

University of Minnesota Duluth Department of Philosophy Presents *The Dialogue*

Spring 2022, Volume 5

Welcome!

Welcome to the fifth volume of *The Dialogue*, the annual newsletter of the UMD Philosophy Program! As we navigate our way through the challenging circumstances the '20s have been throwing at us, in this volume of *The Dialogue*, we pass along some fun facts about what UMD Philosophy folks have been up to, share news about our office space, hear about some awesome things our students have done, and conclude with a couple of fun philosophical jokes and a puzzle.

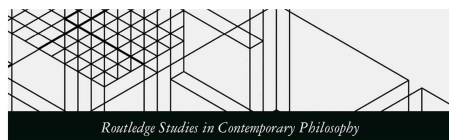
Enjoy!

—Alexis Elder, Associate Professor

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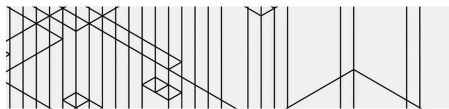
—Bridget Park, Executive Office Administrative Specialist

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MICROAGGRESSIONS AND PHILOSOPHY

Edited by
Lauren Freeman and
Jeanine Weekes Schroer



New Research in Philosophy!

Our chair of the Philosophy Program (and the Department of Geography & Philosophy), Dr. Jeanine Weekes Schroer, has published a new book, *Microaggressions and Philosophy*, part of Routledge Press's 'Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy' series. We sat down with her to talk about this exciting project.

What was your motivation for this book?

Microaggressions is a topic that is desperately in need of philosophers. It was born out of psychology research, both the initial and rebooted concepts, and the challenge of that is that the concept was well-developed enough to begin to address the problems that psychology researchers were working on, but not thick enough to solve practical problems in the world outside. And eventually, the notion of microaggressions started to get applied more broadly, and that's when things got difficult and messy. So philosophers are well positioned to intervene here, to do a broad analysis of the concept that is not influenced by a concern about a specific practical problem.

What was your biggest surprise in working on it?

I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that there are a handful of people doing serious work on philosophy of microaggressions, so we ended up asking a number of people who had not yet worked on this topic to contribute to the volume. And this ended up being extraordinarily valuable because we ended up with some really thoughtful engagement from different perspectives that would not have existed if we hadn't asked them to contribute. I'm also really proud of the fact that we had a goal at the outset to have a really inclusive range of authors, which is hard, in philosophy. But at the end, there were two men among the contributors, and five or six out of eleven authors who identified as white, and at least three who identified as disabled, a couple of queer people, so that's a pretty broad range of representation. I think that's one of the things that made the collection of chapters, as a set, really strong. You're not just getting a narrow range of perspectives.

What was your favorite part?

I really enjoyed helping folks to develop their ideas and work with so many different authors, even though it could be really hard. You'd think editing others' work would not be as hard as writing, but you're just as exhausted when you're done!

Tell us a bit about your own chapter that you wrote for the volume?

My chapter is co-authored with my friend and colleague Zara Bain, who is a political philosopher and disability activist. My interest, as a philosopher, is almost always thinking about how the way we talk about things reflects our agency and the structure that contains it. We spent most of our paper talking about how to think about an episode of the reboot of *Queer Eye* on Netflix, called "Disabled, But Not Really", which was about a paraplegic young black man and father who suffered a spinal injury when he was shot. I was really interested in thinking about how we should analyze and conceptualize the tension between trying to elevate and represent a disabled young man while also using language

that seemed to discredit and objectify disabled people (that he chose for himself; it was the name of his nonprofit, which is where the episode title came from). His reasons for choosing the title had to do with facilitating the agency of disabled people, mostly around health, fitness and nutrition. But there are tensions in this broad media representation because unlike in many of the remodels on this show, a lot of this episode's house remodeling was to make it accessible. And that's great - they lowered the counters and stove so he could use them from his wheelchair, and he liked to cook, but it ought not be a special occasion. It ought not be a prize that you win to be able to live in a house that accommodates you having ordinary access to an ordinary life.

So I was interested in thinking about the tension between wanting to have a media representation that takes a disabled person seriously as an agent, but does so in a way that reinforces the systemic limitations that disabled people are subject to. The upshot, for me, is about the fact that microaggressions are complicated. People often seem to think that if you just get the list of things you're not supposed to say, then you'll be ready to go. But microaggressions are about relationships and context, and one of the challenges is that it's a cliché but, the very best intentions can go wrong with microaggressions. And we have to be willing to roll up our sleeves and work on it, and not ignore it but also not think that we can just develop some rules so we can fix it. Kantianism cannot do the work to solve this problem. [Ed. Note: told you so.] We might even need something like 🧘 virtue ethics to help us navigate through the different contexts. At least it's not Confucianism. [Ed. Note: sick burn]



We've Moved! (Temporarily.) Looking for us? Here's where we'll be this year.

