

News from Alumni

Many thanks to those of you who liked our Facebook page. Keep your own comments coming! (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Oberlin-Philosophy-Department/116124061781395>). If you're not a Facebook fan but would like to share news, please email the newsletter editor: Katherine.Thomson-Jones@oberlin.edu.

Joseph Andriano '02 was appointed visiting assistant professor of humanities and business at Clarkson University in Potsdam, New York, starting this fall. The appointment includes teaching responsibilities in law, business ethics, and a seminar on dystopian and apocalyptic literature. Joe lives in the beautiful St. Lawrence Valley with his partner Sarah, their cats, Louie and Ella, and their llamas, Dolly and Daisy.

Bill Bigelow '63 writes: "I don't know if this constitutes *news*, but I am currently reading (actually, rereading), *The Three Pillars of Zen* (classic), *The Second Ring of Power*, and *Sickness Unto Death*. The Zen and Castaneda make a point of saying they are not philosophy, however Kierkegaard claimed to be a 'philosopher of religion' and not a theologian. These all have to do, I guess, with seeing one's true self and reality as it is. I have yet to learn the value of this, however, when, for example, we hear and see with vivid TV images that a third of Antarctica is now slipping faster and faster into the sea."

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A Note from the Editor

by Kate Thomson-Jones

Another philosophically rich and fulfilling year has flown by at Oberlin, which means it is time to remind you, our alumni, that we are still here, keeping busy and ready to share news.

The 2013-14 year began with a full slate of philosophy courses: In the fall, we offered a first-year seminar, *Rationality in Science*, as well as larger, introductory sections in *Problems of Philosophy* and *Philosophy of Morality*. At the 200 level, we offered *Deductive Logic*; *Epistemology*; *Existentialism*; *Metaphysics*; *Social, Legal, and Political Philosophy*; and a seminar, *The Cognitive Science of Rationality and Morality*. In spring 2014, we had three more sections of introductory courses in *Problems of Philosophy* and *the Nature of Value*. At the 200 level, we offered *Environmental Ethics* and *Topics in Applied Ethics*. Finally, we had two seminars: *Realism and Representation in Art* and *Topics in Metaphysics-Causation*. In the following pages, each faculty member will tell you more about his or her particular teaching and research activities over the course of the year.

As a department, the highlight of the year was our hosting of the 41st Oberlin

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Each year, we gather in the King-Rice courtyard and say goodbye to our graduates, meet their families, and reconnect with alumni. See page 5 for more photos from Commencement/Reunion Weekend.

The illustrious history of the Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy (see <http://new.oberlin.edu/arts-and-sciences/departments/philosophy/colloquium.dot>) makes the seemingly impossible possible: thanks to the reputation of the colloquium, we are able to persuade a sizable group of distinguished philosophers to travel from all over North America to our small town in Northeast Ohio. Once arrived, they spend a weekend in deep and stimulating discussion, barely noticing their surroundings except to remark on how surprisingly pleasant they are. This year our group of philosophers were leading figures in contemporary analytic metaphysics. The speakers on the program were Kit Fine (NYU), Karen Bennett (Cornell University), Jonathan Schaffer (Rutgers University), Sally Haslanger

(MIT), and Stephen Yablo (MIT). The commentators were Ted Sider (Cornell University), Thomas Hofweber (UNC Chapel Hill), Kathrin Koslicki (University of Alberta), Amie Thomasson (University of Miami), and L. A. Paul (UNC Chapel Hill). Topics under discussion included grounding, explanation, metametaphysics, and parts and differences. We were particularly proud of the showing among Obies on this year's program. As well as one of our speakers, Karen Bennett '93, three of our session chairs were Oberlin alumni: Ned Markosian '83 (Western Washington University), Donald Baxter '76 (University of Connecticut), and Brad Skow '98 (MIT). The other two chairs were Roberta Ballarin (UBC) and Marcello Fiocco (UC Irvine).

