t care about old ideas. There’s nothing about the oldness of the things I study that makes them interesting to me. But I think that if you’re only studying philosophy in the journals from the last couple of decades, you get locked into a fairly narrow framework about how philosophy should be done. If you care about thinking new thoughts, it’s very difficult to do that if all you’re looking at are the thoughts of the people around you. And so one way to break out of this narrow framework is to read the ideas of old dead people. There are a lot of smart old dead people, and they oftentimes thought about things rather differently from the way that we do. I don’t think they usually thought about things in radically different ways. I don’t think there’s any great incommensurability between the way they thought about philosophy and the way we do, but I just think we approach issues by way of certain assumptions, and sometimes we don’t even see certain kinds of issues because they’re not on our roadmap of the field. And when you look at old texts, you get ideas. This, at any rate, is how it is for me. When I publish in contemporary philosophy, most of the work I do grows directly out of ideas I’ve gotten from the history of philosophy. So I’d encourage anybody who cares about true ideas to read more old stuff—it’s good for you.

Defends Intelligent Design. He participated in a four-way debate about intelligent design last Fall, in front of an audience of about 1000 in Fort Worth. He’s also been appointed to be on the editorial board of the journal Philosophy of Science. Finally, he’s been teaching Bob Pasnau how to kayak.


Alastair Norcross spent most of the year drinking. In March, he sacrificed an innocent person and distributed their organs to five needy transplant recipients. When not promoting utility directly, he did so indirectly, by publishing “Two Dogmas of Deontology: Aggregation, Rights, and the Separateness of Persons” in Social Philosophy & Policy and “Was Mill an ‘India House’ Utilitarian?” in Southwest Philosophy Review. His “Act-Utilitarianism and Promissory Obligation,” which he presented at the Baker Center Conference on Promises and Agreements, will be published in Understanding Promises and Agreements: Philosophical Essays. He gave six conference presentations and three invited talks. He organized CU’s Think! lecture series. He also presented a motion to the APA, urging the APA to enforce its policy on discrimination, especially with respect to schools that discriminate against homosexuals. With Ben Hale, he organized the second Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, which was an even more outstanding success than the first. He and Diana ran the Boulder Boulder again, this time beating all the seventy-three-year-old women, all the six-year-old girls, and all but one of the seven-year-old girls. Next year, his goal is to beat all the women over sixty-nine and under nine.

Graham Oddie saw the paperback edition of his Value, Reality and Desire published by Oxford University
Graduate Student Accomplishments 2008-2009

CU has a nationally ranked graduate program in philosophy. Our students distinguish themselves in many ways—winning awards and fellowships, presenting their work at conferences, organizing their own conferences, publishing academic articles, and taking academic posts around the county.

Last year, three of our students won university-wide awards or fellowships:

• Pamela Lomelino (7th year PhD candidate) won an Arts and Sciences Graduate Student Fellowship for Fall 2009.
• Ron LeBel (MA student) received two research grant awards from the Institute of Cognitive Science, Fall 2008 and Summer 2009.
• Mike Zerella (6th year PhD candidate) won a 2008–2009 Graduate Student Teaching Excellence Award.

In 2008-9, many of our students presented their work at academic conferences:


Our graduate students organize the annual Rocky Mountain Philosophy Conference at CU, a refereed conference with talks by graduate students from across the nation and commentaries by CU graduate students. This past spring, Tyler Hildebrand (4th year PhD candidate) organized the RMPC. The keynote address was given by Peter van Inwagen (Notre Dame).

Our students publish their work in nationally recognized journals:


Robert Pasnau published the two-volume Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy and finished work on an 800-page history of metaphysics in the later medieval and early modern periods. He is still learning how to kayak.


Michael Tooley completed the book chapters “Causation” for the Routledge Companion to Metaphysics, “Causes, Laws, and Ontology” for the Oxford Handbook of Causation, and “Personhood” for A Companion to Bioethics, 2nd edition. His “Farewell to McTaggart’s Argument?” was accepted by Philosophy. He presented “The Probability that God Exists” at a conference on Formal Methods in the Epistemology of Religion in Belgium. The three-day debate volume Abortion – Three Perspectives; co-authored with Alison Jaggar, Celina Wolf-Devine and Philip Devine; was published by Oxford University Press. He is currently completing a book on causation for
Fall 2009

Welcome to Our Newest Faculty Member: Adam Hosein

The philosophy department is pleased to announce that Adam Hosein will join our department next year as an Assistant Professor. Adam holds a BA in philosophy, politics and economics from Merton College, Oxford, and a PhD in philosophy from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His dissertation, The Significance of Fairness, explored the relation between moral constraints that fall on private individuals and those that apply to political institutions and their agents. He works mainly in ethics and political philosophy, with a special interest in issues of global justice. He also has interests in feminist philosophy and enjoys chatting about all areas of philosophy with better-informed friends and colleagues. Adam will join the Philosophy Department in the fall of 2010, after completing a post-doctoral fellowship in law and philosophy at the University of Chicago Law School. He enjoys playing guitar, reading short stories, and drinking tea, though he is only good at the last of these.

