Philosophers on Holiday

Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday.--LW

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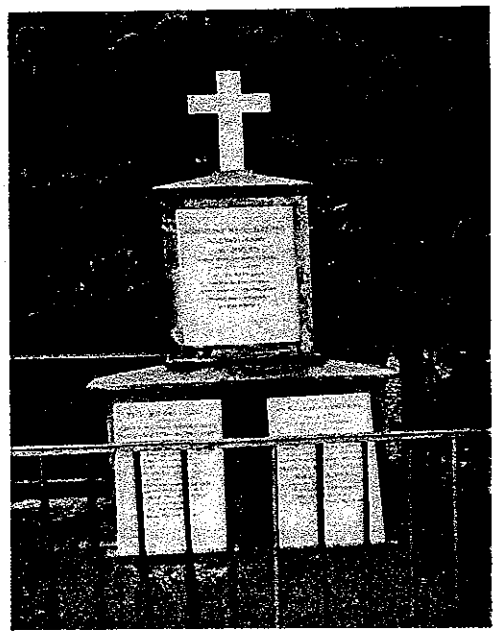
ha ha ha ha

KIERKEGAARD IN ASSISTENS KIRKEGARD



Peg writes: When on holiday, I enjoy finding the places where my favorite philosophers were born, lived, worked, and died. As readers of this august publication know, we have visited Ireland in search of Wittgenstein's retreat (Vol II, no.1) and Vermont and Nova Scotia in search of John Dewey (Vol I, no. 2 and V, no.1 and 2). So, when the opportunity arose for a trip to Denmark with my parents, my agenda was set: we would be on the trail of Soren Kierkegaard and Hans Christian Andersen. My parents jumped at the chance to be investigative reporters.

Soren Kierkegaard, in life and in death, was not a hard man to find. He was born on May 5, 1813 and died forty-two years later on November 11. During his life, Kierkegaard could most often be found writing, which for him was a standing activity. This must have worked; his authorship, by any standard, is immense. One of the many interesting things about Kierkegaard's work is his use of pseudonyms. His most famous works were published under names that were always revealing: as Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, as Constantin Constantius in *Repetition*, and as Johannes Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *Philosophical Fragments* (which was "edited by S. Kierkegaard"). Perhaps just as interesting is that Soren Kierkegaard wrote letters and reviews about these works without acknowledging their ownership. Tempting, no?

He is buried in the Assistens Kirkegard, which is located in the heart of Copenhagen in the area known as Norrebro. He is in good company; Hans Christian Andersen and Niels Bohr are buried there too. The cemetery, because of its beauty and location, also serves as a park. It is not uncommon to encounter the responsible dog owner with her pet or the sunbather at her favorite gravesite. The cemetery provides a map, and we were able to

See Kierkegaard, p.3

From the Editors*

Greetings from Cascade Lodge, in Cascade State Park on the north shore of Lake Superior! In order to get this issue out, we adopted the new approach of being on holiday, when writing *On Holiday*. Nothing gets the creative juices flowing like excellent hikes and an invigorating paddle in a kayak. Many people have heard about the incredible mosquitoes in Minnesota, and we are happy to report that neither of us was carried off, even when hiking in the woods. It may be a bit too chilly for them right now; last night was a two-blanket night. Regardless of the reason for their small numbers, we are thrilled.

For those of you who know Peg, you probably know that she always flips through *The National Enquirer* while in the checkout lane in the grocery store, even if it means she is a little slow getting her purchases on the belt. (Qualification: we do most of our grocery shopping in our co-op that certainly does not carry publications of that sort.) Well, this issue includes some gossip of a 19th century Danish variety: the story of an encounter between two of the literary giants of all time—Hans Christian Andersen and Soren Kierkegaard. How well did these two know each other? How did they each regard the other's work? Find all the exciting answers inside these pages.

So many fine foods necessitated an extra-large section of Pantheon Gastronomique. If you ever find yourself climbing Mt. Blanc in France, Timothy Boggs has just the dining recommendation for you. For people preferring lower altitude dining, we've got something for you as well.

Lisa is on a new campaign to raise the profile of philosophy by creating Philosopher Laureates. Becoming one is not contingent upon being a member of the American Philosophical Association.

* **A Philosophers on Holiday dental care kit** is yours, if you can name the television show on which this typeface was used. Hint: think late 1960's/early 1970's.

Philosophers on Holiday: A quarterly 'zine

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Find us on the web at http://www.gustavus.edu/~poconnor (Email to poconnor@gac.edu or heldke@gac.edu)

We borrow our motto from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein suggests that philosophical problems emerge when we forget how words function in ordinary circumstances. When language "goes on holiday," we *create* our own thorny, knotty problems—and then we proceed to chew on them for a thousand years or so.

Our 'zine was born out of our recognition that when philosophers *go* on holiday, we also tend to thrum up thorny little problems that keep us worrying all the way across Montana. Philosophers, unleashed in the ordinary world, are *dangerous*—or, at the very least, highly amusing. Of course on a good day, we can also be rather insightful. (Paying way too much attention to the ordinary *can* produce real wisdom every once in awhile.) *Philosophers On Holiday* attempts to bring all things philosophical and holiday-related together in one place; the danger, the amusement, the bumbling, and, yes, the occasional pearl of wisdom.

Princess and Pea v. Knight of Faith

Peg writes: Most people like to know whether famous people living in the same place and roughly at the same time knew and liked each other. I certainly wanted to know that about Soren Kierkegaard and Hans Christian Andersen when I set off for Denmark in June. Andersen was older than Kierkegaard, having been born in Odense in 1805. He died in 1875 in Copenhagen, where he had spent the vast majority of his life. Andersen was incredibly prolific; in addition to 175 fairy tales, he wrote 14 novels and short stories, 50 dramatic works and about 800 poems. His creative endeavors were not limited to words; he had quite talent for drawing and paper-cuts. One of his first jobs was as a puppeteer, but I digress.