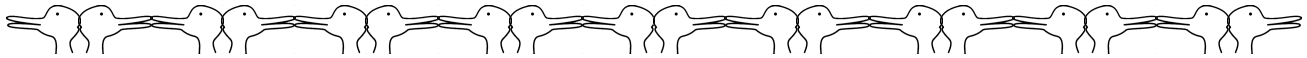
Darland 138: Kelly McPhail & Bob Schroer
Darland 315: Alexis Elder and Laura Engel
Darland 317: Jeanine Weekes Schroer
Kirby Plaza 306K: Jason Ford
Sean Walsh is on sabbatical.
324 Cina: Dept. Office, Bridget Park, staff

What Have Philosophers Been Up To?

- Dr. Caroline Christoff has moved on to Muskingum University. We miss her, but wish her all the best!
- Dr. Laura Engel attended a conference on animal cognition!
- Laura also presented a paper at the North American Society for Social Philosophy, titled "Understanding Adaptive Preferences through the Examination of Social Norms"!
- AND, she is now a consultant for the *Prindle Post*, a public philosophy forum that focuses on ethical implications of current events! (It focuses on making these issues accessible, and everyone should check it out!)
- Dr. Jeanine Weekes Schroer is the new Chair of the Department of Geography and Philosophy!
- Jeanine is becoming a local expert on all the things that **aren't** Critical Race Theory, and will be presenting at least three times this fall to local groups on these issues. She is also excited about knitting, and has purchased a lot of yarn. Furthermore, she has published a book on philosophy and microaggressions!
- Dr. Jason Ford attended two conferences: The Society for Philosophy and Psychology, and the European Society for Philosophy and Psychology, presenting his work on inattention blindness at both! (Both virtual.) His cats, Pepper and Misty, are doing well, and he participated in the annual GISH photo scavenger hunt!
- Jason has returned to teaching in the Philosophy Program after serving as Interim Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, and we are excited to have him back!
- Dr. Bob Schroer sailed in the 2021 Trans-Superior Race (from approximately Sault Ste. Marie, MI to Duluth), racing solo, winning the Olson single-handed class and coming in second in single-handed allover! Paper recently accepted on using cognitive science to explain why people think they see ghosts, Bigfoot, and aliens! Bob spends his spare time tending to retired chickens, and is thrilled to be back teaching face to face!
- Dr. Sean Walsh is on sabbatical, gave a talk at the Pacific APA on "All children are angels sent from heaven but this one is mine: A Confucian human rights approach" and will be presenting at the IAS as a faculty fellow in the Twin Cities this fall (on character, situation, and violence). He and his family will be enjoying life in the Twin Cities during his sabbatical.
- Bridget Park has been growing amazing flowers and vegetables this summer!
- Dr. Kelly MacPhail has two new publications: an article in *The Seventeenth Century Journal* on the Puritan theologian John Owen's perception of death, ontology, and the isangeloi and a book chapter in *Westerns and the Classical World* on the terrifying Greek mythological deities of revenge called the Erinyes as adapted in Anthony Mann's 1950 Western film *The Furies*.
- Dr. Alexis Elder has a new publication out in the *Journal of Sociotechnical Critique*, on ethical frameworks for thinking about our vulnerability to manipulation by social robotics and the gray area of robot moral considerability! She presented at several virtual conferences,

where she discovered she has a tendency to yell at the screen (camera and mic both muted, of course), and cultivated a sourdough starter (named Steve) - Steve's offspring have circulated throughout the Twin Ports, and she's happy to share starter if anyone's looking to get into sourdough baking.

- Our thoughts are with the Ehlers family, whose daughter passed away this past year.



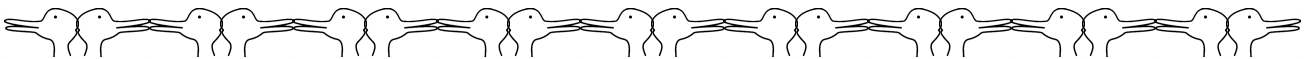
Student Achievements!



This year's Ehlers' Scholarship winners are Timothy Klumpner, Alexander Moe, and Alyssa Schuett!

Alyssa Schuett also won the Center for Ethics and Public Policy's best student paper prize!

Angelica Fleury successfully defended her Honors Thesis, "What Relational Agency Tells Us About Moral AI", graduating with departmental honors!



Getting to know: Alyssa Schuett!

Alyssa Schuett is a senior double major in philosophy and biology! We talked with her and learned about how her different interests work together to help her find balance.

How did you come to major in philosophy?

