



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

# University of Sheffield Philosophy Alumni Newsletter

Welcome to the first of what we hope will be many Philosophy Department Alumni newsletters.

We feel it is important to try to strengthen the ties between current staff and students and our many former students. The newsletters are intended to contribute to this, by letting you know what's going on in the Department. But we very much hope they will also encourage some of you to get involved. There are two main ways in which we think Alumni can support our work.

First, today's students face a tougher challenge than ever in finding a career, and in showing employers how they are the best candidates for the jobs on offer. If any of you are willing to share your experience of moving between university and the world of work, for example by coming back to talk to current students or by acting as mentors, that would be a great help, and much appreciated.

Second, we live in times in which the point of studying for a degree in philosophy (or indeed any other humanities discipline) is likely to be questioned ever more fiercely. The inevitable enormous rise in tuition fees, coupled with the government's apparent reluctance to fund any of the cost of studies in humanities and social sciences, will increasingly lead prospective students, their families and the general public to wonder why these disciplines should be part of our university culture. You can help us to persuade the wider community that philosophy is a subject eminently worth studying. You can speak from your own experience, free of the suspicion that you are fighting your own professional corner, as academics – staff and students – cannot. Our hope is that knowing a little more about some of the wonderful things that go on here, among students and staff alike, will inspire you to do just that.

What are the benefits to you of a closer link between the Philosophy Department and its Alumni? Obviously there's the prospect of getting in touch with long-lost friends and acquaintances. There's also the opportunity to get to know some of the current staff and students. Finally, we thought that some of you, at least, might also welcome the chance to do a little philosophy again. Some of our alumni events will aim to give you that opportunity, and some of our news will tell you something about what's going on in the discipline.

We hope to see you soon at one of our events. In the meantime, do keep in touch, and do please let us know if you are willing to help out with preparing our current students for the world of work.

Rob Hopkins  
Head of Philosophy Department

## Autumn 2010 1st Newsletter

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## Philosophy has a New Home

After nearly forty five years in the Arts Tower the Department has moved into a set of mid-nineteenth century villas at 45 Victoria Street. Our new home is very different in a number of ways. The wonderful panoramic views from the Arts Tower of Sheffield and the surrounding countryside are a thing of the past. So too are the paternoster and lifts, and the experience of a building swaying gently in strong winds. The Department's new location is luxurious by contrast with the twelfth floor of the Arts Tower. We have a shower, a couple of kitchens, workspace for our graduate students, and a private courtyard garden (although we lack large lecture rooms, and so are returning regularly to teach in the large lecture theatres in the basement of the Arts Tower).

We are also closer to the University's recently built Arts Quarter: the newly built Jessop West building, housing the departments of History and English, and the School of Modern Languages and Linguistics, and the Jessop Building (converted from the old Jessop maternity hospital) housing the department of Music.



New Philosophy Department Building on  
Victoria Street

# Philosophy Alumni Newsletter

## Departmental Centenary Celebrations

2010 marked 100 years of philosophy at the University of Sheffield. In celebration of our centenary the department organized a Centenary Lunch on 11 September in Mappin Hall. Over 60 alumni attended, including three who had been among the first cohort to be based in the Arts Tower. There was an exhibition of material from the University archive of particular relevance to the Philosophy department, and a tour of the University's new buildings (including our new home at 45 Victoria Street) for those who haven't visited in the recent past. The celebration also involved talks from our current Head of Department, Rob Hopkins; from an alumnus Brian Woods-Scawen, who graduated from the Department in the late 1960s; and from Steve Makin, who is currently the longest serving member of staff in the Department.



Photographs from the day can be viewed at:

<http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/115120091005813139666/SheffieldPhilosophy100th#>

# Philosophy Alumni Newsletter

## Seminar In A Bar

At the recent centenary event, several alumni mentioned to us that they still found themselves engaged with philosophy, and would welcome the chance for further philosophical discussion.