Kierkegaard and Andersen, Round One

In 1838, an article appeared by S. Kjerkegaard titled, "From the Papers of One Still Living Published Against His Will." This was a review of Hans Christian Andersen's "Only a Fiddler." While Kierkegaard did not regard this as part of his main body of work, it contains themes that recur throughout much of that work. In the piece, Kierkegaard levels the criticism that Andersen lacks a life-view, which is "the transubstantiation of experience; it is an unshakable certainty in oneself won from all experience, whether this has oriented itself only in all worldly relationships (a purely human standpoint, Stoicism, for example) by which means it keeps itself from contacts with a deeper experience—or whether in its heavenward direction (the religious) it has found therein the center as much for its heavenly as its earthly existence..."[1] Individuals must not passively experience life, but rather they must transform it. Kierkegaard's complaint is that a novelist must have a life-view; it is the sine qua non of authentic writing. The life-view is what gives a novel its center of gravity. Kierkegaard admits that he encounters situations and experiences in Andersen's writing that are poetic and beautiful, but the absence of a life-view means that these situations are left undigested, unused and unfiltered (18).

Kierkegaard is quite clear in his essay that he is not arguing for the content of a life-view, or that one view is valid and another not. Rather, he is arguing that everyone, especially a novelist, must have one. Furthermore, he wants to dispute the validity of claiming that not having a life-view is having a life-view of sorts. Perhaps more than anything, Kierkegaard wants to combat a certain kind of passivity towards experience that is both cause and consequence of a lack of a life-view. What Kierkegaard seems to find most upsetting is that Andersen regards passivity as belonging to genius. Kierkegaard quotes from Andersen "Genius is an egg that needs warmth for fertilization of good fortune; otherwise it becomes a wind-egg" and "He had intimations of the pearl in his soul, the glorious pearl of art; he did not know that like the pearl in the sea it must await the diver who brings it up to the light or cling fast to the mussels and oysters, the high fellowship of patrons, in order to come to view in this way (16). But if anyone should be active with respect to experience and (as Kierkegaard says) its transubstantiation, it is those who possess genius. Genius isn't so much an innate property of the individual as an involvement with the world of experience through critical reflection and self-awareness.

See K and A, p.7

Kierkegaard, continued

locate Kierkegaard's grave with very little ado. He is buried in the family plot. The inscription below the dates of his birth and death is vintage Kierkegaard. It reads "It's just a short time, then I have won. Then the whole strife is completely gone. Then I can rest in halls of roses and incessantly talk with my Jesus."

Talking and writing were connected for Kierkegaard. He wrote many of his works with the hope that they would be read aloud. It is easy to imagine Kierkegaard standing at his lectern, reading aloud what he had just written, polishing it so that it was pleasing to the ear. I also recall that Kierkegaard was extremely suspicious about professors teaching his work, and was worried that his work would be over-academized and worst of all, systematized. Alas, after his death, his readership was fairly limited, perhaps as a consequence on his having written in Danish. However, clearly Heidegger and Sartre read Kierkegaard, who now most often gets described as the Father of Existentialism. How accurate this title is, I leave to Kierkegaard scholars. How easy or uneasy SK would be with that appellation, I can only imagine his suspicion.

I read Kierkegaard voraciously for years, and then abruptly quit. The only time I opened his work in the last twelve years was to attempt to teach *Fear and Trembling* in an introductory philosophy course. What a mistake and betrayal on my part. But now I think it is time for those books to come back off the shelf, and play the role of interlocutor as SK imagined they would.

PHILOSOPHER LAUREATE:

An Idea Whose Time Has Come

Lisa writes: A few months ago, I heard a story on "All Things Considered" detailing the rise in the number of poets laureate in the United States. Reporter Andy Bauers took his listeners on a short cross-country poetry reading, interviewing poets from California to Florida and recording them reading their work. It turns out that, while the country isn't exactly going crazy for poetry, it's at least moved off the "downright hostile" mark, and in the giddy aftermath, cities, towns, even counties, are appointing locals to be their official city/town/county poets. Sometimes poets are chosen by panels of other poets; sometimes they're chosen by the city or town councils. Some poets serve for terms of fixed length; others serve indefinitely. Virtually none of them is paid for their work (surprise), which ranges from organizing poetry slams in local schools, to writing poems commemorating local people (fallen police officers), events (the opening of a new high school), places (a now-defunct neighborhood in Tampa), and, uh, circumstances (rolling blackouts in California).[1]

I found myself remarkably engaged by the story, and particularly compelled by the argument of one poet, who said he believes the rising interest in poetry is in part our attempt to take back the language that has been stolen from us by the media and by the political process. (I know just what he means. I long ago held my own funeral for the word "fresh", a word that canned food manufacturers use, with perfectly straight faces, to describe the vegetables they entomb. Don't get me wrong; I have nothing against canned vegetables. I have a LOT against using the word "fresh" to describe them.) I found myself, well I'll admit it, charmed by the idea of a town commissioning its local pen to write a poem—a *poem,* for heaven's sake—to commemorate the opening of a new high school.

Just think of it: instead of (okay, maybe in addition to) a strobe light display, free Diet Coke and Doritos, and large speakers blaring top-40s music, you have one person (in this case, a man) standing in front of a microphone, reading a very small, very *carefully chosen* set of words. That's it. What a powerful antidote to about 80 or 90 things about our consumer-driven culture that drive me nuts. What an acknowledgement of the power of poetry as a form of human engagement with the world.[2] And what a great way for people to be able to approach poetry; to hear it read by someone who lives down the street or across town from them, and *who wrote it themselves!*[3]

And then it dawned on me; why not a *philosopher* laureate?

When I first had this thought, I was kidding. I spun out for myself a humorous little *Phil on Hol* article, in which I imagined the fierce run-off election that would be held at our house to determine the official philosopher laureate of 1002 Riverview Hills South. (Since it would end in a tie, we'd have to divide the house; one of us would get the ground floor and the other would get the second floor and the basement.) I drew up a list of events (ha ha) for which the town or city or county would call upon its philosopher laureate: unexplained suspension of the law of cause and effect; a missing shade of blue; discovery that a lot of its citizens were in fact chained inside of a cave lit only by a fire; cat gone from mat. I came up with witty observations about the towns that would have to have more than one philosopher laureate, in order to accommodate the mixed metaphysical and epistemological commitments of its residents ("oh you know Boston; with all those old transcendentalists still living there, there'd be no *way* for a hard-boiled empiricist to ever be chosen—that's why they had to divide the city in half.")

