

COLORADO COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

Newsletter



ISSUE 2, FALL-WINTER 2019-20

Words of Wisdom

“The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer”
- Henry David Thoreau

“Whatever I know, I could be mistaken.”
- David Crabtree '85

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Philosophy Past & Present

Welcome to the second CC Philosophy Department NEWSLETTER. In this issue, we report both on what some of our alumni are thinking and doing and on current faculty and students.

Following last year's inaugural NEWSLETTER, our student assistant, Tselate Dawit '19,

reached out to alumni on our email list, asking whether they would be willing to share news about their lives, works, and interests. We received detailed responses from several former students in different generations. We also asked two alumni to write short articles reflecting on current challenges and how philosophy helps them to reflect on and engage with those challenges. See below.



Thinking the Present: Two Perspectives

In world marked by division, climate change, populist revolt, globalization, and problematic digital technologies, thoughtful engagement seems increasingly necessary. Has our philosophical curriculum helped prepare us – students, alumni, and faculty – to meet the challenges of our time? We asked two alums to share their perspectives: William “Bro” Adams '72, former Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities; and Nancy Hernandez '96, educational leader and advocate for equity, scholarship, and access for underrepresented and undocumented students. We thank them for sharing their personal reflections. We offer their thoughts here with the aim of spurring dialogue and reflection and encouraging students and other alumni readers to share their perspectives in future issues. We may agree or disagree with each other, but we hope that sharing our perspectives may enliven our thinking – and, perhaps, help us make the world a better place.

Philosophy Pops Up in Everyday Life

One question we asked our alums to comment on concerned whether or how philosophical issues came up in their everyday lives.

COREY BARON '17. I think part of the beauty of philosophy is the way it applies to everything—it really is a way of seeing, interpreting, and interrogating the world, so it's hard to lose that mindset after you've been soaking it in for four years. Right now, I feel it most when interacting with people from diverse backgrounds and working to figure out what underlying “philosophies” guide their ways of experiencing the world. Very few people would pull out the word “epistemologies,” but there's no doubt that different ways of determining and verifying truth are at play in daily happenings and conversations.

KELSEY BERGESON '13. A few years after college, a friend who also studied philosophy recommended the article, “What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting,” by L.A. Paul. The paper is about the unpredictability of potentially transformative experiences like having children. Paul claims that since we can't know ahead of time how those experiences may or may not transform us, we can't make rational choices about whether or not to pursue them—we have to decide using other means. I don't have children, but I have often thought about this argument when making big, life changing decisions, like the choice to quit my job and move to Europe or to get married.

On the Benefits of Philosophy

We would like to think that an education in Philosophy is beneficial (though, of course, not in a crass utilitarian manner!). Here is what some graduates think.

DAVID GAFNER '01. I never used philosophy directly in my life after CC, but I have always appreciated what it gave me: skills of critical reading of a dense piece of text, teasing out subtle meaning from language, and generally the “thrill of the hunt” for new ideas, even though I usually don't catch any.

Philosophy at CC taught me how to read and think carefully. In that sense I use it every day, but as far as actual academic Philosophy [is concerned], it is only in the background and doesn't affect my daily life much. Hegel and Kant are like fuzzy memories of a grandparent.

[G]etting chewed out by Harvey Rabbin or Raphael Sassower [when visiting CC from UCCS] for being a mediocre student did give me some humility and embarrassed me into always wanting to be prepared for my day and my superiors' expectations.





MAT ELMORE '09. My time at CC studying philosophy was integral to my career and has given me a leg up in the professional world. It's repeated time and time again at liberal arts schools, but I can't emphasize enough how important critical thinking skills are. They are by far the most valuable asset you can have in the professional world, no matter which field you are interested in.

DAVID CRABTREE '85. I continue to appreciate my CC experience. Learning on the block plan was tremendously valuable to me. Studying philosophy was terrific preparation for graduate school and, eventually, for my work as a psychotherapist and counselor. I help people [to] find questions which lead to greater understanding of their challenges; [to] explore effectively a variety of answers to their questions; and to discover satisfying ways to live within the questions. Plato's notion of heuristic conviction is such a pragmatic point of view.

I'm a clinical social worker with a counseling / psychotherapy practice. I often help clients find useful questions to facilitate a better understanding of their problems and challenges. While studying philosophy at CC, I found that there are many ways to explore the variety of answers that arise to any question. Sometimes the best we can do is to learn to live in the question ... to use the question like a guiding light along our path. Many people want concrete, black and white or binary answers that they can rely on. Most of the time life brings challenges that don't function that way. Of course, I can use the DSM to arrive at a diagnosis for a client presenting problems and / or symptoms. However, stopping with that most often doesn't lead to a good, effective treatment plan. "Good treatment" depends on much more (research seems to validate the importance of a good relationship between client and clinician).