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Four PhD students graduated recently and are at their first teaching posts after CU:

- Peter Higgins (PhD 2008) accepted a tenure-track position at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti.
- Jason Hanna (PhD Fall 2008) accepted a tenure-track position at Northern Illinois University.
- Dan Demetriou (PhD 2009) accepted a tenure-track Assistant Professorship at the University of Minnesota, Morris.
- Kendy Hess (PhD 2009) accepted a tenure-track position, the Brake-Smith Assistant Professorship in Social Philosophy and Ethics at the College of the Holy Cross, in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Five students graduated with MA's in the spring of 2009:

- Janella Baxter wrote an MA thesis entitled "Kant’s Mereological Essentialism," directed by Professor Bob Hanna. She is now enrolled in the PhD program at the University of Illinois at Chicago.
- Jennifer Kling wrote an MA thesis called “Phenomenology, Intentionality, Empathy, and the End of Separatism,” directed by Bob Hanna. She is now enrolled in the PhD program at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
- Brian Miller wrote a thesis entitled "Seems True: A Critique of Phenomenal Conservatism" with Michael Tooley. He is now enrolled in the PhD program at the University of Texas at Austin.
- John Martin wrote an MA thesis on Plato's Euthydemus, directed by Prof. Dominic Bailey. He is now enrolled in the joint University of Denver—Iliff PhD Program in Religious and Theological Studies.
- Gustavo Oliveira wrote an MA thesis “Revolution or Genocide: A Peasant Polemic Against Political Liberalism,” advised by Claudia Mills. Two-time winner of the department’s Stahl Prize, he continues to pursue his interests in philosophy, especially social philosophy, agrarian and labor reform. He is working on translations between Portuguese and English on the issue of agrarian reform, and working with labor organizers and reform groups in Brazil.


Michael Zimmerman spent much of his time on administrative duties as Director of the Center for Humanities and the Arts. He continues to do as much research as possible. In May 2008, he gave invited lectures at three universities in Taiwan. In August, he gave a prize-winning paper (to be published next year) at the first Integral Theory Conference in the Bay Area, and in October he gave a keynote address about "technological post-humanism," at the Western Humanities meeting in Vancouver. He also published "The Singularity: A Crucial Phase in Divine Self-Actualization?" in Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy.

A series that John Perry and John Martin Fischer are editing for Oxford University Press.
Student Prizes

Jentzsch Prize

Congratulations to Jennifer Kling for winning the 2009 Jentzsch Prize, awarded annually to the graduate student who submits the best paper, as judged by an anonymous faculty committee. Kling’s paper, “Mind-Body Interaction in Descartes,” takes up the problem of how mind and body interact in Descartes’ theory. In particular, Kling defends a distinctive account of where exactly the mind is, in relation to the body. The mind is not nowhere, and it is not spread throughout the whole body. Rather, it is located at just a single place in the brain, the pineal gland, which is the only place in the body that the mind directly acts on. Kling argues that this helps understand how Descartes can avoid various puzzles that arise over mind-body interaction.

Stahl Prize

The Stahl Prize is given annually in memory of Professor Gary Stahl, who taught at CU from 1962 to 1996, to recognize a graduate student who has made a significant contribution toward bringing the discipline of philosophy to bear on some demanding and crucial human problem. This year’s winner, Gustavo Oliveira, is an active member of the Left Hand Book Collective and an organizer with Students for Peace and Justice. He was involved with last year’s Democratic National Convention at the “Tent State,” which served as a site for protests; a campaign to convince Congressman Mark Udall to “fund the troops home”; a free conference on “Progressive Responses to the Economic Crisis”; a counter-recruitment campaign against weapons manufacturers in Colorado; and the “Enough is Enough! – Stop Foreclosures!” response to the housing crisis, as well as many other initiatives too numerous to name. Congratulations, Gustavo!

Faculty Awards

Two Philosophy Department members received Boulder Faculty Assembly Awards for Excellence in 2009. The awards come with $3000 and recognize excellence in teaching, service, or research.

Claudia Mills Recognized for Excellence in Teaching

Claudia Mills is one of the most highly regarded teachers in the department of philosophy. She is recognized for her ability to make her classes entertaining learning experiences while maintaining academic rigor, conceptual sophistication, and philosophical content. A gifted storyteller, Mills uses humor to explain and to illustrate philosophical theses, helping students understand difficult material.

Beyond her exceptional work within the CU-Boulder academic community, Professor Mills has also been successful outside CU’s boundaries, developing a flourishing writing career. In addition to her many scholarly articles, she is the author of more than forty children’s books, for which she has received numerous writing awards. She enjoys using children’s literature in the philosophy classroom. When she teaches Nietzsche in her introductory ethics class, she reads aloud the picture-book classic *The Rainbow Fish* and then leads a discussion with her students on why Nietzsche would not have liked the book. Her research interests focus on ethical questions regarding the family, such as the rise in the use of behavior-altering medications for children, conflicts between parents and non-parents in the workplace, and intercultural adoption.

