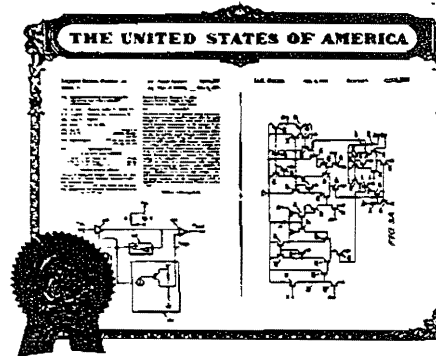
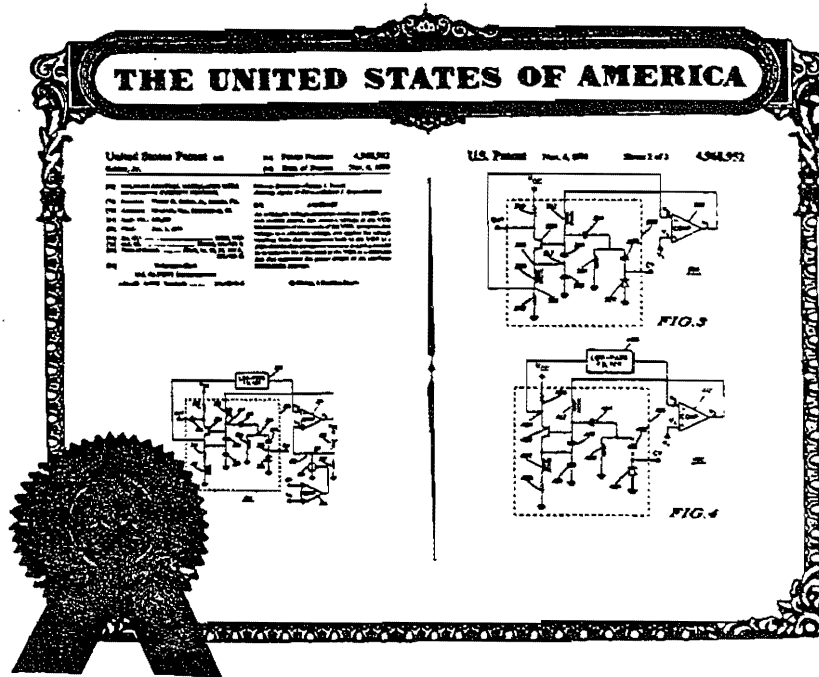


Electrical Engineer and Philosophical Novelist

“...a[n] example of how far afield one of your wayward students has gone...”

After receiving his Ph.D. in 1978 from our department with a dissertation under Edward Madden, Walt Kehler earned another doctorate from UB's Department of Electrical Engineering. The Maddens have kept in touch with him both in correspondence and in visiting his home in Florida. For many years Walt has been an electrical engineer for Motorola. He has four U.S. patents for electrical circuits. Abstracts of two of those patents appear on this page. He has also published a novel, has two novels in press, and a fourth in preparation. In response to a recent inquiry, Walt writes:

“...Since I haven't been able to do philosophy professionally, I try to do it thru my hobby—writing. My books explore a problem from philosophy as a subplot to the main action by opening with the protagonist in the middle of a life crisis. His spiritual regeneration, which requires the solution of the philosophical question, is intertwined with his external adventure which presents clues and obstacles to the solution of both subplot and plot. His adventure propels him towards unknown territory both external and internal—into foreign lands and into himself.



In *The DragonStar Project*, a disheartened Brett Allman searches for a meaning to life while puzzling over stolen military integrated circuits and the function of a mysterious chip inside the new generation of cellular phones. In *The Gemini Factor*, Allman and his brilliant but troubled lover struggle with the question of Fate versus Free Will when precognitive visions haunt her. Allman must rescue both her and their beliefs when she and U.N. inspection team are arrested by the Chinese when she stumbles upon secret biological research and the evil plan for its use.

Both novels will be published in paperback by Commonwealth Publications of Edmonton, Canada. They should be out in the Spring of 1998. Commonwealth has a website at www.commonwealthpub.com. I am working on a fourth novel, *Circle of Masks*, but since it takes me two years to write one of these things I have yet to figure out how it will end.

In any case, I hope this will be of interest to you as an example of how far afield one of your wayward students has gone. Even tho I haven't been able to work in philosophy, I will always treasure the years I spent at the University; studying philosophy was an enriching experience that has served me well in all aspects of life....”

