

## Chair's Letter

Dear Friends and Alumni,

Welcome to our third (almost) annual newsletter. In this newsletter, we hope to let you know how things are going in the UWM philosophy world. In some ways, things are looking up quite a bit. We are very happy to be teaching in-person again and meeting up in our offices and hallways. We had a mixture of online and in-person talks during this last year. At the end of Spring, we hosted two major events: our first Annual Brin Distinguished Philosophy Lecture, given by Graham Priest, and a workshop with David Riemer, Iskra Fileva, Michael Huemer, and Hrishikesh Joshi focused on David Riemer's New Deal 3.0 proposal. Both events were hosted at the beautiful Edith S. Hefter Center just a couple of blocks from our main campus. They were supported by a generous gift from Brad and Glenna Brin. And they were both a smashing success. We hope to have even more in-person events during the upcoming academic year. Our events are always open to the public. Please visit our [website](#) to find upcoming events and feel free to attend anything that sounds interesting to you.

We also welcomed Dr. Willy Penn as a Visiting Assistant Professor. Dr. Penn comes from the University of Pittsburgh. He specializes in Philosophy of Science and likes to defend the idea that everything ultimately boils down to processes. He has been a great addition to our department this last year, and we hope he will be able to stay with us for a long while.

Our department does continue to struggle in some ways. Long term demographic trends continue to reduce UWM's student population. And the years-old massive state budget cuts to the UW System have not been reversed. Consequently, our department has shrunk from 16 faculty and 4 lecturers when I first arrived to a mere 6 faculty, 4 lecturers, and 1 Visiting Assistant Professor. Most recently, Peter van Elswyk accepted a new position at Northwestern University. We are very happy for Peter and wish him all the best as he starts his new position.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that our department was listed in the highest-need category by the faculty APGC, the L&S administration has chosen not to replace Peter this upcoming year. They have, however, promised us that we will be first in line for a new hire when the budget next permits.

Our department continues to provide the best education we possibly can, and we continue to produce high quality research. We have had a significant uptick in majors and minors over the last few years. Our philosophy club, supported by Dr. Ágúst Magnússon, continues to be enthusiastically active. And we are working as hard as we can to diversify our course offerings. Our MA program, which has long been one of the best philosophy MA programs in the world, continues to attract impressive students. Moreover, we have been placing our graduating MA students in some of the very best philosophy PhD programs including, among many others, Princeton, UCLA, Harvard, Stanford, Cornell, UNC-Chapel Hill, and Toronto. Our faculty are publishing in excellent journals like *Philosophical Review*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Philosophers' Imprint*, and *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*. And Blain Neufeld's new book *Public Reason and Political Autonomy* was just published by Routledge this last winter.

I just finished my first year as chair of philosophy. It has been challenging to take up this new position during the pandemic and after significant faculty and staff losses. Almost all our keepers of institutional knowledge retired before I became chair, including our invaluable program assistant Georgette Jaworski. I was happy to have our new program assistant, Natachia Attewell, by my side as we both learned, basically from scratch, how to run an academic department at UWM. I love my department, and I love Milwaukee. I hope that we can hold strong through these troubled times.

Finally, I thank Yashin Voss and Natachia Attewell for their work putting this newsletter together. Sincerely,



Joshua Spencer,  
Associate Professor & Chair

# PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

Winter 2023

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## Contact Us

If you are an alumna or alumnus of our program and have news from your professional life, please contact us!

Send your news to Joshua Spencer at [spence48@uwm.edu](mailto:spence48@uwm.edu). He'll keep it in a folder, and we'll report your news to the community in this space. Thanks!

## Giving Info

All gifts of any size are greatly appreciated and used to directly support students and the program! [Give online](#) to make your tax deductible donation. Search for the Philosophy fund of your choice or indicate in the notes how you would like your gift used within the Department.