We have therefore decided to start a series of seminars aimed primarily at alumni, to which you are all warmly invited. The seminars will be very informal, with a member of staff introducing their current research interests and taking questions. Other staff will also attend, as well as some current undergraduates and graduates – a mix which we hope will help develop connections between the generations.

The first seminar in the series will be held on the First Floor of Mish Mash at 617

Ecclesall Road, S11 8PT (<http://www.mishmashsheffield.co.uk/>) on **Tuesday 23 November at 19:30 talk to start at 20.00.**

The talk, which will be given by Yonatan Shemmer, and entitled *Despotic Constitutions and Despotic Reasons*, is a discussion of the different ways in which societies and individuals control their future selves.

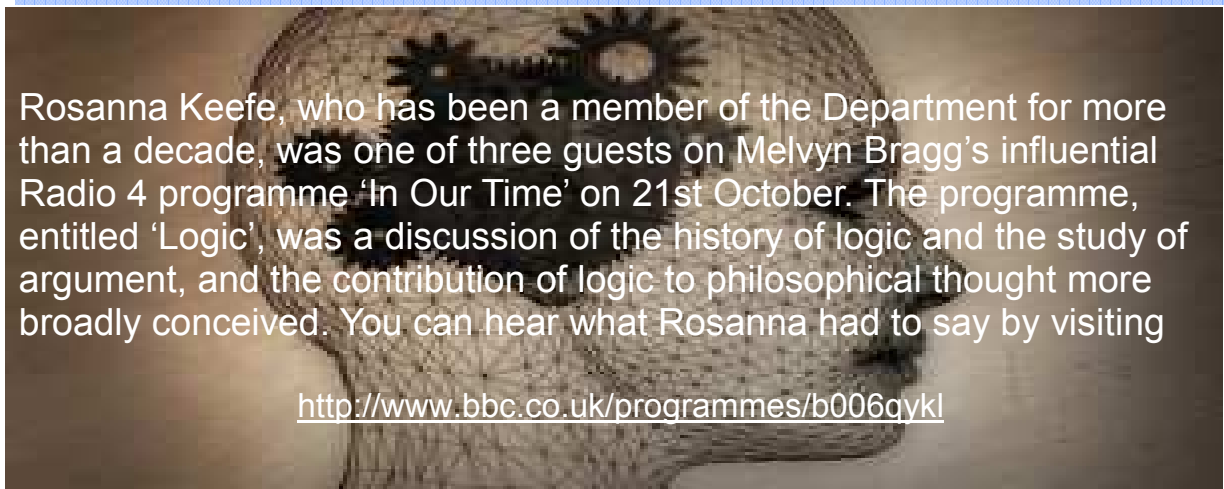


If you would like to attend this seminar, please do come along. It would be some help to us if you could let us know that you intend to come, but it is not necessary to do so. And if you have any questions about the seminar, please do get in touch with us at [philosophy-alumni@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:philosophy-alumni@sheffield.ac.uk)

## Rosanna Keefe On Radio 4

Rosanna Keefe, who has been a member of the Department for more than a decade, was one of three guests on Melvyn Bragg's influential Radio 4 programme 'In Our Time' on 21st October. The programme, entitled 'Logic', was a discussion of the history of logic and the study of argument, and the contribution of logic to philosophical thought more broadly conceived. You can hear what Rosanna had to say by visiting