I went to a community college for 2 years before coming to UMD as a PSEO student. I had taken a philosophy class there and I absolutely loved it, more than anything I had ever learned before. I was always the kid who constantly had questions about everything, and it seemed like a setting where you could ask all the questions and they all mattered and people wanted to talk about them. It felt like finding a piece of myself. So I came to UMD and I've always liked science and thought that was what I was supposed to do, but once I started focusing on biology I realized how much I missed philosophy and wanted something more abstract to balance out my thinking, so I thought it would be in my best interest to focus on both. So I signed up for Bob Schroer's Science & Pseudoscience class here, and that was my first philosophy class at UMD.

What's something important that you learned from majoring in philosophy?

I feel like I'm a math-minded person, but I've learned through philosophy is that not everything is always quantifiable. While the numbers are beautiful and clear, and easy to follow, most of life doesn't really follow clear, easy numbers and the humanities and philosophy can help us think about that.

You've been involved in so many things around the philosophy program - Socratic Society leadership, teaching assistant, reading group participant, now a UROP researcher and writing a senior honors thesis! What stands out to you about your experiences doing philosophy outside the classroom?

The philosophy program is so friendly! I was shocked at first; you can just show up and talk to people and they like to talk with you and help you. Although there are relatively few philosophy majors, I think most people have an interest in it, and most of the time when I talk to people about it they get excited and want to hear about it. It was fun to be a TA but a bit hard because I worked during 2020 when everything was online. I really enjoyed being able to revisit the material in courses I'd already taken without being graded. It was challenging to try to connect with students and make sure I was helping as best I could.

It was great to work with Bob since I've worked with him a lot and have a good sense of how he teaches. I'm also working with him on my UROP and honors thesis. I really enjoy the independent research because it gives me more of a sense of what it's like to be a professional philosopher, which is kind of unique work and you don't always get to see how they think and talk with each other, separate from classes. I like how independent research is so customized to what you're thinking about, you can really tailor or adjust it based on what you find interesting. There's a lot of freedom to change directions or act like you're doing something wrong to guide it one way or another based on what you find interesting or how ideas work — or don't.

One thing I am really liking right now is becoming more familiar with the main philosophical players within each arena, starting to recognize names and theories as they come up again and again and start to become familiar with patterns, and you need to read a lot to be able to notice them but now I can recognize a name and be like “Oh, I recognize Rosen and I know what he’s interested in and doing here!”

What advice do you have for other philosophy students?

That’s a tricky question! I guess I don’t know that this is specific to philosophy, but get to know your professors and don’t be afraid to ask for help. In any class I’ve taken, having a good relationship with my professors and being able to go to office hours and email and talk with them goes a lot further than people realize. That’s where you actually learn and most of my professors love to talk about their subjects.

What benefits do you see to your double major?

I noticed just in my mood and attitude that if I’m just doing one subject or the other I start to dread school - it’s happened to me a few times! I feel like if I get to engulfed in one, I start to resent it. But in addition to keeping me happy and interested, it gives me so many more options - almost too many. And as I said, I ask a lot of questions so it’s nice to have different places to ask different questions, as well as exploring the overlap between the two.

Another benefit for me is that in my first two years at UMD, I did research in molecular parasitology, studying parasites at the molecular level, this parasite called a trypanosome, and now I get to do completely different research on some big philosophy stuff like critiquing academics’ positions around gender differences and looking into the uses of disgust, so I feel really lucky in that I get to see different ways that research operates, because it’s extremely broad, every research area operates in different ways. I’ve been exposed to very different methodologies.



Philosophy Jokes to Make You Groan

What is a wolf that loves studying philosophy called?

A self-aware wolf.



Why did the Chicken Cross the Road?

Aristotle: To actualize its potential.

Buddha: If you meet the chicken on the road, kill it.

David Hume: Out of custom and habit.

Jean-Paul Sartre: In order to act in good faith and be true to itself, the chicken found it necessary to cross the road.

Ludwig Wittgenstein: The possibility of “crossing” was encoded into the objects “chicken” and “road”, and circumstances came into being which caused the actualisation of this potential occurrence.

Nietzsche: Because if you gaze too long across the Road, the Road gazes also across you.

Pyrrho the Skeptic: What road?

Zeno of Elea: To prove it could never reach the other side.

Support the Philosophy Program

The stories in this issue highlight the many ways in which the Philosophy program has enriched the lives of our students and faculty. Of course, many of these opportunities are only possible because of the philanthropic support given by people like you. There are many ways in which your contribution of any amount can have a lasting effect on the lives of the students and faculty in Philosophy. Together we can discover how your passion can impact the lives of our students and faculty. To make a gift, please contact our development office at 218-726-6322.

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