Then I stopped laughing. Sort of. Okay, I didn't then go down to the St. Peter City Hall and present a petition to the city council to make St. Peter the first town with its own philosopher laureate.[4] But I did start thinking about how exciting it would be if people in a community sometimes turned to a philosopher or philosophers to help them think about something—an event, an issue, maybe even a concept. And then I started thinking about how very, *very* exciting it would be if those philosophers actually had something to say, and knew how to say it, and took the time to do it.[5]

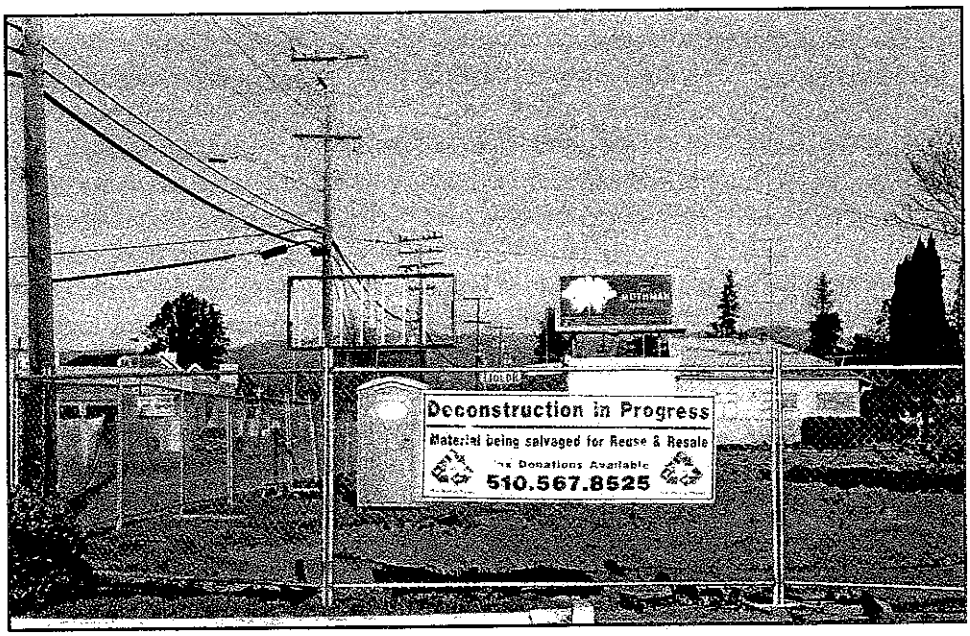
I began trying to think about what a philosopher laureate (or even a philosopher without any leaves on their head) might do in their town or their county if they had the ear of some of its citizenry—if someone actually asked us what we thought about something.[6] It was remarkably—embarrassingly—hard, especially for a someone who alleges to be a philosopher of everyday life and who claims to believe that philosophy ought to be speaking to actual people's actual experiences in the world.[7]

After much wringing of hands, and much bouncing of this idea off of other philosophers of a sympathetic sort, I came up with the following list. It's short. I think we can

See Laureate, p.10

Warning! Deconstruction Zone

Dan C. Williamson of San Jose writes: The old nostrums say that walking is good for the soul especially if one wants to really take in the breadth of an area. Many American sages have said the same such as Whitman, Thoreau and the culmulative tribal wisdom of Native Americans. As I have learned, there is always a practical side to any such advice. Take me as an example. Necessity is some kind of creator for invention. Since I have been without a car for several years I rely on all forms of public transportation and, of course, my feet. And just recently, I became another individual who has lost a home (of well over 5 years) in San Francisco to astronomical real estate prices that would tempt even the sweetest of landladies and lords, whom I had. So, down to San Jose I go where I have been teaching for the past several years at the State University and, yah, more walking.



San Jose is kind of like Atlanta, spread out all over the place. One day I had set out on what was to be a hour walk, max. It turned into a three hour wander through multiple suburban and urban vistas. Towards the end of it things were getting desperate. I was hoping for a sighting of the local light rail line when I came across this gem. Little did I realize that my own conditions, nostrums and all, would lead me to the *omphalos* of Western Civilization itself and in the center of one of the gray siblings of San Francisco no less.[1]

Two days later I returned in haste, in a fit of repetition, to repeat the moment with a camera. In the *interludium*[2] I was afraid that the "Deconstruction in Progress" sign along with the site would have disappeared, returning to some kind of neutral lot-without-a-house state of being, something you don't see too much of in urban-suburban Kaliforniae. But no, it remained.

Repetition, as Kierkegaard would remind us, never can be the *same*. That was true the day of my re-visit, to re-member, to re-collect. The site had been deserted when I first walked past it, staring in philosophic wonder. But this day workers were there clearing what appeared to be the last of the debris, the veritable foundations—*das Grund*—of whatever dwelling had *been there*. I attempted to engage the workers in conversation about the site. They were of an ordinary sort, pleasant looking men going about their day in a quiet way. The tractor driver was, I think, one of the guitarists from ZZ Top. Not my type, nevertheless he was kind of cute. And I also thought to myself, "Aha, at last. I have found the beknighted and equally elusive individuals of my youthful radicalism, the working-class intelligensia." But they shyly skittered away from me. Perhaps it was the camera. It was more probable that they had already identified me as an, gasp, ***academic***. They had no need for such triflings. There are those who merely talk and then there are those who just do; imagine that, postmodern existentialists!

Too bad, I was going to ask them where the remainder—the excess—went, what it had been and for whom. The only hint, outside of few nondescript and folorn chairs pushed to the side of the fence, was the remainder of a sign standing at the front of the site next to the road. Just the bare structure gave a testimony. A silverish pole supported a square frame of metal, also silverish, crossed vertically with metal tubing outlining a

See Deconstruction, p.6

SOH: Secretary on Holiday

Carol Lawrence of Le Sueur (yes, that *Le Sueur), Minnesota, and secretary extraordinaire at Gustavus, writes:* After weeks of working for the faculty in several departments (not to mention one philosopher), I decided I needed a getaway during Spring Break. Cancun? Florida? Mexico? Only inmy dreams! Instead, I headed to Webster City Iowa. It is a small town about 150 miles south of the Mankato area. We (my husband and I) picked that city because of a golf course advertised in the newspaper, and of coruse, since we were heading south, the weather would be perfect for golfing--in March--who am I trying to kid?