Martin Thomson-Jones was the principal organizer of the colloquium, as-

sisted by Kate Thomson-Jones and Karen Barnes. Martin and Kate decided to try a new format for the sessions: papers were distributed to be read in advance of the colloquium, and we began each session with the commentator's response, leaving more time for discussion. The discussion periods were regulated by a colored-card system in order to maximize the chances of inclusive discussion. Ned Markosian served as an invaluable consultant in our setting up this system, which he originally developed for the Bellingham Summer Philosophy Conference. By almost all accounts, the new colloquium format was a great success. Martin is moving ahead with the publication of the Colloquium papers in a special edition of *Philosophical Studies*.

EDITOR'S NOTE, cont.

Colloquium in Philosophy. Expertly organized by Martin Thomson-Jones, with help from Kate Thomson-Jones, the focus for this colloquium was contemporary analytic metaphysics. You will find a full description of the program above. We were also delighted to host James Stacey Taylor from the College of New Jersey for this year's Nancy K. Rhoden Memorial Lecture. Professor Taylor's talk, "In Favor of a Market for Human Organs," was well attended and provoked lively discussion.

Finally, it has to be noted that we had a change of leadership midway through this past year. Tim generously agreed to take over as chair when Dorit had to go on medical leave at the beginning of February. Dorit has been greatly missed this past semester by her colleagues and students. Our thoughts are with her, Todd, and their girls, and we are all hoping for Dorit's speedy recovery.

Student Activities and Achievements

Philosophy Majors Committee

Ari Benjamin, Anna Field, Brian Jortner, Paul Merrill, Robert Merges

The Rhoden Essay Prize is given for the best undergraduate essay in the areas of ethics, medical ethics, or the philosophy of law.

- Brian Jortner was awarded first place for his paper, "A Critical Analysis of Robert Nozick's Experience Machine."
- Ryan Kavanaugh was awarded second place for his paper, "The Origins of Our Morality."

Well done, Brian and Ryan!

2014 Graduates

Philosophy Majors:

Isaac Yoder*
 Jason Alexander**
 Daniel Baker
 Michael (Chris) Danis
 Emma Fox
 Brian Jortner
 Ryan Kavanaugh
 Justin Murphy-Mancini
 Griffin Sabelli
 James Taylor
 Simon Turkel

*December 2013 graduation

**January 2014 graduation

Philosophy Minors:

Rosemary Boeglin
 Lauren Branson
 Christopher Bromberg
 Alfred Goodrich
 Kristen Johnson
 Abraham Rowe
 Andrew Winslow

FACULTY NEWS

Dorit Ganson: I have been on medical leave, receiving treatment for stage III breast cancer. I'd like to send my best wishes to our new graduates, and I look forward to returning this year.

Todd Ganson: Thanks to a sabbatical leave during spring semester, I was able to devote considerable attention to the sensory capacities of plants, microorganisms, bees, and robots. I recently finished a paper titled "Sensory Capacities," coauthored by Ben Bronner. I am currently writing a paper on visual indeterminacy and ambiguity and another paper on Aristotle's theory of color for a conference in Sweden. This past year I had two articles appear in the journal *Philosophical Studies* and another in the journal *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research*. I am looking forward to returning to teaching in the fall.

Tim Hall: I have done more work this last year on the ethics of personal self-defense, in particular as the question relates to gun control policies. Last fall I gave a talk at Utica College on this topic. Continuing along the line of an earlier paper of mine, I argued that a right of self-defense entails a right of individuals to own and use guns. Utica College is near a Remington gun factory, and so the audience members included not just the college community but

Remington employees. Much interesting discussion was had both about the soundness of the argument and about the limits of what the argument might establish. The discussion was spirited at times but always reasonable. I am now working on another paper on self-defense, guns, and crimes for a special edition of a journal on this topic, as well.

This year, I taught my 226 Social, Legal, and Political Philosophy course in the fall, along with a section of 121, Philosophy and Morality. I spent more time in 226 on Hobbes, Locke, and then Robert Nozick than I have done in previous years. In the spring, I taught a section of Environmental Ethics and a section of Topics in Applied Ethics. The year was a good reminder to me of the keen interest of Oberlin students in ethics and political matters.

I was acting chair of the department this spring, and we had an especially busy semester. We hired two philosophers who will join us this fall in one-year appointments: Owen King from the graduate program at Ohio State University and Jonathan Shaheen from the University of Michigan. I much appreciated the work of all of my colleagues throughout the semester in these and other matters.