# Department News

## 2021 Scholarship and Award Winners

Every year, in the fall, the Philosophy Department awards its William J. Seidler Scholarship to philosophy majors based on academic merit and need. We were thrilled to be able to award the Seidler Scholarship for 2021-2022 academic year to 4 (!) highly deserving undergraduates: Carmen Flenory, Jordan Olinski, Mark Prihoda, and Butz Lanski Tuazon.

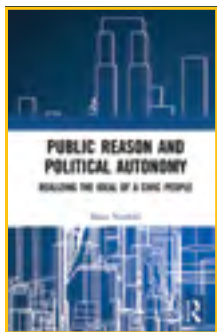
The Department's annual Richard W. Peltz Memorial Scholarship for Excellence in Philosophy goes to one undergraduate and one graduate student for the best piece of philosophical writing. This year, the Peltz Memorial Scholarship attracted an unusually high number of quality applications. We were extremely pleased to award the 2022 scholarship to Jordan Olinski (undergraduate philosophy major) for his insightful exploration of Hume's *Natural History of Religion* in his paper "Interpreting Hume's 'Natural History of Religion' as a Polemic" and to Jazlyn Cartaya (2nd year graduate student) for her outstanding original analysis of the nature of cognitive belief in "What it means to believe".

Congratulations to all our Scholarship winners! The Philosophy Department is grateful to our generous donors – the late William J. Seidler and the Peltz family – for their continuing support of our students through these scholarships!

## Graduate Fellowships

Steven Alvarez is a recipient of the Advanced Opportunity Program Fellowship while Juan Murillo Vargas and Christian Vulpe are recipients of the Distinguished Graduate Student Fellowship. We extend our congratulations to these students on their fellowships.

## Professor Blain Neufeld publishes book on public reason



Routledge recently published Blain Neufeld's book, *Public Reason and Political Autonomy: Realizing the Ideal of a Civic People*. and Professor Robert Talisse (Vanderbilt University) interviewed Blain about the book for the [New Books Network](#).

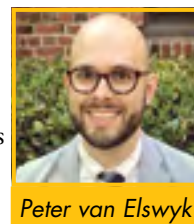
This book advances a novel justification for the idea of "public reason": citizens within diverse societies can realize the ideal of shared political autonomy, despite their adherence to different religious and philosophical views, by deciding fundamental political questions with "public reasons." Public reasons draw upon or are derived from ecumenical political ideas, such as toleration and equal citizenship, and mutually acceptable forms of reasoning, like those of the sciences. This book explains that if citizens share equal political autonomy – and thereby constitute "a civic people" – they will not suffer from alienation or domination and can enjoy relations of civic friendship. Moreover, it contends that the ideal of shared political autonomy cannot be realized by alternative accounts of public justification that eschew any necessary role for public reasons. In addition to explaining how the ideal of political autonomy justifies the idea of

public reason, this book presents a new analysis of the relation between public reason and "ideal theory": by engaging in "public reasoning" citizens help create a just society that can secure the free compliance of all. It also explores the distinctive policy implications of the ideal of political autonomy for gender equality, families, children, and education.

## Arrivals and Departures

### Farewell to Peter van Elswyk

This past year was Associate Professor Peter van Elswyk's last year with our program. Peter works primarily in the philosophy of language and mind, and in adjacent areas of metaphysics. We are sorry to see Peter go, but wish him well as he begins his time as assistant professor in philosophy and affiliated faculty in cognitive science at Northwestern University.



Peter van Elswyk

### 2022 Master of Arts Graduates

Our 2022 cohort consisted of twelve students. We extend our congratulations to the following students and note their next destination.

Yasmin Aydemir (McGill)

Kenneth Galbraith (California Los Angeles)

Aaron Kruk (will apply next year)

Jie Bao (Florida State)

Prescott Jackson (Florida State)

Selim Otku Ogut (TBD)

Felix Benzant (North Carolina-Chapel Hill)

Lucas Johnston (California Riverside)

Abhiraj Singh (will apply next year)

Jazlyn Cartaya (Princeton)

Bethany Kim (will apply next year)

Yashin Voss (Arizona State)

### Incoming Master of Arts Students

We are excited that the following students will be joining our MA program. We've indicated their undergraduate school. Welcome all!