The Worst Cognitive Performance in History

Barry Smith and Peter Baumann

Some time ago the editors of the Hamburg Cognitive Science journal 'KogBit' sent out a questionnaire on cognitive science to a number of prominent cognitive scientists. In his response to this questionnaire, Barry Smith gave the following answer to the question

"What is the worst cognitive performance in history?":

"Kant's Critique of Pure Reason".

This led Peter Baumann to ask Barry Smith via e-mail what might speak in

favor of such a judgment. The following is an extract from the e-mail discussion which followed:

PB: Why do you think that Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason' is the worst

Continued on page 13

Graduate Students

Michael Berman, (Ph.D. 1997), successfully defended his dissertation in March 1997, and will finish his assistantship this semester in the Asian Studies Program, Interdisciplinary Studies. Michael will have a forthcoming book review published, in R. Puligandla and D. L. Miller, editors, "Buddhism and the Emerging World Civilization," *Philosophy East and West*, as well as "Time and Emptiness in the *Chao-Lun*," forthcoming in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. Michael served as panel chair at the 1996 New York Conference on Asian Studies at Dowling College, Long Island, NY. There Berman presented "Phenomenological Intersubjectivity: Merleau-Ponty and Nagarjuna."

☘ ☘ ☘

Eric Bronson presented a paper entitled "The Madness of Socrates" in March at the Syracuse University Graduate Student Conference, and in April at Opsi, an interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference sponsored by UB's Classics Department.

☘ ☘ ☘

Alan Clune had published in *The Monist*, "Biomedical Testing on Nonhuman Animals: An Attempt at a Rapprochement Between Utilitarianism and Theories of Inherent Value," vol. 79, no. 2, 17 pp. as well as "A Critical Assessment of Varner's Proposal for Consensus and Convergence in the Biomedical Research Debate," accepted for publication, *Between the Species*. Also forthcoming is "Justification of Empirical Belief: Problems with Haack's Foundherentism," *Philosophy*.

☘ ☘ ☘

Leo Zaibert has the following publications: "On Deference and the Spirit of the Laws," *Archiv für Rechts-und Sozialphilosophie*; "Philosophy of Law in Latin America", in Christopher B. Gray, (ed.), *The Philosophy of Law: An Encyclopedia* (NY: Garland); Review of Joseph Cropsey's "Plato World: Man's

Place in the Cosmos", *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*.

☘ ☘ ☘

Gloria Zúñiga was selected as a Bradley Fellow by the Acton Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan to conduct research in value theory this past summer. The academic research promoted by the Acton Institute reflects the advocacy for freedom on the part of its namesake, the moral philosopher Lord Acton, who is best remembered for the much-quoted line: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Among the approximately eighty applications to the Acton Institute for this opportunity, three scholars were selected. The three Bradley fellows joined efforts for two months in Grand Rapids to collaborate in their respective areas of expertise in philosophy and/or economics. The intended goal of such collaboration is to lay the groundwork for a book on value theory to be published by spring.

In February Gloria presented a paper entitled "Polish Phenomenology: Bridging Moral Objectivism and Economic Subjectivism" in Warsaw, Poland. The paper traced the development of the Lwow-Warsaw School to the phenomenology of Karol Wojtyla (a.k.a. John Paul II).

In April, Gloria presented a paper entitled "Internet Ethics: the Emergence of Family Values" at the Value Inquiry conference in Boone, North Carolina. This year's conference theme was Values in Business and Gloria's paper discussed the Internet as a free market.

The Worst Cognitive Performance in History

Continued from page 12

cognitive performance in history?

BS: Kant drew an absolute line between what we can know and what is; in this way he seriously devalued human confidence in the powers of science, setting in train a tradition of thinking which began with Hegel, through Marx (the doctrine of 'false consciousness'), Nietzsche and

other 'masters of suspicion' down to Adolf Hitler and Goebbels (the great lie), and Pol Pot and Derrida (both students of philosophy in Paris).

PB: May I quote you?

BS: I suppose so, but only to people with a sense of humor."

PB: May I quote you?

BS: I suppose so, but only to people with a sense of humor.

PB: Oh, I guess I didn't get the joke. But there's still something serious in what you said, isn't there? In the beginning you said that Kant drew a line between what we can know and what is. But who doesn't?

BS: Kant drew an absolute line: We can, he said, never know anything about what is.

PB: Do you want to say Kant is a sceptic? If yes, you should really publish this view -- it's a very original view of Kant...