Madeline, who, as many readers will recall, is my African Grey Parrot housemate,

enjoyed meeting another group of Oberlin students throughout the year. Maddie kept most of her thoughts on my research to herself this year, but she appeared happy with the direction of my courses during her occasional visits.

I look forward to hearing news from our alumni this summer. I'd be very glad to hear from any of you, and I hope you all feel free to keep in touch with the department. Best wishes in the coming year.

Peter McInerney: I taught a full range of courses in 2013-14, including Existentialism and a Seminar on the Cognitive Science of Rationality and Morality. My research concerns the interaction of scientific claims (from psychology, behavioral economics, and neuroscience) about the workings of human psychological systems with philosophical and commonsense conceptions of these matters in ethics, practical reasoning, and philosophy of mind. I am particularly interested in the extent to which people can exercise conscious control over what happens in their own minds. I have written several articles concerning various ways in which reflective activity can affect automatic, non-reflective mental happenings. Since some of my courses

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SOME OF OUR GRADUATES' FUTURE PLANS

Daniel Baker: "I am moving back home to San Francisco and will hopefully be working for a non-profit, The Forgotten International. In general, I'm going to take some time off before I start thinking about potential graduate school plans."

Christopher Bromberg will take a gap year before pursuing a PhD in psychology with a specific interest in positive psychology. He will continue to conduct research with Oberlin psychology professors in the near future.

Chris Danis: "I'll be working in the accounting department of a concert booking agency called the Windish Agency in Chicago: <http://www.windishagency.com/>."

Brian Jortner: "Over the summer, I plan on tutoring middle school and high school students and will live at home in

Freeport, Maine. After the summer I plan on taking education courses in order to become a middle school or high school math teacher."

Ryan Kavanaugh will be in Aspen working with the Aspen Music Festival for the summer before moving to Nashville to find adventure.

Justin Murphy-Mancini will pursue doctoral studies in musical composition at the University of California, San Diego.

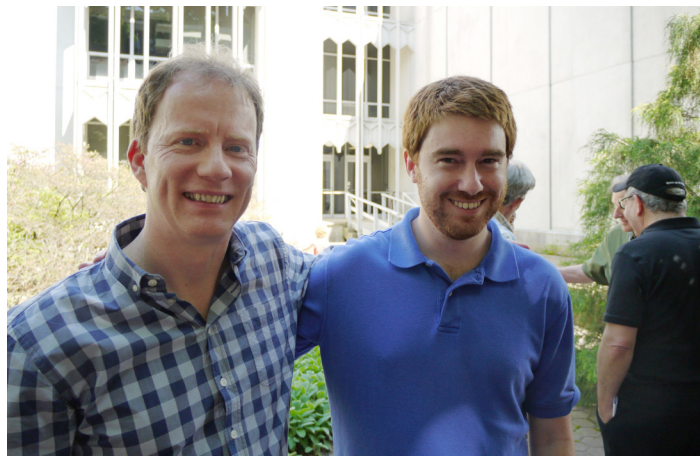
Abraham Rowe will work at a meditation center in Colorado for the known part of his future.

FACULTY NEWS, cont.

cover topics in these areas, there is a nice fit of research for publication purposes with research for teaching purposes.

My daughter was applying to colleges last year, so I learned quite a bit about the college application industry, which was quite interesting. For those who knew me in the earlier years, I no longer fly small planes or train in karate, but I still play basketball and tennis. My wife and daughter are doing well.

Kate Thomson-Jones: In the fall, I was on research leave, thanks to a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies. I was very busy working on my book about digital art and giving related talks—one as part of a panel on art and technology at the annual meeting of the British Society of Aesthetics and another on digital cinema at the annual meeting of the American Society of Aesthetics. I also published an encyclopedia entry and a book chapter on digital cinema and accepted an invitation to edit *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Film* for Routledge. In the spring, it was back to teaching: my schedule included my usual introductory course, *The Nature of Value*, which I always love to teach, and a new seminar, *Realism and Representation in the Arts*, developed in collaboration with the excellent staff of the Allen Memorial Art Museum. Now that the semester is over, I am back to working on my book and several related side projects. When not thinking about digital art, I spend my time cooking



Martin and Chip Williams at the Commencement/Reunion Weekend open house

vegan meals, bouncing with my daughter Orla on her trampoline, and meditating—sometimes with Martin.