Kendall Bowers (St. Norbert)

Sarah Gregory (George Washington)

Erin Rodgers (California Los Angeles)

Rebecca Brand (Marquette)

Dane Gustafson (University of Tulsa)

Shu Wang (Columbia)

Baoyu Dai (University of Toronto)

Lynette Heng (National Univ. of Singapore)

Henry Weiss (Clark University)

Tavis Enderle (Miami University)

# Faculty Updates

**Margaret Atherton** (Distinguished Professor, Emerita) has had a number of recent publications and presentations including:

- “Locke on Innate Ideas” in Jessica Gordon-Roth and Shelley Weinberg, eds, *The Lockean Mind*, Routledge, 2021.
- “Berkeley’s Philosophy of Science” in Samuel Rickless, ed., *Oxford Handbook on Berkeley*, Oxford University Press, 2020.
- “Does Berkeley have a Theory of Meaning?” presented at a workshop on Berkeley and Signs, online, May, 2022, where she also served as commentator.

**Miren Boehm** (Associate Professor) highlighted her recent works and notes the presentation of her paper on Hume at the International Hume Conference in July in Prague, Czech Republic.

- Boehm, M. (2021). “Hume’s “Projectivism” Explained.” *Synthese* 199, 815–833 (2021)
- Boehm, M., & Cruz, M. (Accepted and Forthcoming). Time for Hume’s Unchanging Objects. *Philosophers’ Imprint*
- Boehm, M. (Forthcoming). Hume and Shepherd: Knowledge and Science. *Lady Mary Shepherd*, New Narratives Series, Oxford University Press (book chapter-processing)
- Boehm, M. (2022, July). Review of Jay L. Garfield. The Concealed Influence of Custom, Hume’s Treatise from the Inside Out. Oxford University Press. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*
- Boehm, M. (2022, January). Review of Hsueh M. Qu. Hume’s Epistemological Evolution. Oxford University Press. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 60 (1):165-167 (2022).

**Bill Bristow** (Associate Professor) is currently working on a paper on the human experience of self-loss in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Augustine’s *Confessions*, as part of a larger project on Hegel and the concept of experience. He plans to teach a graduate seminar on Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* in the spring, including consideration of Kant’s and Fichte’s philosophies of right as well.

**John Koethe** (Distinguished Professor, Emeritus) had a book of essays, *Thought and Poetry: Essays on Romanticism, Subjectivity, and Truth* published by Bloomsbury in March, and a book of poems, *Beyond Belief*, come out from Farrar, Straus and Giroux in September.

**Matt Knachel** (Senior Lecturer) was honored to receive the UWM Outstanding Teaching Award this past year. Trying to live up to that standard, he says “I’m busy (finally) finishing the second edition of my free textbook, *Fundamental Methods of Logic*. Also during this past year, I worked with an old friend of mine to design and partly co-teach an introductory philosophy class for his high school students. It was great fun and quite rewarding; it’s giving me ideas for the future. Finally, I have recently become convinced that First Degree Entailment provides the true, universal account of logical consequence.”

**Blain Neufeld’s** (Associate Professor) book, *Public Reason and Political Autonomy*, was published by Routledge in February, and he was subsequently interviewed about it for the [New Books Network](#). He also took part in an online “[Critics Meets Author](#)” session hosted by the Politics, Philosophy, and Economics Society. More recently, he wrote “Political Activism, Egalitarian Justice, and Public Reason” for a special issue on the political philosophy of John Rawls for the *Journal of Social Philosophy* and “Rawlsian Political Liberalism and Democratic Education” for *The Cambridge Handbook of Democratic Education*. Last December Blain helped to organize and run (with Micah Schwartzman of the University of Virginia Law School and Lori Watson of Washington University in St. Louis) the conference, John Rawls’s [A Theory of Justice: 50 Years Later](#). And congratulations are on order for Blain’s promotion to full professor this summer. Sláinte!