KELSEY BERGESON '13. I think that my philosophy background makes me a more well-rounded professional with a greater sense of the historical context of my work. Since college, I have either been teaching or studying language. As a teacher, I drew on a working philosophical theory of learning I had developed in courses like Freedom and Authority. As a linguist, I have benefited from an understanding of early thinkers like Saussure and Frege that have impacted the field.

COREY BARON '17. My long-term career goal is to use business / organizational skills in a blended-sector [or public-private] environment, so there are definitely elements that connect back to my time in the Philosophy Department—particularly wanting to prioritize social good and to question or challenge the ways things have always been done. I'm a ways off from putting that fully into practice, of course, because before I can effectively question those things, I have a whole lot I need to learn about them first. 😊



Alumni Perspectives

Reflections of Bro Adams '72,

Hon D.H.L. '97

Philosophy has never been more relevant or useful than it is today. Consider, for starters, the front page of your daily newspaper. Or if that is too old fashioned, think about the latest news and information feed on your cell phone.

As I write this, I am looking at the front page of the online edition of The New York Times. It's a philosophical gold mine. The principal story is about the unravelling of Great Britain's parliamentary democracy as the deadline for Brexit looms. The parliamentary machinations are fascinating, but the deeper drama, and the tip of the philosophical iceberg, is the question of how, and if, a democratic country can address democratically the problems that Brexit has revealed. Those problems include resentment over immigration and the resurgence of nationalism nearly 25 years after the Maastricht Treaty promised to diminish the importance of the nation state, at least in Europe.

Great Britain is not alone, of course. Similar forces are at work across the European continent, where populism, nationalism, and xenophobia are on the march. And in the United States, the principal political story since 2015 has been the rise of Trumpism. Many dimensions of Trumpism are worrisome from a democratic perspective, but perhaps none more so than the way Trump's authoritarian personality and style energizes a significant bloc of American voters. And as in the pro-Brexit movement, Trumpism also signals a reversion to a politics of nationalist isolation not seen in this country since the beginning of World War II.

Here's the philosophical piece. If we wish to understand it, our current political situation—domestic and global—leads us back to first principles and fundamental values. I'm thinking of the principles and values of the American political tradition, but also about the much longer conversation about democracy going all the way back to the origins of political philosophy itself. I'm also thinking about the deeply disruptive impulses and ideas that currently threaten our sense of democratic order. Nationalism, populism, and xenophobia are rooted in fundamental claims about national identity and the common good. We need to be able to name and understand those claims, even, or perhaps especially, as they disturb and frighten us.

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As part of our effort to reach out to and involve alumni in the work of the Department, we asked two prominent alums to share their reflections on their educations in philosophy and on the ways in which their philosophical perspectives help to orient them to the challenges of the contemporary world.

We asked, in effect, for op-ed pieces, to see if we could generate dialogues among and across the generations of CC philosophy students and faculty members.

The views presented here are those of the authors. Would you be interested in sharing your philosophical reflections? Write to us at the email address on the last page of this newsletter. We can't promise that we will publish everything we receive, but we do promise to attempt to open up thoughtful dialogues to the extent that it is practical.



William D. "Bro" Adams '72 holds a doctorate from UC Santa Cruz and has taught at UNC Chapel Hill, Santa Clara, and Stanford. He has served as president of Colby College and Bucknell University and as Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Alumni Perspectives: Think ... Then Move!

Reflections of Nancy Hernandez '96



Nancy Hernandez was graduated from Colorado College in 1996. She then earned an M.A. in Nonprofit Management from Regis University and doctorate in Education from the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs.

She worked for several years at the Hispanic Scholarship Fund before becoming Equity Specialist Coordinator at the Western Education Equity Assistance Center of the Metropolitan State University of Denver. She recently was appointed Director of Career and Family Education for the City and County of Denver.

I chose Philosophy as my major because it moved me. Sadly, my pursuit of a graduate degree in philosophy ended after one too many game theory lectures involving fish. I am still proud of my degree and I use the skills it taught me daily. I ask a lot of questions and I rarely take anyone's answers at face value

Philosophy both destroys and saves me. To have everything I hold as "truth" ripped apart and questioned is painful but liberating. It is also very humbling. I believe that studying philosophy made me more aware of my ignorance and arrogance. It certainly taught me a wonderful detachment. You know that detachment. Students of philosophy try not to delve into the messiness of life. We observe. We question. We wonder. We never get involved. We know that the "truth" is not always what it seems.

Philosophical and academic detachment was fundamental to my well-being. Without it, and without the support of my CC mentors, I would not be where I am today. I needed philosophy to form and reform my beliefs, to establish healthier relationships with my biological family and to develop deep connections with my created one. I needed it to form my life in a way radically different from everyone around me. I would gladly have stayed in the bubble of philosophical detachment but for the moment we started separating children from their families at the border.

I grew up in El Paso, Texas. I identify as Mexican American, as Latina, and Chicana who is first generation and low income. I am brown-skinned, and I speak Spanish and English. I grew up at a time when the border was more fluid and we were aware of the symbiotic relationship our nations share. To see the nightmare of child separations, children and families kept in conditions I had only seen in black and white pictures from past wars, was profoundly painful. It has stunned me like nothing I have experienced before and believe me, many things have stunned me.