On our way down to Iowa, the clouds rolled in, the wind picked up, and the weatherman predicted snow showers and windchills. How could this be??? It's spring!!!!

Friday night we ate at the Second Street Emporium in downtown Webster City. It turned out to be the highlight of our trip. The atmosphere was delightful--rustic beams oozing with history and black-and-white pictures hanging on the wall boasting of the past. The hostess was also the proprietor and she was a delight. She was in business with her husband for the past twenty years, and you could tell she was very proud of their popular little eatery. The people and atmosphere can sure make or break an eating experience.

The rest of the trip was snow and rain. What a bummer--but the memories of the Second Street Emporium will linger for a long time. Do stop for lunch or dinner if you are ever in the area. It is even worth driving out of your way!

Deconstruction, continued

structural support where one hangs those advertising placards. These placards usually are hung underneath the logo for the building. Both are illuminated at night by lights placed in the structure. I got the impression that this structure was once a school marquee. The rest of the site consisted of a few trees interspersed with *das Grund*: concrete slabs, both uprooted and many in their original staid geometric configuration. The slabs of concrete stood out in some kind of bizarre relief against the still-living trees in the sun-blazing clarity of that day. As for the remaining concrete foundations awaiting the final clearance; well, if there is nothing there to support anymore why bother with that?

I was left to the breeze that clear day, the sun, my snapping shutter-bug frenzy, the carefully mounded concrete and dirt; carefully, I might add, avoiding the trees. There were guard-dogs too. I usually have a really good rapport with four-legged sweeties, at least the dog and cat variety. But since I didn't stray past the fence into their territory, they paid no heed and continued rummaging in the dirt for new scents, for their stories, for other reminders and testimonies to the unsaid, that was yet in some odd fragmentary sense still present in what was barely there.

Indeed, I shall have to return to this area, this *omphalos*, for more inspiration. The area is a living metaphor that reflects and echoes. More, later, from your intrepid sojourner, a stranger in a strange land.

[1] Will you, dear reader, forgive me for invoking this slightly suggestive historical phallogocentrism? But it was the rock at Delphi christened (there I go again) as the navel of the world.

[2] "From Latin, *inter-+ludus*, play." (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam Webster, Springfield, MA, 1986.) Don't you just love it? From between comes the play. Maybe we should deconstruct Derrida.

Phil on Hol Copy Deadline

Do you want to write for us? Well, we want you to, too! So clip 'n save this handy chart, showing the deadlines for submission for all four issues of Volume VI. (Aren't we organized?)

Vol.VI, no.1: September 8

Vol.VI, no.2: November 23

Vol.VI, no.3: March 16

Vol.VI, no.4: June 16

K and A, continued

Kierkegaard and Andersen, Round Two

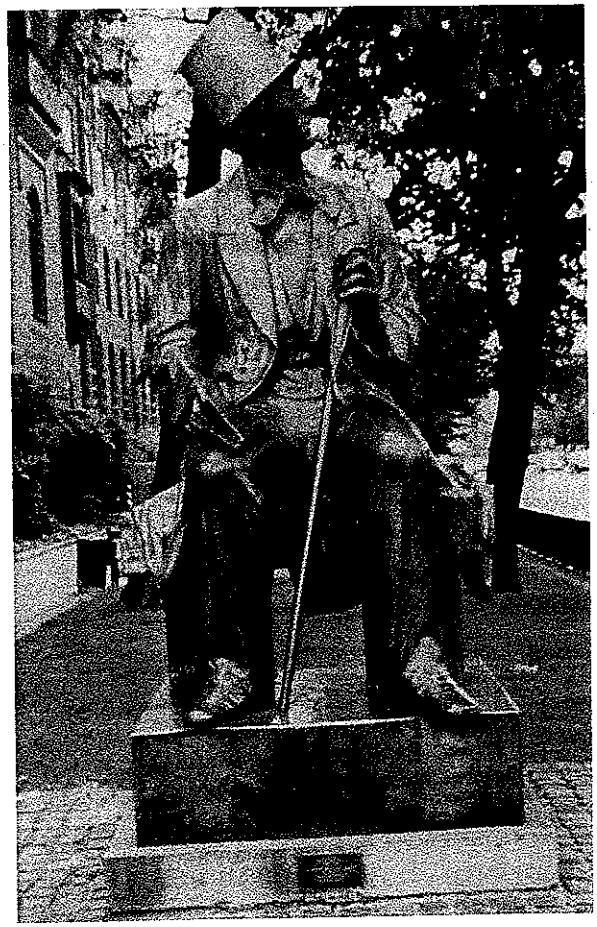
Andersen, in his autobiography, *The Fairy Tale of My Life*, wrote that he and Kierkegaard were probably the only two people who had read "From the Papers of One Still Living." In his fairy tale, "Galoshes of Fortune," Andersen caricatures Kierkegaard as a parrot. In this story there are two fairies sitting in a cloakroom in a wealthy home. The younger one is not Fortune herself but "lady's-maid to one of her ladies of the Bedchamber who carry round her smaller gifts." The elderly one is Sorrow, "who does all the errands herself, in her own person, to make sure they are carried out properly." The younger fairy had in her possession a pair of golden galoshes that transport the person wearing them to the place or time where he would most like to be. Every wish as to time and place will be immediately granted. Sorrow claimed that the wearer of the galoshes would be most miserable, while Fortune's lady-maid claimed the person would be most happy. To settle the dispute, they decided to leave the galoshes by the door and observe what happens. Various people put on the galoshes, and find themselves exactly where they said they always wanted to be, but were miserable.

The parrot (that is, Kierkegaard) appears in section five, "The Transformation of the Copying Clerk." Here, an industrious copy clerk puts on the galoshes, thinking that they are his. As he is taking a stroll, he encounters a poet who is off again on another trip. Wishing that he himself could be poet, full of wonderful and beautiful thoughts and possessing a high degree of freedom, he becomes more poetic, and begins to notice things in ways that are new to him. Checking in his pockets, he finds not the documents that he was to copy, but rather his own creative work. Just for verisimilitude, he finds a rejection letter from the director of a theater. As he walks along, the clerk sees birds. Mournful of his rejection, he wishes that he were a bird instead. He becomes a bird who is captured and sold to a boy living in Copenhagen. The clerk, now a common lark, is put into a room with a canary and parrot. The parrot is capable of only one sentence in human speech, which was "Come, do let's be men!" The parrot, canary, and the former clerk/now lark can understand each other, and while the canary mourns her lost freedom, the parrot claims to be better off, living in a cage and being well fed. The parrot knows that he is well informed and witty, while the canary, he says has genius but is very unsteady. The clerk/lark listens to this, and when the canary tells him that his cage is open and he should fly away, he escapes back to his own lodging. There, unthinkingly, he says to himself, "Come, do let's be men," and he is transformed back to his former self.