**Willy Penn** (Visiting Assistant Professor) was promoted onto the board of directors for the PhilSci-Archive, an open-access repository for manuscripts in the philosophy of science. His book, “What’s Really Going On: Process Realism in Physics” is to be published in 2023.

**Bob Schwartz** (Distinguished Professor, Emeritus) had two works published in 2021:

- “Putnam and the Pragmatists”, *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*
- “Berkeley’s Theory of Vision”, *Oxford Handbook of Berkeley*

**Beth Silverstein** (Senior Lecturer and Teaching Assistant Coordinator) was so happy to return to the classroom this past year. “I am reminded how much I love the students here at UWM and how much we all need to be together in the classroom. I’ve spent much of the last year trying to help students take their passion for philosophy and turn it into practical skills for the crazy world we live in. By incorporating community outreach projects and service learning into my curriculum I am hopeful students will be persuaded that a philosophy degree offers one of the best foundations for not only living a good life, but also as the basis for a fulfilling career whatever professional path they choose.”

**Joshua Spencer** (Associate Professor and Chair) is the resident metaphysician at UWM. He continues to work on issues related to the nature of being and the composition of material things. This last year, he had a paper accepted to *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* called “A Special Composition Question”. “I’m very proud of this paper. I hope other metaphysicians will read it with interest and publish their bold objections thereby making me ever more famous. I have recently been developing a new project on the metaphysics of poverty. I have two papers written on this topic which I am currently trying to get accepted for publication in journals and I hope that this project will eventually turn into a book.” After completing his first year as Chair of the Philosophy Department, he notes that he is still trying to figure out how to balance research and teaching with the new responsibilities. He is optimistic that next year he will strike a better balance and is very happy to be teaching in-person again. “Even though it was fun to have my cat join me for online classes, nothing quite compares to teaching in an actual classroom. And I am excited that I may be able to travel for conferences and talks during the upcoming academic year.”

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## Thank you Brins!

### ***Inaugural Brin Lecture***

On May 6, the philosophy department was delighted to host its inaugural Brin Lecture at UWM's Hefter Center. The lecturer was Professor Graham Priest from the City University of New York, and the title of the talk was 'Social Atomism and its Problems – Metaphysical and Political.' All participants were invited to join dinner after the talk. As an expression of the department's gratitude and appreciation for their generous support, the department has inaugurated this lecture series in honor of Glenna and Bradley Brin. We hope to invite a prominent speaker every spring semester to deliver the Brin lecture, intended to address subjects of wider public concern and be open to the public at large.

### ***Brin Workshop with David Riemer***

With the generous support of Glenna and Bradley Brin, on May 13, 2022, the philosophy department held a one-day workshop, open to the public, on the proper role of the government. The chief speaker of the workshop was David Riemer, a public intellectual well known in Wisconsin and beyond for his service in multiple administrations, including Mayor John Norquist, Governors Patrick Lucey and Jim Doyle, as well as his work for U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy. Riemer's recent book 'Putting Government in its Place: The Case for a New Deal 3.0' served as the basis for the conversation. Three philosophers, Hrishikesh Joshi from Bowling Green State University, Michael Huemer and Iskra Fileva from the University of Colorado, Boulder, joined the conversation as critical commentators of Riemer's ambitious policy proposals. Exactly as intended, the workshop attracted a wide and diverse audience from within and without the academy, generating a most productive, non-technical, occasionally spirited, but always civil conversation. At the conclusion of the event, all attendees were invited to join a workshop dinner. The turnout and level of engagement was most rewarding to the organizers of the event, chiefly professor Husi from the philosophy department, and it is the hope that the department will host similar events on public policy with a broad appeal in the future.



*Bradley M. (right) and Glenna Cose Brin (left)*



*From left: Bradley M. Brin, Hrishikesh Joshi, Michael Huemer, David Riemer, Iskra Fileva, and Stan Husi during the Brin Workshop.*