I learned ethics at home (to care for and be useful to others) and I learned ethics through philosophy (what I believe is right may not be right for others). And at the end of the day, my deep resonance with philosophers like Paolo Freire and bell hooks shapes me. I believe that dehumanizing others is evil—especially when we dehumanize children. There are some actions that are right for no one. My sense of outrage

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Alumni Advice for Current Students

We asked our alums whether they had any advice to share with current CC students.



DAVID GAFNER '01. Don't fear that you have studied something which will be useless. This may be an unpopular opinion to the College, but I think for a lot of people, especially [to] those like me who didn't go to grad school, an undergrad degree is just a piece of paper. Most employers check to see if you have one, and move on. So, if you took a major that opened your eyes and taught you how to think, more power to you! You won't get any big awards or prizes for all that hard work, but you may just live a better and more colorful life thanks to CC's Philosophy Department.

I think students worry a lot about the specifics of their undergrad major and how to maximize it to land a better job. They should relax and study what they like, what energizes them. There's time for specialization later. This is the only time in life when a person can live and study boundlessly and impractically. Your mind will never be this elastic again, so stretch it into as many weird shapes as you can while you can.

DAVID CRABTREE '85. People asked me, when I was a student, why I chose philosophy as a major — “What can you do with that?” I always knew that the study of philosophy was preparation for a way of seeing, a way of interacting... I knew it wasn't about learning some technical skill for something to be applied; it wasn't about learning THE answer to this or that question. Today, maybe more than ever, an undergraduate degree is not a terminal point of education. Either going to graduate school or to technical school is often an essential next step. Even for someone who wants to be a mechanic or a craftsman. Ever read the book, *SHOP CLASS AS SOUL CRAFT?* A good read by a guy who left Wall Street for a doctorate in philosophy on his way to opening a motorcycle repair shop. As I recall, the book was a reworking of his dissertation. Check it out. The way a philosopher approaches a construction project or a mechanical repair can bring much more to the outcome than the technical skills alone.

KELSEY BERGESON '13. Don't be afraid to make contemplation a priority in your life, even if you encounter pressure to "be productive" at work, in relationships, or in your hobbies. If there is something about doing philosophy that animates you, don't ignore it! It can be more difficult after college to find opportunities to pursue these topics in great depth and with the guidance of skilled teachers.

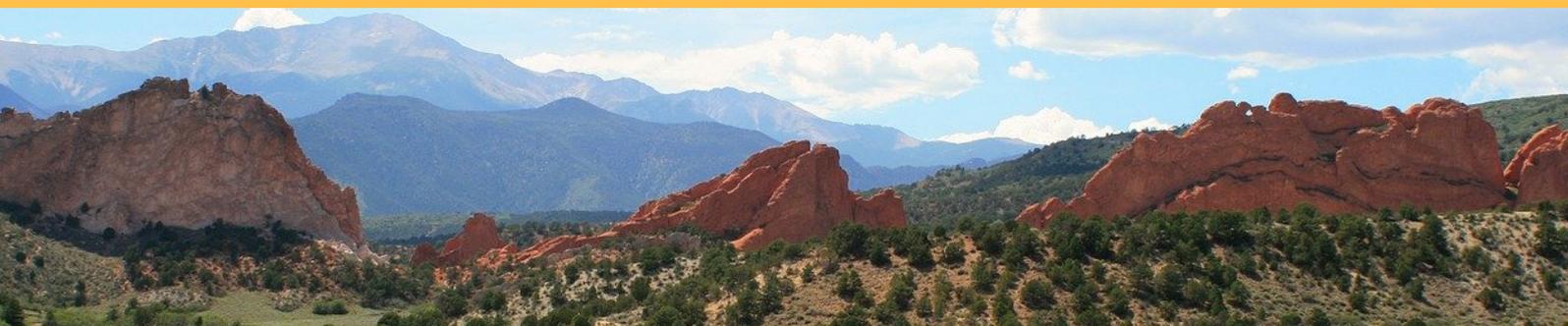
COREY BARON '17. I think a challenge for philosophy majors is to keep the questioning mindset without growing overly cynical or jaded, and then also to keep the learning mindset / excitement that you have while reading Nietzsche or Heidegger (or whomever) and apply it to whatever professional situation you are in. I guess the last piece would also be to trust that the skills like critical thinking and coherent argumentation do translate broadly and can set

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Topics Courses Offered in Philosophy

As the world and the discipline change, the Department's faculty often responds by offering courses on special topics. Sometimes these are one-time course offerings, arising out of a faculty member's current interest or requests from students. At other times, these offerings are trial runs for courses that may become regular elements in the Department's curriculum. Here is list of the topical courses Philosophy has offered in recent years:

- Anti-Capitalism (Alberto Hernandez-Lemus)
- Critical Epistemologies: Race, Gender, Knowledge & Justice (Mike Kim)
- Darkness & Light: Enlightenment & Its Critics (Alberto Hernandez-Lemus, taught in Germany)
- Humans & Other Animals (Marion Hourdequin)
- Jacques Lacan and the Radical Psychoanalytic Tradition (Jonathan Lee)
- Japanese Existentialism (Rick Furtak)
- Nature in East Asian Traditions of Thought (FYE course, Marion Hourdequin)
- Philosophy and Science Fiction (Helen Daly)
- Pragmatist Challenges (Dennis McEnerney)
- Sigmund Freud (Jonathan Lee)
- Speculative Realism (Jonathan Lee)
- T.S. Eliot, Poetry, & Philosophy (Rick Furtak with David Mason)
- Techno-Natures (Marion Hourdequin)
- Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Dennis McEnerney)



Alumni Advice for Current Students

Corey Baron continued:

you up for success—but that you will go farther if you keep learning new skills to go along with those baseline strengths.

If you're into it, philosophy is just a whole lot of fun, so if you're someone who feels that way I think you just have to follow the joy! It does come with some tangible skills (particularly the ability to break down really complex thought and construct logical arguments), but I don't know that that should be the biggest draw of it—the greater magic is that it gives you the chance to really dive into the big questions of life in a way you otherwise might not. And if you can get even a little bit of clarity for yourself on your answer to questions like “How do I conceive of reality?” and “What makes for a good life?” when you're 20 instead of when you're 40 or 60, I think that's a great investment of time and energy.

Where Are They Now?

Here is what our contributors report:

COREY BARON '17. The basics are that I graduated in 2017 and have worked at El Pomar Foundation (a nonprofit grant making foundation in Colorado Springs) for the past two years doing work in communications, rural grant making, and leadership development. I'm headed to the Yale School of Management this fall to pursue an MBA, and I hope eventually to work in a blended sector space that allows me to tackle challenging problems and put my philosophical musings into organizational action.

KELSEY BERGESON '13. I was graduated in 2013, when I took a job teaching Spanish. I lived in Charlotte, North Carolina for two years and worked in a public middle school there. In 2015, I moved to Atlanta, Georgia, to live closer to my (now) fiancé, who was finishing law school at the time. I again taught Spanish, this time at an independent school. From 2017-2018 I earned my M.A. in Spanish from Middlebury College. I lived in Madrid, Spain, for most of that year, but I also spent time in Middlebury, Vermont, and Buenos Aires, Argentina. After graduation, I returned to Atlanta to teach. This fall, I will be starting a Ph.D. program in Hispanic Linguistics at The University of Texas at Austin. I plan to do research on language change that can be observed in situations of contact between Spanish and other languages.

DAVID CRABTREE '85. I retired from California Department of Corrections five years ago. While working in corrections, I provided mental health counseling services to inmates in a state prison for 5 years and to parolees in a community-based parole clinic for 10. Since then I've been working part-time in a private practice setting. Last summer I moved from Central California to Maine. I live on the Narraguagus River in Cherryfield. It's a lovely rural setting in an historical location with a very nice community spirit. I enjoy volunteering now and then for a variety of local community service organizations. I completed my Master of Social Work at CSU, Fresno in 1991. I'm recently married (for the second time) to Alison. She and I have been enjoying hiking, volunteer trail work (while in California), and most recently settling into our historic home in a new town / state.

MAT ELMORE '09. During the summer after graduation, I received a Transition Fellowship Grant from CC to work for the Oregon Environmental Council in Portland, Oregon, on a greenhouse gas reduction program for Oregon wineries. After working for a small local commercial solar energy company for several years, I moved to Chicago with my wife Nicki and ended up working for Elevate Energy for more than three years. During my time at Elevate in Chicago, I assisted homeowners in making energy efficiency upgrades and eventually started the solar energy program division of the non-profit. I currently work as Managing Director at Pivot Energy, a commercial and community solar company with headquarters in downtown Denver. My wife and I decided to make the move back to Colorado almost four years ago, and I've been working at Pivot Energy ever since. I manage our Denver headquarters and lead business development and sales for the company. I consider myself lucky to love what I do and live in Colorado.

I did not do any traditional graduate school programs, but wine became my extreme hobby during my time in Oregon. So, I decided to train to be a sommelier starting in my time in Portland. I've completed four of the five levels in the Wine and Spirits Education Trust (WSET)

Philosophy for Children Initiative



Following a visit by Jana Mohr Lone and Sara Goering of the University of Washington Seattle last spring, the Philosophy Department has begun working with colleagues in Education, staff in the Collaborative for Community Engagement, and local teachers to develop the Springs Philosophy Initiative. Inspired by the work of Professors Mohr Lone and Goering at the Center for Philosophy for Children, our project aims to incorporate philosophical reflection in local K-12 schools in the Colorado Springs area. Our hope is to bring CC students with philosophical expertise and pedagogical training into local classrooms to stimulate philosophical discussions. The Washington Center for Philosophy for Children describes the dialogues they foster in this way:

[These] philosophy discussions do not involve talking to students about what philosophers have said, but inquiring with them in open-ended and thoughtful dialogues about philosophical ideas. As part of the work of exploring these ideas, we ask questions, suggest imaginative and new ways of approaching philosophical problems, read stories, draw pictures, role-play, create poetry, and engage in other forms of creative expression.