A caricatured Kierkegaard also makes an appearance as a hairdresser in 1840 in *A Comedy in the Open Air: Vaudeville in One Act Based on the Old Comedy An Actor Against His Will*. The subtitle bears striking resemblance to Kierkegaard's own subtitle of "From the Papers of One Still Living Against His Will."

In 1848 and 1849, Kierkegaard and Andersen went on to exchange gifts of some of their published works along with friendly greetings. This was, as far as I know, the extent of their contact.

[1] *The Essential Kierkegaard*, edited by Howard and Edna Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p 13



PANTHEON GASTRONOMIQUE

DeForest Family Restaurant

Lisa writes: The DeForest Family Restaurant is located a despairing distance off Interstate 90/94 in DeForest, Wisconsin, a sort-of suburb of Madison. Just as you begin to think that federal law surely prohibits restaurants this far *off* the interstate from advertising themselves *on* the interstate--just when you've begun to convince yourself that the DeFFR must have closed last week too late for the highway department to have removed its icon from the "Restaurants This Exit"--just then it appears, an unasumming beacon on the righthand side of the road.

We entered the DeForest Family Restaurant desperate for breakfast, a meal Peg ordinarily eats *but immediately* upon rising in the morning. Having delayed the meal for an hour in order to get some driving done, we were reaching the critical stage.

The DeFFR is a local joint--no doubt about it--but unlike lots of local hangouts where you feel, oh, just a *teensy* bit like everyone else in the place wishes you would just get back in your car and go back to wherever you came from, it's the kind of hangout where the server acts like she's been waiting for someone just like you to come in the door, so she'd have someone new to serve, since all these locals always want the same thing to eat all the time.

We were the only people under sixty in the joint; maybe the only people under sixty-five. I have no idea why; it had to have something to do with the time of day. Surely it isn't only people over sixty-five who recognize virtuosity at the breakfast grill, is it? For that is what goes on in the kitchen at the DeForest Family Restaurant--virtuoso displays of flipping, hashing, basting and crisping.

We ordered from a triple-fold menu devoted to breakfast. (Truth be told, this made me just a touch nervous; I find that places that claim to be able to do that many things usually can't do any of them very well. This time I was wrong.) Peg ordered pancakes; I got a waffle, and we shared an order of hash browns. The fluffy pancakes were clearly made out of *ingredients*--you know, eggs, flour, leaveners--and not poured from some carton of frozen, ready-to-use glop. They tasted faintly of cast iron, a flavor that always carries me, Proust-like, back to my days as a 4-Her working the Junior Leader Pancake Supper at the American Legion Hall.

My waffle was exquisite. No, really; it was. Eggy, buttery and crisp. Not a pancake poured into a waffle iron; this was a waffle, made from waffle batter. (There's a difference, you know.)

A note about hash browns: whereas I make a pretty decent pancake, and an actually quite good waffle, I'm a lousy hash brown cook. Thus I'm always sympathetic to cooks who can't make them well--and I'm positively worshipful of the cook who can. And this cook could. She had started with actual potatoes--you remember those?--and had done something that involved onions and a hot griddle and just enough grease to leave you with a plateful of brown, crispy potatoes that tasted like potatoes.

The menu at the DeForest Family Restaurant says "We serve homemade food." They do. But more than that, they serve food from the home of someone who actually knows how to cook.

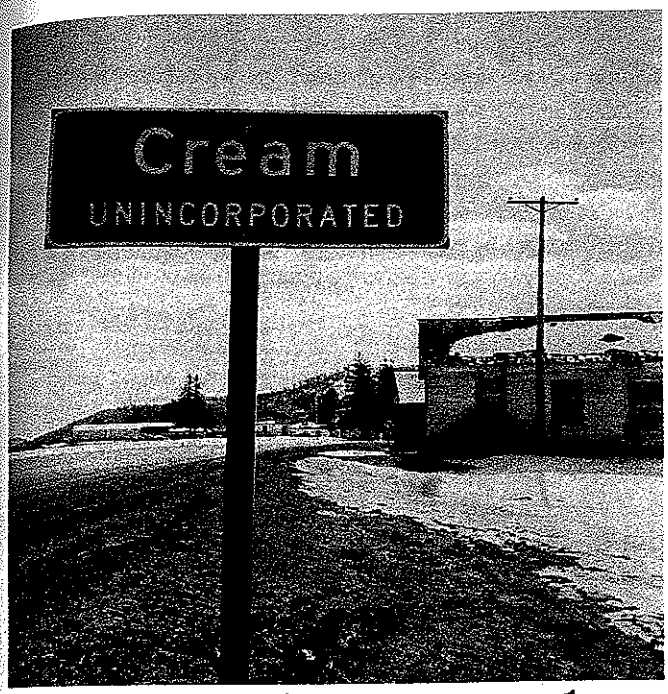
Sophie's Kitchen Redux

In our last issue, we reported on a place serving terrific pierogis that we'd stumbled upon somewhere in northern Indiana. Our web guy, Jay Benjamin, is not one to let a fact go unsearched-for, and he unearthed the following info about Sophie's:

Just for fun, I did a quick search for Sophie's Kitchen, and found this listing for the Portage area on an Indiana Dunes web site:

Sophie's Kitchen
5003 U.S. 6
Portage
219/764-3631
Home cookin, everything fresh
See http://www.casualcoast.com/visitordining.htm

Thanks, Jay, for that travellin' tip!