Martin Thomson-Jones: This year I taught *Metaphysics*, *Deductive Logic*, and a seminar entitled *Causation*. All this year's conferencing was crammed into the last four weeks of the spring semester, which made for an exhausting but exhilarating end to the year. First came a trip to San Diego for the Pacific Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association. Then, two weeks later, a good year-and-a-half of planning and organising came to a head with the 41st Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy, which Kate and I co-organised; everyone seemed to think it was a success, which was extremely satisfying. Finally, a week later, I presented a paper entitled "Realism about Missing Systems"

at a conference called *Models and Simulations 6*, for which I'd served on the program committee. (In a bit of poor planning, I missed *Models and Simulations 5* last year, which was in Helsinki, and waited for this year, when it was in South Bend, Indiana.) One of this year's pieces

of good news was that a longer version of that paper will be appearing in a volume entitled *The Scientific Imagination*, now under contract with Oxford University Press. Another was that Robert (Chip) Williams, an honours student of mine who graduated in 2013, will be joining the excellent master's program in philosophy at Tufts next year. Chip, whose main interest is in the philosophy of biology, was also offered places in the PhD programs of UC Irvine's Logic and Methodology of Science Department and the University of Pittsburgh's History and Philosophy of Science Department, two of the top programs in philosophy of science in the world; I'm very proud of him.

Read about more faculty research at new.oberlin.edu/philosophy.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR DONORS

Mr. Joseph Bonomo '95 & Ms. Ellyn Stewart '98

Mr. Henry Frankel '66

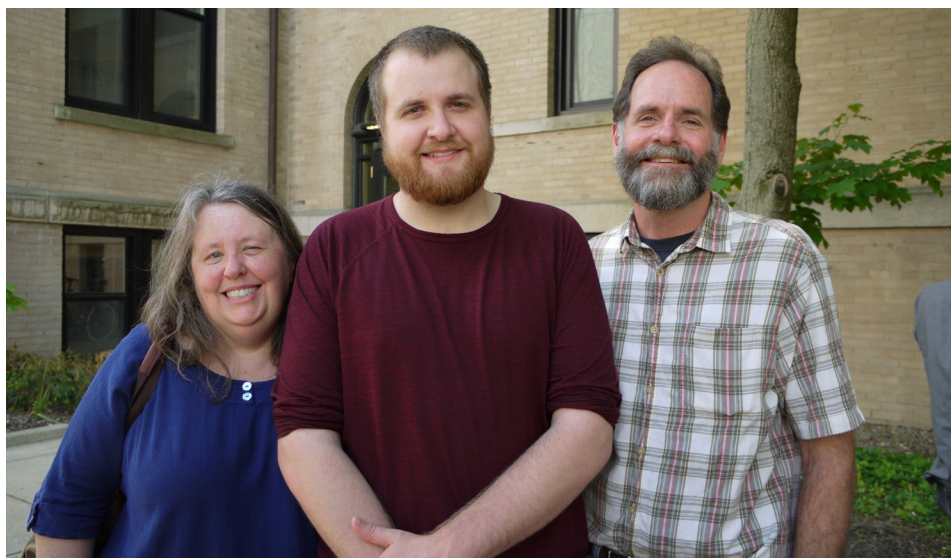
Dr. Robert & Mrs. Eileen Kleps, parents of Christopher Kleps '04

And **Dr. Susan Koethe**, who writes: "My son, John, graduated from Oberlin with a degree in philosophy in 1998. He picked up his pre-med courses at Scripps in California and went on to Yale Medical School. He has developed a career in academic medicine and is on the faculty at Vanderbilt Medical School. I strongly support philosophy as a major in college because I think it prepares graduates for so many opportunities. We can teach students all the biochemistry they need to practice medicine. So much of medicine is deductive reasoning, which is hard to teach, and which is why I like students who have majored in philosophy. Further, majoring in philosophy results in an educated person. Unfortunately, we have too few in society today."