We aim to begin a small pilot program, perhaps as early as this spring, followed up by a half-block course and spring extended format course next year. This fall Alberto Hernandez-Lemus travelled to Seattle with two local teachers to observe work the Washington center. That team is working with the Project's ad hoc committee, which includes Dennis McEnerney and Helen Daly from Philosophy; Aaron Stoller, Director of Academic Programs and FYE; and Howard Drossman from the Education Department.

In addition, Helen Daly has formed the College's first Ethics Bowl team this year. Our hope is that members of the team, after competing in college-level events, will take on the role of mentoring a student team at a local high school.

These initiatives, which have received strong support from the Office of the Dean, offer exciting new ways for students to connect their studies of philosophy in the classroom to their everyday lives – and the lives of local K-12 students.

Where Are They Now?

Mat Elmore continued:

program and currently hold a Diploma. I'll be applying to study for Level 5 in the coming year and hope to complete the Master of Wine program in the next 3-5 years. I don't ever plan on working directly in the wine industry, but who knows...?

I currently live in the Berkeley neighborhood of Denver with my wife Nicki and our dog Rigby. We're thrilled to be living in Colorado and have very much adopted the CC lifestyle of playing outdoors during all seasons. We love to ski, hike, mountain bike, and this winter went ice fishing for the first time in Colorado and loved it. Cheers!

DAVID GAFNER '01. Current occupation: Air traffic controller. Lives: Louisville, KY. Personal life: Married since 2012, no kids. Philosophical perspective: Pretty skeptical / cynical but open to new thoughts. Grad Programs: None.

PHILOSOPHY SENIOR ESSAYS - CLASS OF 2019

Since 2010, the Philosophy major has required completion of a Senior Essay. We ask students in their Senior Essay to investigate in some depth the work of a significant philosopher or a challenging problem in philosophy. These essays are written and rewritten in one block under the supervision of a faculty member, who has been appointed to that role by the Department as a whole. Senior Essays are limited to 15 pages and must be completed by the end of block 6. In block 7, all Philosophy seniors enroll in the Senior Seminar, a course in which the students then present their work orally in a setting that models an academic conference. The class of 2019 wrote and then presented senior essays on the topics listed below.

- **Lowell Bisio, "Prolegomena to Any Future Realism"**
- **Andrew Bolte, "A Novel Spirituality: Ralph Waldo Emerson's Conception of Divinity as a Remedy for the Modern World"**
- **Theo Buchanan, "A Confucian Critique of Selfish Rationality"**
- **Ethan Cutler, "Erich Fromm and Byung-Chul Han on Our Self-Defeating Freedom"**
- **Tselate Dawit, "Development of the Self Based on John Dewey's Philosophy"**
- **Lena Farr-Morrissey, "My Body Knows Unheard-of Songs"**
- **Carson Fritz, "The War-of-Position under Empire and the Praxis of Freedom"**
- **Noah Gaby, "Life without God: How Camus Can Help Us to Live without Faith and Meaning"**
- **Landis Hackett, "Call for Further Questioning concerning Technology: Exploitation, Non-Neutral Tools, and Nature"**
- **Qian (Alice) Huang, "Merleau-Ponty and the Making of the World"**
- **Paxton Hyde, "Qualifying Hume's Sentimentalist Defense against Moral Relativism"**
- **Matthew Kwak, "Peirce and Science's Relation to the External World"**
- **Katie Lawry, "Re-Examining Rape and Sexual Subjectivity"**
- **Carmen Rafaelita Lucero, "Necessary Ambiguity: A Critique of Essentialist Gender Assumptions in Analytic Psychology"**
- **Jesse Phillips, "A Paradigm Case of a Modern Disease: Dostoevsky on Intellectualism"**
- **Samuel White, "Behavioral Abnormality and the Social Experience of Agency"**

CURRENT PHILOSOPHY FACULTY MEMBERS:

- Helen Daly, Associate Professor & Chair
- Rick Anthony Furtak, Associate Professor
- Alberto Hernandez-Lemus, Associate Professor
- Marion Hourdequin, Associate Professor
- Jonathan Lee, Professor
- Dennis McEnnerney, Associate Professor
- John Riker, Professor

VISITING FACULTY

- Mike Kim, Riley Scholar-in-Residence
- Jacob P. Daly, Block Visitor
- J.P. Rosensweig, Block Visitor

AFFILIATED FACULTY

- Marcia D. Dobson, Classics
- Michael E. Sawyer, Race, Ethnicity, & Migration Studies
- Aaron Stoller, First-Year Experience





ALUMNI GRADUATE STUDIES

Many of our alumni follow up their CC education with advanced studies – including several in philosophy. Below is a list of some of the former students that we know to be currently enrolled in graduate studies. Are you or your friends absent from this list? If so, let us know!