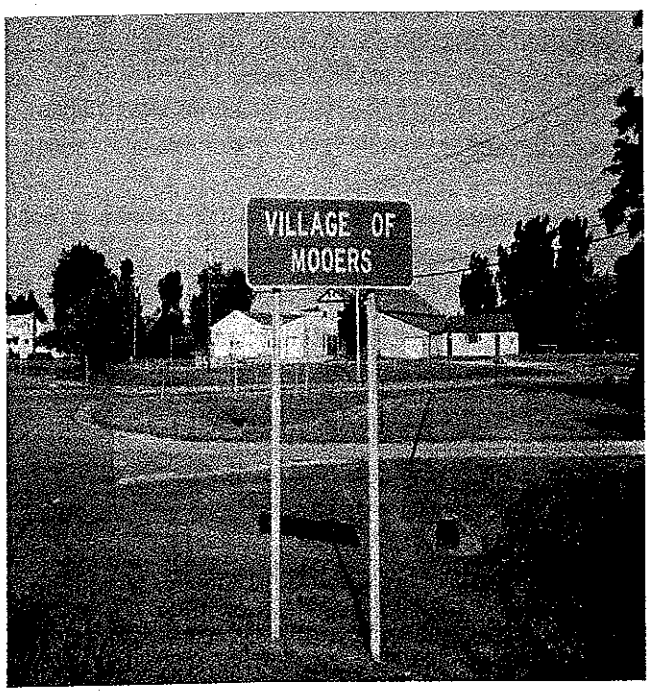


Cheese With an Altitude

Timothy Boggs now of Washington, D.C. (but born in Wisconsin--can you tell?) writes: The refuge at the Aiguille du Gouter is a sturdy wooden structure bolted fast to an icy ledge at 3819 meters on the face of Mt. Blanc in France. It is sided in wind-deflecting and light-reflecting silvery aluminum and on sunny days is a beacon for climbers and sightseers throughout the Haute Savoie. The well-worn refuge can sleep close to 100 in close quarters and is a welcome way station for those attempting to ascend Mt. Blanc's 4810-meter summit by the tough classic route. Reached only by an arduous climb up the lower mountain and the Arete de la Grand Couloir, a steep ridge of ancient rock, the refuge fills in late summer afternoons with the tired and happy and anxious voices of climbers from around the world. The collaborative tone of the multi-lingual chatter belies the simple climbing truth that this is a solitary sport. But, for the twelve hours that the refuge provides a climber with a community and a rest, it is an unusually wonderful place to be. The views to Italy and the distant placid blue lake at Geneva with its sparkling jet d'eau are a joy.

Tomme de Savoie is one of the seven or eight intense cheeses of the region. Reblochon and Emmental and Beaufort and the various chevres are more famous, but Tomme is thought of as the oldest and most versatile. A cow milk cheese in the Savoie, Tomme is frequently made with skim milk after the cream has been taken for butter. Tommes traditionally have only a 20-40% fat content. The large brown Tarine cows of the Haute Savoie with their noisy and humorous bells clanging away, graze on alpine meadows throughout the spring and summer, but are fed hay in barns in winter, and their milk and its cheeses reflect these diets. The summer Tommes, pressed, uncooked soft and fruity cheeses, taste of sweet grass. As the ten-inch cylinders of Tomme age, their rinds thicken and they pick up a rustic appearance with a gray or yellow or red rind. Often named after a village, Tommes can age for several months with intensifying results.

Given the strange hours climbers keep, the staff of the famous 200 square foot kitchen of the Refuge du Gouter serves an early (6 PM) dinner and an early (2 am) breakfast to their hungry guests. Dinner at tables and benches for ten begins with the distribution of sturdy, scratched glass bowls and beat up stainless spoons and knives. Followed quickly by a metal plate with ten equal slices of lovely Tomme, smelling like a far-away meadow. The knowing climbers pass the cheese to be de-rinded and deftly sliced into small cubes for lining the bowls. Next, a steaming porcelain bowl of vegetable broth and a ladle are brought to each table for communal serving. The melting Tomme mingles with the broth and the occasional carrot or legume and a great joyful meal is begun. The main course and the wine and the desert and the tea and the good cheer and my mediocre French are all memorable, but I choose to think of my time on Mt. Blanc as being fortified by the Savoie's oldest cheese.

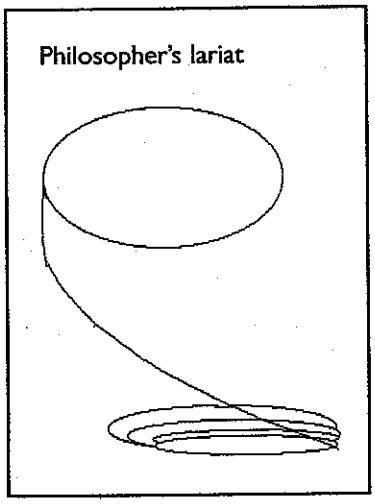


Laureate, continued

do better. In fact, so confident am I that we can do better, that I'm offering the coveted Philosophers on Holiday Travelling Dental Kare Kit to the first five philosophers (credentials immaterial) who send us an addition to this list. We'll post them in the next issue.

Events that might inspire a village/town/city/county to call upon its philosopher laureate, and/or what that PL might do:

(Notice that these aren't events that philosophers alone are equipped to address. For some of them, a poet laureate might be just as good a choice; for others, perhaps a plumber laureate would be more appropriate. I'm not out to make philosophers uniquely qualified for anything; after all, they wouldn't have had to have a poet at that high school opening either.)



1. A town annexes a new portion of land, and contemplates building a new subdivision.
2. The PL posts weekly reflection questions in the city/town/neighborhood newspaper, and reports on people's responses in a subsequent week.
3. The PL conducts an analytical survey to find out if most people in the town are Platonists or Aristotelians.
4. A city council/town board/county commission asks the PL to attend its meetings as an ex officio member, charged with asking clarifying questions when debate seems entangled.

Send your suggestions for Philosopher Laureate to:

Philosopher Laureate Job Desciption
c/o Philosophers on Holiday
P.O. Box 355
St. Peter, MN 56082
(or email to heldke@gac.edu)
Dental health awaits!

[1] I'm only guessing, but I would bet that since September 11 (this story aired on the 3rd of that month) the number of these poets laureate has increased, as have the demands on their services. I was surprised and moved to witness the way in which many people turned to poets, in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. People (like me) who normally feel very intimidated by poetry found ourselves listening to it, reading it, finding in it the depth of expression that we couldn't find in the endless news analysis with which we were surrounded.