Graham Oddie Recognized for Excellence in Research, Scholarly, and Creative Work

The main focus of Graham Oddie’s research for more than twenty years has been metaphysical realism, value realism, and scientific realism. He has authored, co-authored, or edited four books, has written numerous articles, and has many works in progress. While remaining an active scholar, he served as Chair of the Philosophy Department for several years and is currently serving as Associate Dean for Arts and Humanities in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Professor Oddie’s recent book, *Value, Reality, and Desire*, received extraordinary attention from philosophers worldwide and is considered an important contemporary contribution to the idea of value realism. Oddie defends value realism, which recognizes the existence of objective values that are independent of the mind and are not reducible to more basic properties. In other words, values actually exist and are not merely the expression of human fears and desires. His peers from around the world expressed glowing admiration for his work. One found it “one of the two or three most interesting contributions to philosophy I have read over the last dozen years.” Another wrote, “I consider it to be the best defense of value realism ever to have been published,” arguing that it “clearly belongs with the very best of contemporary work on the nature of value, and is in fact one of the most original and creative books I’ve read in any field of philosophy.”
The Spring graduation ceremony was held on May 8, 2009. The department honored the six students receiving Doctorates, seven receiving Master of Arts degrees, and fifty-six receiving Bachelor of Arts degrees. The department acknowledged nine BA students who graduated with honors and nine who graduated with distinction.

Department Chair David Boonin presided over the Philosophy Department ceremony.

The graduation address was given by Congressman Jared Polis. Polis was elected to Congress in 2008 and represents Colorado’s Second District. He was the first openly gay man elected to Congress. While attending Princeton University, Polis co-founded his first company and has since launched several highly successful business ventures. He has been named an “Entrepreneur of the Year” by Ernst and Young and one of America’s “Top Ten Young Entrepreneurs” by Success magazine. Polis has served on the Colorado State Board of Education and has worked for educational reform. He created the Jared Polis Foundation to improve access to education and technology, and founded two innovative charter schools, and established the New America School, which today operates four campuses in Colorado and will soon open one in New Mexico. Polis co-founded the Academy of Urban Learning to address the challenges faced by teens who struggle with unstable living conditions. He was named “Outstanding Philanthropist” for Colorado’s 2006 National Philanthropy Day.

Undergraduate Advisor Sheralee Brindell and Honors Advisor Robert Rupert presented the undergraduate degrees. Robert Pasnau, Director of Graduate Studies, presented the graduate degrees. Awards were presented to the winners of departmental prizes. Gustavo Oliveira was given the Stahl Prize for Community Service, and Jennifer Kling was awarded the Jentzsch Prize for the outstanding graduate student paper.

The opening and processional music was provided by Kevin Garry and Margarita Sallee. The formal ceremony was followed by a reception in the University Memorial Center.

### Philosophy Department Graduates

**Bachelor of Arts**

- James Bahan
- Brandon Barrett
- Jason Barry, magna cum laude
- Sonja Blondeau–Heglin
- Johanna Blumenthal*, summa cum laude
- Jordan Bohall, cum laude
- Tyler Broeren
- Hannah Bulick*
- Kendra Chapman
- Joseph Chierotti
- Brian Cocos
- Benjamin Cooperman
- Galen Dahl
- Erik DeRoin
- Eric Edwards
- Nicole Fardi
- Matthew Fine*, summa cum laude
- Kirsten Garlinghouse
- Joseph Goldberg
- Jeffrey Green
- Rebeca Heisler
- Abram Herman
- Colin Hickey*
- David Humphreys
- Daniel Hutchinson
- Shawna Jensen
- Leah Katz
- Alexander Kelly
- Charles Kern

**Master of Arts**

- Christopher Kluis
- Daniel Layton
- Darren Lee
- Richard Lee, magna cum laude
- Matthew McCormick
- Robert Meis*, magna cum laude
- Christopher Meyer*
- Parker Mills
- Maxwell Miner
- James Murray
- Luke Nikitow
- Amie Christine Osberg
- Bridgette Peterson*, summa cum laude
- Anastasia Pinson
- Sabrina Renteria
- Ali Rodgaveller
- Dana Rosen
- Nicholas Shaw
- Theodore Simpson V
- Zachary Sparks*, magna cum laude
- Edwin Teran III
- Joshua Townley
- Jennie Trefren*, magna cum laude
- Michaela Turner
- Joshua Vaisman
- Douglas Varacalli
- James Zorrilla

**Doctorate of Philosophy**

- Chelsea Haramia
- Tyler Hildebrand
- Jennifer Kling
- Randy Krogstad
- John Martin
- Gustavo Oliveira
- Matthew Pike
- Daniel Demetriou
- Jason Hanna
- Kendy Hess
- Diana Hsieh
- Ryan Mott
- Jason Wyckoff

* with Distinction
Support the Philosophy Department

Philosophy is one of the most vibrant and engaged departments in the university. Help us continue with these efforts by making a tax-deductible donation. The items mentioned here are just a few of the many possibilities. For more information, contact the Department Chair, David Boonin, at 303-492-6964, or David.Boonin@Colorado.edu.

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- $10,000,000 Naming rights for the Department

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