BS: If 'world' here means 'world of things in themselves' then my view is not original at all; if 'world' means 'phenomenal world' then Kant says we can know the world we've created, but only that.

PB: I still don't see how that makes him a sceptic. Anyway, you also said that Kant "devalued human confidence in the powers of science". Let's compare, e.g., Hume and Kant. One might take Hume as a kind of sceptic with regard to causality. Kant on the other hand tried to 'rescue' the idea of causality as a principle of science. One can, of course, doubt whether Kant succeeded in doing so. But be this as it may, I don't see any reason for saying that Kant devalued human confidence in science and in the value of science.

BS: But he did, as did Hume (Kant resolved Hume's dilemma by fictionalizing the whole of science—see Vaihinger's 'Philosophy of the As If')

PB: There is a sense in which Vaihinger would agree. But here you're relying on an interpretation of Kant almost nobody

nowadays - except you and Vaihinger - holds.

BS: Everyone is desperately trying to find interpretations of the German Saint which will protect his saintliness ...

PB: Some people seem to have an obsession with the church!

"Kant was really a non-classical Chinese realist."

BS: ... and Kant writes so badly that new interpretations fall readily off the trees. He established norms of style in German philosophy which have had deleterious effects above all in France, but also elsewhere...

PB: If you don't like his style, o.k. But I think it's historically false to see a connection (as you seem to do) between Kant and the anti-scientism/anti-rationalism of postmodernist French philosophy. These people are primarily influenced by Hegel, Husserl (Your hero!), Nietzsche and Heidegger.

BS: Kant gave birth to Fichte, ...the kneecap is connected to the thigh bone...

PB: What about Kant's famous letter, his "declaration against Fichte"? That Kant gave birth to Fichte is what the followers of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel say. And even these people criticize Kant for not being idealist enough.

BS: So: "Classical German Idealism" is a misnomer. Kant was really a non-classical Chinese realist.

PB: So you take Kant to be the first German Idealist? Like Fichte or Hegel? I heavily disagree with that. I'm not the only one who thinks that German Idealism is based on a misunderstanding (whether productive or not) of some parts of Kant's philosophy.

BS: And Kant is innocent, in this regard?

PB: What does "innocence" mean in the history of ideas? Anyway, I think you put Kant in an entirely wrong neighborhood. Let's try it the other

way around. In my view, Kant is one of the grand-uncles of cognitive science (but that's another topic). Besides that, I think that Kant's role in the history of philosophy is much more positive (to say the least). In a way, (almost) every philosopher today is working on problems and questions that lead back to Kant. No matter whether one agrees with what Kant says on specific topics and no matter whether one recognizes his impact on philosophy. Let me just name a few topics: Who was a better and more devastating critic of metaphysics than Kant? (Take, for instance, his path-breaking critique of the "ontological" proof of the existence of God and his remarks on the concept of existence which are very close to what Frege later said about the concept of existence).

BS: Yes - and look at the terrible, terrible consequences of the failure on the part of so many contemporary philosophers to take metaphysics seriously!

"...the line that leads from Kant to Hitler..."

PB: The Logical Positivists, for instance! And you don't want to say they're also part of the line that leads from Kant to Hitler, do you?

BS: Long Story (see, inter alia, chapter 1 of my book "Austrian Philosophy")

PB: Another point: Take the project of identifying necessary conceptual features of experience. Strawson is only one of the most well-known philosophers who pursues such an idea. Or take the idea that judgment is complex in the following important way: two fundamentally different types of mental representation are involved, i.e. intuitions and concepts. They have two very different semantical and logical roles in judging. There is nothing like that in Locke's or Hume's empiricism: they don't have any attractive theory of judgment or propositional structure because they only have mental representations of one single sort: ideas. Furthermore, in a sense, Kant's distinction pre-dates the distinction between referring

(with singular terms) and predicating (with predicates).

BS: On all of these things I think Kant is confused, and I am confident I could find precursors of whatever his good ideas might have been (e.g. in Leibniz, Wolff, Crusius, etc., not to mention -- if it's good theories of judgment you're after -- Gregory of Rimini or William of Ockham or Tom of Cobley).

PB: Or in almost anybody else? Anyway, let's take the analytic-synthetic distinction: it was there before, but Kant was the first to give some explanation.

BS: This was definitely in Crusius, and in Locke, and in Leibniz...