- **Charlotte Allyn is enrolled in the Law School at New York University.**
- **Matthias Barker is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at the University of Texas, Austin.**
- **Cory Baron is an M.B.A. student at the Yale School of Management.**
- **Kelsey Bergeson is a Ph.D. student in Hispanic Linguistics at The University of Texas, Austin.**
- **Joel Bock is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at DePaul University, currently studying at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris.**
- **Kiley Dunlap is a Psy.D. student at Stanford University and the Pacific Graduate School.**
- **Vita Emery is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at Fordham University.**
- **Cara Greene is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at the University of New Mexico.**
- **Alice Huang is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at DePaul University.**
- **Maria A. Keller is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at the University of Toronto.**
- **Y. Mike Kim is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at Villanova University and Riley Scholar-in-Residence at Colorado College.**
- **Lucy Logan is studying toward a P.A. degree at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.**
- **Teelin Lucero is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at Emory University.**
- **Elliot Mamet is a Ph.D. student in Political Science at Duke University.**
- **Willow Mindich is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at Stony Brook University (SUNY).**
- **Eric Reiger is an M.A. student in Environmental Studies at the Nicholas School of the Environment, Duke University.**
- **Sherry Safavi is enrolled in the Law School at Georgetown University.**
- **Emma Schiestl is a Ph.D. student in Psychology at The University of Michigan.**
- **Sarah Schulte is enrolled in the Law School at the University of Denver.**
- **Erika Versalovic is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at the University of Washington.**
- **Andrew Vierra is enrolled in the Law School at The University of Michigan.**
- **Alice Xiang is an M.A. student in Humanities at the University of Chicago.**

Alumni Perspectives

Reflections of Bro Adams, continued from p. 4

Our current political malaise is closely connected to an economic one, and it, too, brings us into the philosophical domain. In the United States, as in Great Britain, the current wave of populism is rooted in economic grievances caused by globalization and new technologies. After decades of complacency about growing economic inequality, questions about fairness, opportunity, and social justice have reemerged with a vengeance, sometimes in weirdly distorted form. Where do we locate equality among other social goods? And what about work? What is the place of work within a full life? And what is its future?

It's impossible to think or talk today about work without the topic of digital technology entering the picture. Artificial intelligence is often the leading edge of this intrusion. No one knows just how or when for sure, but it's a pretty safe bet that AI is going to transform the nature of work in almost every imaginable field over the next several decades. Philosophers are paying attention. Indeed, philosophers have been there from the beginning. There would be no AI without the long, slow gestation of cognitive science as an effort to understand human intelligence through mathematical and mechanical models. Yet another reason to read Descartes and Leibniz.

But philosophers have an even more important role to play in giving us perspective on the digital juggernaut we have created, and which now invades nearly every square inch of our personal and social lives. Social media offer a compelling example. What does it mean that digital technology intervenes in so many of our social interactions? What will be the consequences of the steady diminution of unmediated, fully embodied experiences with and among people? What happens if someday everyone agrees that the human mind is a computer?

Just below the Brexit story is a piece on the relentless approach of hurricane Dorian. It's a big story, but every storm story these days is also a story about how human activity is affecting the weather. The now nearly universally accepted scientific position that climate change is caused in large measure by human activity is the philosophical mother lode of our time, raising a host of questions unprecedented in human history, at least in their scale and possible consequences. What is our relationship to the natural world? What are our obligations to the beings that inhabit the earth along with us? What are our obligations to future generations, and what sorts of sacrifices do we now need to make in order to make the lives of our children's children possible? Science is enormously important in understanding the empirical terms of these questions, but science cannot provide answers. The weather makes philosophers of us all.

Of course, there is much to life beyond the front page, especially for the young. Careers, for instance. And personal life in its many expressions. But there, too, philosophy is no less relevant or useful.

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Alumni Perspectives

Reflections of Bro Adams, continued from p. 12.

I received my B.A. in philosophy at CC in 1972. I went on to get a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of California, Santa Cruz. I wasn't employed as a philosopher for more than a few years, but philosophy proved to be a great asset in the rest, and bulk, of my career, first as a college administrator, and then as a government official.

I agree with the customary arguments about the importance of critical thinking to any career that involves information gathering, analysis, decision-making, strategy. Whatever else it does, philosophy teaches disciplined, rigorous, and big thinking. And I also know that communicating complex ideas, in writing and orally, makes all of us much better speakers and writers. But for me, philosophy did something more and something different—it acquainted me with a remarkably broad array of important subjects that enabled me to engage a diverse array of people and the things they care about. You can't read very much in the history of philosophy without encountering science, history, culture, religion, and art, among other topics. Knowing something about these worlds, why and how they matter, gave me a much broader and more active imagination. I felt at home, or at least not at sea, in a wide array of human concerns and possibilities. Philosophy also made me curious, and I was a better listener as a result. All these things become more and more important as careers become more dynamic and less predictable. Nevertheless, we still tend to overestimate the value of highly technical and professional education and to underestimate the value of liberal learning, where philosophy is core.