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qykl>



# Philosophy Alumni Newsletter

## Research Snapshots

Bob Stern  
*Staff*



Amazingly, I have been in the Department now for over 20 years (though of course I cannot rival Steve Makin for long service). Equally amazingly, I have basically worked on Hegel for most of that time, covering different aspects of his thought, and his connections with a range of different thinkers. In the past, I have mainly considered his metaphysics and epistemology, and how this relates to Kant. Currently, however, I am working more on his ethics, and how this compares to both Kant and Kierkegaard. I am completing a book for Cambridge University Press, which considers their respective theories of moral obligation: that is, how we are to explain the way in which morality constrains and binds us, especially when God is no longer accepted as the source of the moral law. For Kant, I argue, this sense of obligation was explained by the fact that we are creatures torn between reason and desire, for whom morality therefore takes an imperatival form in which the latter is overruled by the former. Hegel, however, rejected this dualistic picture, and argued instead for a social account of moral obligation, as arising through the community of which one is part. But because Hegel's solution to the problem of obligation was intended to avoid any Kantian tension between duty and inclination, for Kierkegaard this meant that the Hegelian account could not treat morality as asking too much of us as individuals; it thus threatened to render our moral lives too complacent by reducing the moral demand. Kierkegaard held that only by returning to something more like the divine command theory that Kant had rejected, could this demand be restored to the right level, where it again makes sense to think of morality as presenting us with a challenge that we must struggle to fulfill. I consider the arguments for and against these central views, and how seeing the debate in these terms helps us better understand the history of modern ethics.

Kathy Puddifoot  
*Postgraduate*



I am entering the third year of studies for my PhD. Currently my main interests lie at the intersection of philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology and epistemology. I am interested in naturalistic approaches to the mind and their relationship to epistemological issues, such as questions about what it is to be rational or to have knowledge. Those who take a naturalistic approach to epistemology develop theories informed by experimental data from sciences such as psychology and neuroscience: findings which tell us how people actually go about forming beliefs and reasoning. They tend to assume that it is important to develop standards to use to assess people's beliefs – standards for knowledge or rationality – that take into account the limits on human reasoning determined by human psychology. As a result of taking this approach, some philosophers have developed what they think are radical challenges to traditional notions of rationality, and to traditional methods in philosophy, such as conceptual analysis. My doctoral research focuses on the epistemological and methodological issues surrounding these radical approaches to rationality. It addresses the question 'how radically should we adjust traditional notions of rationality given what science tells us about the human mind and its limits?' I defend the view that there is a distinctive place for philosophical analysis alongside the analysis of experimental data and provide a defence of some traditional notions of rationality against the challenges of their seemingly radical opponents, while allowing that philosophers should be willing to make adjustments to their theories to ensure that they develop standards for knowledge and rationality that are within the reach of ordinary human beings. More generally, I am interested in philosophical questions about the nature of mind which seem as if they could be informed by science, such as questions about innateness, human moral psychology and the nature of concepts.

# Philosophy Alumni Newsletter

## Philosophy Archives

In the course of preparing for our centenary celebration we were able to access and display items from the University's archive which had special relevance to the philosophy department. These included a staff application form from the 1950s; an obituary of Professor Bertram Laing who worked in the department from 1920 to 1949, and who was the sole philosophy academic for twenty seven of those years; and a report from the University Gazette of 1964 by the then head of department Professor David Cousin on philosophy as a University department and as a subject at the time.

We have now arranged with the University Library for all the available archive material relevant to the philosophy department to be on display in reading room of the Western Bank library (as the Main Library is now known) from Monday 22 November to Friday 3 December. Alumni are welcome to look at this archive material. Details concerning access to archive material, including opening hours and arrangements for visiting can be obtained from the Special Collections and Archive website at

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/library/special/>

## Keeping in Touch

We've created a **Sheffield Philosophy Alumni** page on Facebook and hope as many people as possible will join in order to keep in touch with departmental goings-on and to reconnect with fellow graduates

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sheffield-Philosophy-Alumni/109862295723230>

We also have a special Alumni page on our Departmental website

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/philosophy/alumni>

You can download a copy of our Departmental Timeline from the Alumni page, which gives details of the fifty or more people who have worked to build the Sheffield philosophy over the past century. You can also access other Departmental web pages from the alumni page, and find, amongst other things, information current members of staff and news from the Department.

## Feedback and Suggestions

We would very much welcome feedback about this newsletter, and suggestions of items for inclusion in future editions. Please send these to our dedicated alumni email address [philosophy-alumni@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:philosophy-alumni@sheffield.ac.uk) or to our alumni officer Steve Makin ([s.makin@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:s.makin@sheffield.ac.uk))

The Production of this Newsletter is due to:

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