[2] Okay, so maybe it's a little overblown to suggest that a poem about a new high school opening is an instance of "human engagement with the world." But you get my point—and you wouldn't be arguing with me right now about it, if I'd picked a poem about the death of a police officer or of a neighborhood.

[3] The first time I ever really listened to a poem—as opposed to fidgeting along with the meter—was when I heard my friend Clare read her poems. I was, by the way, Not Young when this event occurred. I'm a late and slow bloomer in the poetry-appreciation department. I like to believe I'll catch up; I have a lot of friends who are poets.

[4] They probably wouldn't have honored my petition anyway, since I live outside the city limits; I'd have to petition the Lake Prairie Township board. Lake Prairie Township Philosopher Laureate: has quite a ring to it, doesn't it?

[5] Okay, yes, this is probably another one of those rants (familiar to those of you readers who are actually in this profession) about the divorce of philosophy from everyday life, about the abdication of philosophy from engagement with the questions that actually matter to people. So sue me.

[6] But wait: in the beginning, I think we'd have to volunteer our services rather than waiting to be asked. I don't think philosopher laureate events come quite as clearly labeled for people as do poet laureate events. I think people would actually be a little nervous and intimidated to call upon a philosopher laureate, for fear we'd tell them that "this isn't a philosophically relevant event." Of course if they'd ever been to a philosopher's party, they'd know that the placement of commas is a philosophically relevant event, but never mind. We don't generally make ourselves all that approachable, so in the beginning, I think we'd just need to be willing to step in and assert that our services were needed.

[7] Turns out *I'm* rather intimidated by philosophers as well. I keep imagining other philosophers saying "that's not philosophically relevant" about every idea I come up with.

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THUMB AS TOOL

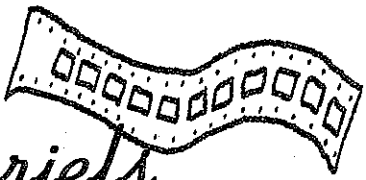
Peg writes: Lisa and I have been experiencing thumb problems recently. We've worked our way through various medical practitioners, beginning with a chiropractor, then an orthopedist, and finally a physical therapist specializing in hands. The orthopedist gave me a diagnosis of arthritis, and this only after he kept characterizing my pain and its location in one place and I kept characterizing it in another. He ordered an x-ray and that settled the matter. According to him, it was weird all right, but I did have arthritis. And then to save face, I think, he diagnosed me with a case of trigger finger too. Trigger finger involves the tendons in the base of the thumb becoming swollen, which can causes a painful clicking further up the thumb. Lisa, on the other hand, was given an ill fitting plastic splint for Gamekeeper's thumb. Each of us was unsatisfied with the diagnoses and with the lack of explanation and methods for alleviating the pain, other than taking Naproxen by prescription. We eagerly awaited our appointments with the physical therapist.

But we were disappointed with what we learned from the hand therapist. Lisa's assignment is to stop hyperextending her fingers—something she has done since, oh, birth. To me, the therapist's refrain was "Your thumb is not a tool. Do not use your thumb as a tool." This has introduced a whole new dimension to my being in the world. Everything I do—from getting a bowl out from the cupboard to clicking my mechanical pencil to advance the lead to opening a door—throws me into a panic. "Am I using my thumb as a tool here??"

Humans often reduce the distinction between ourselves and other animals to the thumb. We often then go on to say that our use of tools distinguishes us as well. These two definitions collapse together, and we see ourselves as unique and superior because we use our thumbs as tools. Does this mean that I am devolving if I can no longer use my thumb as a tool?

It seems to me that the thumb is exactly a tool; it is always used as a means to an end. And this is where Kant makes a guest appearance in my thinking. Kant's second formulation of the Categorical Imperative states that people should treat others always as an end in themselves and never merely as a means. The fundamental issue is the respect for the autonomy (that's autonomy, not anatomy) and dignity of the other person. At first I fixated on the means/end relationship. What would it mean for me to treat my thumb not as a means? Would this mean treating it as an end, and what would that involve? Or is there another alternative that is neither a means nor an end?

After puzzling about these questions, I realized that I was focusing on the wrong concept. It really is a matter of respect. One can have respect for something as a means but also recognize that it is not an end in itself. With regard to my thumb, respect for it involves recognizing its limitations. So for example, no longer will I use my thumb to pry and push things when other implements are available for doing so. Recognizing the limitations of something is one way to show respect for it. This is what philosophers do; we mark the limits of language and knowledge, for example. This, apparently, is how I will be leaving my thumbprint on philosophy.



Barb's Briefs

Three from the fastest cursor in the business.

Training Day. Oh My. Keep reminding yourself that there's some rule in the movie business that the really bad guy has to be defeated in the end. And that the DAY in Training Day probably means that as it starts to get dark outside it may be almost over. Denzel may have won an Oscar for this, but you should consider watching something more cheerful like *Goodfellas* or Harvey Keitel's dirty cop drama *Bad Lieutenant* (1992). Even *Straw Dogs* (1971). This is very unpleasant and reminded me of *Scarface* (1983) in a strange and disgusting way.

www.rottentomatoes.com says it's a "top video rental" now (4/02) so at least I'm doing the popular thing.

Lantana violates BTB Rule #2 (rule #1 is BE QUIET IN THE MOVIES): the word "LANTANA was never spoken and anyone who hadn't owned an actual lantana or two would not have recognized the quick shot of the plant that they put up at one point. Well done and quite interesting but once you violate one of my rules, well....you know!

Monster's Ball. A fascinating IDEA (but even the box lies - showing hallie with curly hair on the front and implying that Hank was minding her husband on death row at the same time as he was "falling in love" with her). The unbelievable set of interlinked people in *Lantana* was easier to buy than this "overnight" transformation from "nigger hater" to conciliatory, amends- making NICE man. . . . I'll buy that the performances were extraordinary but the premise was not well developed.