As important as the public and professional value of philosophy has been to me, its initial attraction had to do with personal experiences. After a disastrous first year at CC, I joined the U.S. Army for three years, including a year in Vietnam. Returning to CC in the fall of 1969, I had lots of questions, and a very substantial meaning deficit. I found my way in short order to the Philosophy Department, which was a good place to consider meaning. It was the right place in part because the faculty at the time—Jane Cauvel, John Riker, J. Glenn Gray, and Harvey Rabbin—were sympathetic and encouraging teachers. But it was also the right place because the philosophy they modelled was committed to making sense of things, to the struggle to bring moral coherence to the disorderly business of living.

As we think about the relevance of higher education, and of philosophy, we should think and talk more about this dimension of what might be called existential relevance. It's where we all end up, sooner or later.

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and grief is so profound that I am not sure I will ever be able to sleep properly again.

On August 1 of 2018, I became a volunteer Spanish speaking interpreter for an investigation team visiting an immigrant children's detention facility. In the past, unaccompanied children who came across the border were treated just like adult prisoners complete with strip searches and with handcuffs and shackles. Then, after a lawsuit, an accord called the Flores Agreement dictated the way these children were to be detained (in the least restrictive way possible). For a number of years now, children have been held in detention facilities guided by the Flores Agreement. We (at least me) did not know about these facilities. The minute screaming children were separated from their parents, some of them ended up in these facilities. The Flores Agreement is supposed to outline how the children are handled, how long they are held, and what treatment they receive. And for a year now, the Agreement has been thrown out the window as children are herded around like cattle and spread across the country without rhyme or reason. If not for the separation of children from families, unaccompanied minors in these facilities would have continued to suffer unnoticed.

I went with volunteers for the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law (<https://www.centerforhumanrights.org/>). I urge you to look them up. You will find in their reports of detention facilities a pattern of abuse and psychological damage that will likely harm these children for the rest of their lives.

The place I visited is called Casa Key Estrella in Arizona. It is run by Southwest Key Facilities, a nonprofit that makes millions off unaccompanied minors and children forcibly separated at the border. The creator of Southwest Key is, like me, a first-generation Latino with a Ph.D. I believe he may have enjoyed game theory way more than I did. Or at minimum, he studied economics more than I did. All the owners of these facilities, both nonprofit and for-profit, and licensed and unlicensed, make millions off these imprisoned young people.

To have a child in foster care costs approximately \$36/child/day. These facilities cost \$700/child/day. They are supposed to have standards set by the Department of Human Services, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. They are supposed to be safe and healthy for children, but news reports have uncovered abuse and financial scandals that plague Southwest Key and other operators.

Casa Key Estrella is in a converted motel in a run-down area. It houses 300 children ages 13-17, segregated by age and gender, three to a room. The public side of the facility is welcoming and unassuming (a warehouse hidden among warehouses), but the side the children see is fenced and gated, requiring card key access. Cameras and security personnel are everywhere. The children enter and leave via a gate into a holding area for vehicles—just like a prison.

The children receive three meals and two daily snacks. They wear wristbands with barcodes and are scanned at each meal. Their bands document any food allergies. It feels impersonal and

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mechanical. Their every move and action are observed and documented.

There are security guards and “handlers” with walkie-talkies, unlicensed teachers, and volunteers who tell the children about their rights. The children often are unable to determine who does what, who is telling them the truth, or that the volunteers are not their legal representatives. Although adults are usually bilingual in English and Spanish, other languages are not accommodated. Some of the children cannot read in any language. None of the staff is experienced in dealing with traumatized adolescents.

On arrival, the children often do not know where they are. Medical exams are given within 48 hours and vaccinations administered without parental consent or medical records review. Medication is often given without a physician on-site. The children often are told “stories” about what will happen if they try to leave the facility, i.e., that they will not be helped any longer or that will have to stay at the facility longer or will be moved to an adult jail where they could be abused.

There are minimal religious services offered. The children I interviewed asked for more religious care as they are depressed and sometimes suicidal due to their long confinement. Flores standards state the children should not be detained more than 20 days. Some of the children had been detained for up to 7 months. I was told that access to church or outside excursions to break up the monotony of detainment is not possible because the outside community is hostile to them, which is decidedly not the case. Multiple groups—embassies, concerned citizens, and nonprofits—have offered assistance. They are summarily turned away.

Six hours daily of “instruction” are given by unlicensed staff, without regard to grade level. There are no library or computers to support classwork and no special-needs instruction. Despite one school district’s offer to educate the children in regular schools, that offer was rejected. After-school and physical education activities are restricted because of space—girls can go to “beauty club” and boys to “soccer club,” although there is mandatory physical education for all, as well music and arts/crafts club. Children do not have contact with the outside world. Few people from the public have access to these mostly clandestine facilities.