COMMENCEMENT/REUNION WEEKEND 2014
PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT OPEN HOUSE



←
*Brendan Morris '08
in conversation with
faculty member Martin
Thomson-Jones*



→
*Graduating senior
Abraham Rowe (center)
with his parents*



←
*Isaac Malitz '70 (left) with
emeritus faculty member
Al MacKay*

ALUMNI NEWS, cont.

Steve Braude '67 has a new book due out this summer: *Crimes of Reason* (Rowman & Littlefield): <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442235762>. Steve is emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

Chris Brown '67 gives us a brief resume of his life and Oberlin influences: "I chose philosophy for its minimal credit-hour requirements and added art appreciation, coeducational ice dancing, physics, economics, math, history, and religion. Mr. Bogen's *Tractatus* seminar and the *Principia* seminar were influential. Mr. Merrill was kind enough to supervise (as philosophy) at least one semester's independent reading of Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*. That and a job in Oberlin College's first computer center (IBM's 1620—look it up) led to my interest in computational linguistics, to automated natural language understanding, and to artificial intelligence in general. Two summers spent on Cape Cod at Oberlin Gilbert and Sullivan Players and its successor, the CLOC, seriously changed my life. I did PhD work at Chicago (in a new so-called committee, not a department), a post-doc at the University of Edinburgh, then worked at the best AI lab outside of the U.S. (post Viet Nam; I had to get out of the country).

Since 1974, I've been at the University of Rochester's computer science department, where my self-indulgent (way pre-Facebook) webpage

tells more than you want to know. I did the whole teaching, research, book-writing, grant-getting, chairman, PhD advising thing (details on request). My main interests were computer vision and robotics (easy for animals but hard for machines). I'm now in phased retirement, one more year of 1/2 time involvement. <http://www.cs.rochester.edu/u/brown/>

I married Suzanne Bell a long time back. She spent a couple of years at Oberlin, maybe 10 to 12 years after me (art history), then finished her BA at SUNYAB and a few years later got her MLS. She's a reference and business-school librarian here at UR and is working on the fourth edition of her book this summer. We lead a pretty small life, but have enjoyed hiking the Alps, eco-touring Costa Rica, and Rochester's hugely vibrant amateur theatrical and musical scene. Since 1954 I've done trombone, 5-string banjo, musical theatre, and recently classical guitar."

Kevin Gilfether '13 is wrapping up his MA in elementary teaching at Tufts University. Starting in August, he will take on the job of business coordinator for the Oberlin Student Cooperative Association (OSCA). He looks forward to working in the Oberlin City Schools and attending the philosophy department speaker series. When Kevin is not in an elementary school or working on double-entry bookkeeping, he enjoys playing Dungeons and Dragons, kissing

deadly scorpions, and spray-painting "Iron Maiden" on Prof. Hall's car.

Matt Carlson '04 writes: "The past academic year was very momentous for me. I earned a PhD in philosophy at Indiana University in August 2013 and immediately afterward took

up a position as a visiting lecturer in the philosophy department at the University of New Mexico. That appointment has now ended, but I am delighted to report that I will be starting as an assistant professor, tenure-track, at Wabash College in the fall of 2014. I am very much looking forward to returning to the liberal arts environment that I found so invigorating as a student!"

Katharine Cook '59 writes: "I remain greatly interested in native perennial grasses that draw down CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it as usable carbon in the soil—see www.marincarbonproject.org. Also native and non-native dye plants for the wool industry, native and honeybee forage, perennial wildflowers of the coastal prairie. My interest in philosophy was about wanting to understand linguistics and language, and this project is about the language of ecological function, economy, and environment. More about me at www.cuke.com; put "cook" in the search engine. I practice citizen journalism, writing for the Pulitzer prize-winning *Pt. Reyes Light* on environment, ecology, and economy."