PB: I said that. But there is a difference between saying a distinction is there and giving an explanation.

BS: Moreover Kant's treatment of the a priori is absurd.

PB: Why absurd?

BS: Propositions are a priori (e.g., Pythagoras' theorem) because, Kant says, we impose them on the world: when a passerby sees a ladder leaning against a wall, he imposes Pythagoras' theorem on what he sees. So if the ladder is 5 feet long, and the foot of the ladder is placed 3 feet from the wall, the perceiver makes it true, by the miraculous workings of his "transcendental consciousness", that the top of the ladder will be 4 feet from the ground. This is just silly.

PB: It is absurd to define "a priori" as "imposing something on the world"! Right you are! But Kant didn't do that (I wonder how you find all this nonsense in just one book). He rather explained it along the (nowadays) usual lines ("independence from experience"). It's true: for some years we have known (see Kripke and Kaplan) that one shouldn't identify the a priori with the necessary and the a posteriori with the contingent. This is an improvement that would hardly have been possible without a conception like Kant's. Frege, for instance, knew about the merits of Kant's distinction of analytic and synthetic (see his "Foundations of Arithmetic") and developed his own view based on

that. Learning from Kant doesn't mean agreeing with him. It's not a good idea just to condemn, condemn, condemn... in the manner of some Holy Spanish Inquisition ...

BS: One can find good bits in "Mein Kampf", too. (Even in Derrida, perhaps)[Added in proof: No. That last bit is going too far.]

PB: And I was just beginning to get your jokes... You leave no doubt that you really don't like Kant. But even if Kant is so bad wouldn't it be a good thing to read the book as a student? In the questionnaire you say you want to ban the book. Why not read it as a paradigm of how not to philosophize? Furthermore, you told me why you think Kant is so bad. But you didn't tell me why the first Critique is the worst cognitive performance in history (late Heidegger would be a much better candidate for that position, wouldn't it). And that's definitely a different question, isn't it?

"Don't try to teach your grandmother how to suck eggs."

BS: God, how I hate Kant!

PB: Did you ever read Kant? Why not give it a try?

BS: Don't try to teach your grandmother how to suck eggs.

Awards...

Hourani Fellowships Awarded



Jason Adsit, Eric Bronson and Scott Harrigan received Hourani Fellowships for the Spring 1997 semester. These scholarships are provided by the George F. Hourani Memorial Fund, established in memory of former Distinguished Professor and Department Chair George Hourani. Fellowships are granted to outstanding graduate students specializing in ethics.

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Steinberg Prize Winners

Sarah Fagnan won first place in the competition for the Steinberg Prize with her essay "The Fate and Freedom of Bigger Thomas," and second place was awarded to **Jorge Torres-Lumsden** for his essay "Language and Thought." The Prize(s) is given yearly to an undergraduate(s) for an outstanding work of a philosophical nature.

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Mary C. Whitman Scholarship

David J. Hodge and **Jorge Torres-Lumsden**, both Philosophy majors, shared the Mary C. Whitman Scholarship for 1996-97. The 1997-98 Mary C. Whitman Scholarship winners are Philosophy majors **Tienne L. Smith** and **Anthony M. Caputi**. Congratulations are extended to these deserving students.

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Perry Prizes

The Thomas D. Perry Dissertation Prizes for 1997 were awarded to **Kimberly A. Blessing** and **William Irwin**.

Proposed Institute for Law and Applied Philosophy

Barry Smith and **David Koepsell** have proposed the creation of an Institute for Law and Applied Philosophy. In their Preliminary Pro-

spectus they provide the following background:

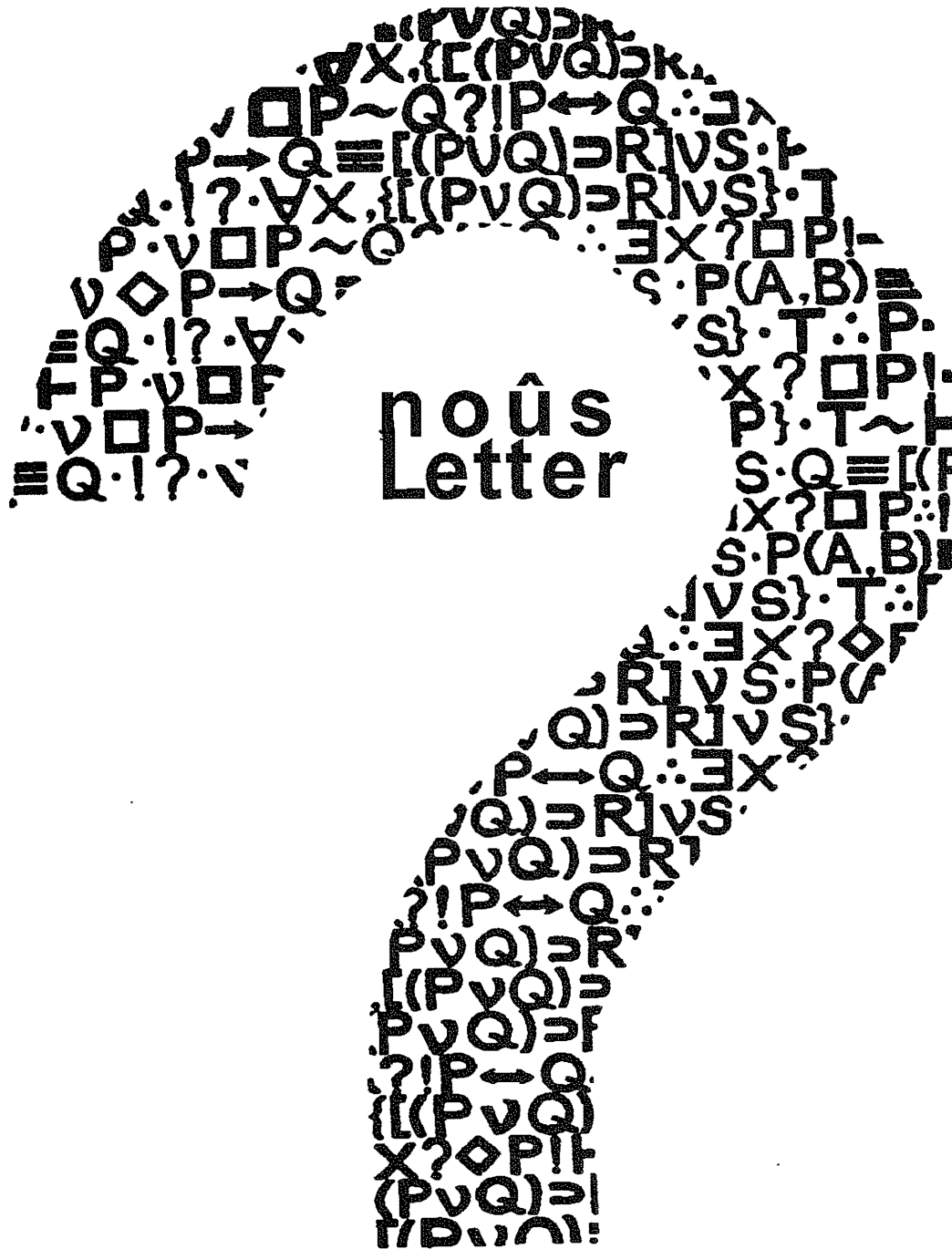
In an age of rapid technological progress, legislators, jurists and lawyers must grapple with constantly changing domains of objects. The expansion of trading blocks and treaty organizations, and the concomitant growth in importance of international law have in addition subjected the processes of law-making and enforcement to challenges of increasing intensity. Legal systems have been forced to try to fit such things as genetically engineered life forms, artificial intelligences, "virtual" currencies and the Internet into legal schemes which, when initially developed, anticipated no such phenomena.

Legal schemes have constantly to be updated, yet this is done primarily in an ad hoc manner. This ad hoc legislating is marked by a general failure to examine or develop categorical schemes, or ontologies, of sufficient generality and robustness to comprehend both old and new varieties of objects in a natural and intuitively appealing fashion. Examples abound of new types of objects with which the law has failed to come to grips in reasoned fashion. Are genetically engineered life forms expressions, which might be afforded the protection of intellectual property law? If so, are they the sort of expressions which may be patented, or are they the sort which may be copyrighted? The answers to such questions can be discovered only through a careful examination of the existing ontology of intellectual property law and of the broader ontology of manufacture and biological entities.

Courts and governments have been left to deal with such problems by trial and error, often with much confusion and inconsistency amongst jurisdictions as a result. Such confusion might to some degree be avoided through the development and application of sophisticated techniques of ontological analysis: it is with such techniques that the proposed University at Buffalo Institute for Law and Applied Philosophy will be primarily concerned.

PHILOSOPHY

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