The children told me about, and I witnessed, a number of unhappy things—including:

- A miniature dirt soccer field in an interior courtyard that often reaches 107 degrees;
- The staff deliberately destroyed the grass and landscaping for a better security-camera view;
- There is no indoor gym or play or even reading area;
- There are no working water faucets in their rooms or drinking fountains, but only large water carboys often left in the sun;
- When not involved in school or a club or at a meal, children cannot be anywhere alone, including their own rooms;
- The children must be escorted by “handlers” everywhere, including the bathrooms;

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- The children are not allowed the comfort of human touch or hugs—even if they are siblings, even if they are in distress;
- There is no access to mental-health providers;
- They have only two phone 10-minute phone calls a week, the minimum allowed.

My visit was so disturbing that in that moment, my days of being the detached and aloof philosopher ended. I could no longer claim to be the objective researcher or the neutral academic. I know that the facility is not as horrid as what we have done to children since my visit. The children I saw were not in cages with other children sleeping on the floor in mylar blankets. It was not a “hielera.” It was not Tornillo or Homestead which are basically large-scale children’s prisons. It was not the bare, cold ground. But the shock of what I saw cannot be undone.

I wake up every single night thinking of the brown faces of these children—scared, confused, powerless, and vulnerable. I have no doubt that some of them are forever broken, and that some of them, miraculously, will overcome this. I also know that what I learned at Colorado College prepared me to MOBILIZE. And for that I am profoundly grateful.

After a few days of debilitating depression and trauma from my visit, I began to MOVE. I started a petition against Southwest Key: <https://somos.presente.org/petitions/demand-southwest-key-programs-inc-stop-warehousing-immigrant-children-1>.

I started a postcard campaign to elected officials with oversight of these facilities. I sent out 11,000 postcards to volunteers willing to write to their elected officials. I just ordered another 15,000 postcards to donate. I prepared packets of information and went to my local elected officials, including one of our own prominent alumnae, and spent hours talking to staff about what I saw and what I felt needed to change. Officials keep asking me, “What group are you with?” My answer: “No one. I am here alone.” I do not care. I joined social media groups and believe that thousands of other people have my back. I spend hours and hours trying to let others know about what I saw. I definitely am not the prime example of an outstanding philosopher. I am involved. I am subjective. I am not detached. And yet, I cannot stop.

You may be wondering why I am writing about this when this newsletter is supposed to be an academic endeavor about philosophy. Well, to me, it is. I studied philosophy to better understand my world, and to form my life. But suddenly, the world has stopped making sense and I am no longer able to keep the life I formerly had. So, I am trying to fix it, to re-inject a bit

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of ethics and humanity into the minuscule sliver of the world I can control. I am **MOVED** to do something. And I wish more of us would do the same. But I believe that your turn will come. There will be one day when you can no longer stand in detachment while you observe the horrors that we humans choose to inflict on each other. And then you will look at your grounding in philosophy and ethics and make the decision to **ACT**.

Though my Philosophy professors may shake their heads and feel disappointed in my failed philosophical career, I want them to know that their work is what has helped to turn me into the person I am today—the quasi activist, the failed philosopher thinker who is unable to look at what is happening without getting involved.

Here are some links to articles and videos documenting the kinds of problems discussed above:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/six-year-old-girl-sexually-abused-immigrant-detention-center/>

<https://www.propublica.org/article/chicago-immigrant-shelters-heartland-internal-documents>

<https://www.propublica.org/article/illinois-chicago-children-teens-immigration-shelters-heartland>

<https://www.revealnews.org/article/defense-contractor-detained-migrant-kids-in-vacant-phoenix-office-building/>

<https://www.kold.com/2019/04/26/claim-wasteful-spending-southwest-key/>

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/immigration/article215738665.html?fbclid=IwAR2XccZ9nNBcuHvUzEAxponkm0RRcbtyNUY4RMycpHzWQinZQluoylWvShc>

<https://projects.propublica.org/graphics/migrant-shelters-near-you>

<https://www.propublica.org/article/chicago-immigrant-shelters-heartland-internal-documents>

<https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2018/06/20/southwest-key-charity-ceo-shelters-salary-griffin-pkg.cnn>

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/immigration/2018/12/30/video-showing-abuse-southwest-key-shelter-go-maricopa-county-prosecutors/2447629002/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/us/migrant-shelters-border-crossing.html>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/levian-pache-hiv-positive-phoenix-southwest-key-shelter-worker-sexually-abused-8-teen-immigrant-boys-authorities-say-propublica/>

<https://www.texasmonthly.com/news/southwest-key-separated-migrant-families-copacabana-reunite/>



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LET US KNOW YOUR NEWS!

Students and alumni are welcome to contribute to future issues or comment on past ones. While we cannot promise to publish submissions, we are happy to consider them. Feel free to contact us by writing to the Department at:

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