Jonathan Dinman '80

Jonathan Dinman '80 will become chair of the Department of Cell Biology and Molecular Genetics at the University of Maryland. Jon's research involves

understanding how alternative reading of the genetic code is used by cells and viruses to regulate gene expression. He recently returned from a yearly two-week stint teaching at the University of Tübingen, Germany, and presented his research in Killarney, Ireland, at the Translational Recoding meeting. A recent paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA solved "Damashek's Riddle," a long-standing question in hematology regarding how diseases that start out as hypoproliferative (anemias) later become



Chris Brown '67

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ALUMNI NEWS, cont.

hyper-proliferative (cancers). An upcoming paper in *Nature* identifies the first human recoding signal, located in a gene that is critical for establishing HIV infection.

James Harold '93 was recently promoted to full professor at Mount Holyoke College and elected as a trustee of the American Society for Aesthetics. In February, he was a visiting scholar at City University of Hong Kong—the whole family went and had a wonderful time. His recent research focuses on aesthetics and ethics in Classical Chinese and ancient Greek thought, and on the ethical dangers of the arts.

Justin Hughes '82 completed a second multilateral intellectual property treaty in 2013; he was the chief U.S. negotiator for the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Printed Works for the Visually Impaired. The treaty mandates that countries have exceptions in their copyright law for the blind and establishes a framework for the international sharing of special format copies (such as braille, digital braille, and navigable audiobooks). Finishing his stint in the Obama Administration, Justin moved back to California and joined the Loyola Law School faculty as the William H. Hannon Professor of Law.

Lynn McDonald '66 writes: “My major in philosophy at Oberlin was never useful

to me directly. Instead, it led me to think critically about institutions and authority and life and helped me to examine the meaning of life. In 1970, I graduated with a master's degree in social work and a commitment to make the world a better place: I wanted to reduce impacts of income disparity, racism, and social exclusion with my new community organizing, group work and child mental health skills. In 1976, I completed my PhD from an avant-garde, interdisciplinary education at UC Irvine's School of Social Sciences. Then as a social work academic, I successfully applied and tested applications of social science theories to address urgent social problems. In 2010, the complex social intervention I developed and tested, which is a coproduced parent and professional multifamily group strategy for kindergartners, was recognized by the United Nations as the number 11 family skills program in the world. FAST (Families and Schools Together), has a track record for engaging low-income, disadvantaged parents, using a Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of the Oppressed) approach. FAST now builds local social capital within and across families with young children and reduces education disparities in 20 countries. See www.familiesandschoolstogether.com. In 2013, the U.S. Department of Education awarded UW-Madison (WCER) an i3,

\$15-million, five-year grant to rigorously study FAST in 60 inner city failing elementary schools in Philadelphia, as a promising idea. In the UK, Save the ChildrenUK has raised \$20 million to bring FAST to many thousands of children living in poverty. I now spend half of the year in London as professor of social work at Middlesex University, and half based in Madison, Wis., writing and being with three grandchildren and friends.”



Isaac Malitz '70

Isaac Malitz '70 describes his philosophical life since Oberlin: “1976: PhD Philosophy/ Logic (UCLA). Dissertation was an expansion of my Oberlin senior

thesis on set theory paradoxes. Dissertation was approved, but without much faculty enthusiasm. My opinion: The work was not well-understood, probably ahead of its time.

1976: I decided to go into computers, planning to revisit the above in about 20 years.

1990s: Logicians began to write about the work. I'm now considered one of the top two pioneers in non-standard set theory (the other is Quine, Obie '30). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positive_set_theory. I have been understood.

2014: After long development, am about to publish a paper on the philosophical aspects of the above; I hope it will be viewed as a definitive resolution of the main set theory paradoxes. (Will this be understood?) It's been a 'non-academic' career, but serious and fulfilling. And a good fit for my temperament.”

George Rainbolt '84 is (still) a professor and chair of the department of philosophy at Georgia State University. What was supposed to be a three-year term as chair is now in year 14! He has two sons, Corbin, 16, and Joseph, 9. He writes: “Corbin is into Minecraft and Joseph is into baseball. Both of them think that philosophy is weird. Of course, philosophy is weird, but in a wonderful way.”



James Harold '93 with his son, Toby, at the “Big Buddha” in Hong Kong, February 2014

OBERLIN PHILOSOPHY

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Kate Thomson-Jones

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