The Other Side of the Lectern

Or: When Is a Teacher's Holiday Like a Busman's Holiday?
Or: Pastry Chefs Really CAN Teach the Philosophers a Thing or Two

Lisa writes: For about four years now, I've been taking the occasional baking and cooking class at a cooking store in Minneapolis. In addition to their intended purpose (that is, teaching me how to make a *buerre blanc* or explaining the difference between double and triple cream cheeses (don't even ask)), I've found these classes to be an interesting window into the psyche of a student. An opportunity to experience a bit of what my own students experience in my classroom. (One might think such windows would not be necessary for a person who, as her mother is fond of pointing out, spent 21 of her first 26 years going to school. One would be wrong. After 15 years on the other side of the lectern, the window into one's student days tends to be covered with a thick layer of conceptual vaseline, which substance leads one to end sentences that begin "When I was a student," with statements like "I *always* read the extra readings," or "I really *cared* about what I was learning in each of my classes," or "I *never* came to class unprepared." Not "I sometimes drank too much beer," or "I perfected the art of sleeping with my eyes open" or "I would never have *dreamed* of doing anything more than the bare minimum for that course.") As a student in these cooking classes, I have been reminded anew of what it's like when the teacher chooses to come by your small group at just the moment that disaster has struck. (The only difference is that, in a cooking class, the disaster isn't "no one in the group did the reading;" it's "the meringue just broke.") I've been forced to confront my terrible brown-nosing tendency, a tendency that leads me to say "I do!" when the teacher says, "So, does anyone know how the croissant originated?"—even if I've already answered the last seventy-four questions he's asked.

These cooking classes also have given me cause to reflect on the differences between the methods of the pastry teacher and the methods of the philosophy teacher in ways of which Plato, bless his heart, would not at all approve. *I* think the pastry teacher has a lot to teach me—and not just about pastry, but about teaching, and, indeed, about the nature of knowledge itself.

For those of you who just this morning forgot, Plato has some very nasty things to say about the pastry chef, in his dialog the *Gorgias*. There, in a discussion of the nature of knowledge (who has it, who doesn't, and how do we know?) he contrasts the pastry chef to the physician, arguing that the physician has true knowledge, whereas the pastry chef has a mere knack. Specifically, the physician can diagnose your health problems and prescribe just the diet to cure them. The pastry chef, on the other hand, will give you what you think you want, no matter whether it is good for you or not—and she'll flatter you into thinking it's just the thing for what ails you. By extension, of course, one oughtn't go to a pastry *teacher* in hopes of acquiring *knowledge*.[1] (Of course Plato, or at least Socrates, would say one oughtn't go to a *philosophy* teacher hoping to acquire knowledge either. The best the philosopher can do is function as a midwife, pulling from you what you always already knew. Can't *teach* you a thing, really.)

Despite Plato's dire threats about the consequences of consorting with pastry chefs, I chose to spend one entire week of my holiday from teaching (a.k.a. sabbatical, a.k.a. opportunity for professional development) studying classic French pastry making. I mainly did so because I wanted to learn more about the foundational methods upon which such pastries are built (creaming, foaming, laminating and like that), and to practice them in the presence of an expert who could critique my technique. I also knew, however, that the week would have the added bonus of providing me-the-philosophy-teacher an extended opportunity to learn what I could about the craft of teaching from the pastry teacher (and also to refresh my ever-dimming memories about what it is like to be a student.)

I spent the week in a program called (I kid you not) Pastry Boot Camp, run by the CIA, a name which, to cooking types, is immediately recognizable as the Culinary Institute of America. (Inhabitants of *this* CIA sometimes act as if the other one doesn't even exist. And really, what would be the harm in getting rid of the other, and having this one take up the work? Wouldn't we be better off sending croissants around the world instead of spies? Couldn't a lot of our international conflicts be cleared up if everybody regularly got some really decent meals? And couldn't we just turn the *other* CIA's budget over to the food CIA, in order to see that this all gets done properly?)

Fortunately, the powers that be did not see fit to carry the boot camp motif too far beyond the promotional material and the olive-green duffel bags we were issued upon our arrival. (It did not, for instance, extend to our meals, which were decidedly un-mess-hallish.)

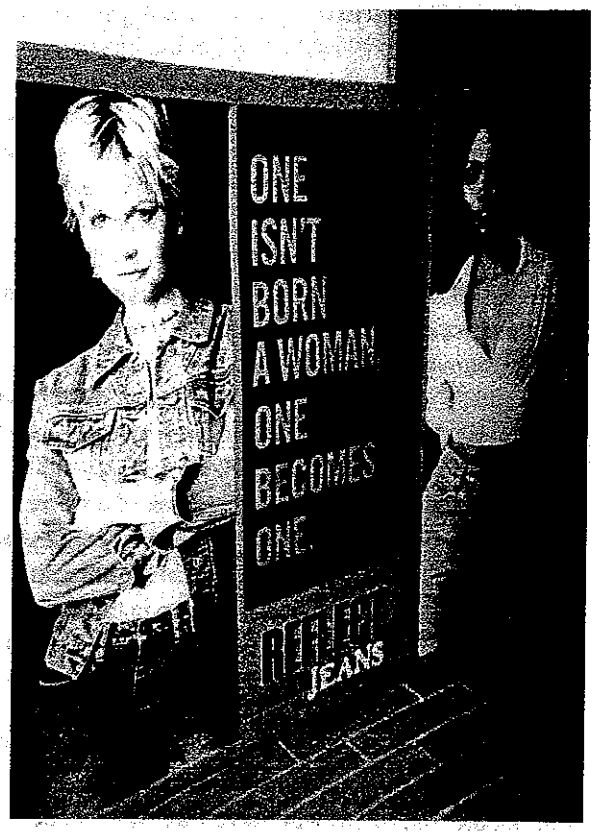
So anyway, there I was for a week, creaming, foaming, laminating, yes, and brown-nosing to my heart's content. I learned a lot about classic French pastry; no doubt about it. But at the end of the day, what did I learn about teaching and learning? (Or, to put it another way, how might I write this up in my end-of-sabbatical report, so as to make it sound like something other than a lark?) Frankly, I learned a lot. None of it's exactly in the category of rocket science, and most of it is common knowledge to anyone who teaches first graders.

1. Active learning really *does* work better than passive learning. Our teacher could talk till the cows come home about the need to cream butter for five full minutes before incorporating other ingredients, but until we did it ourselves, we were unbelievers. And until we struggled with a laminated dough (a.k.a. croissant dough) whose edges we hadn't lined up scrupulously, we just weren't going to understand the importance of lining up those edges scrupulously. The need for active participation in one's learning is simply obvious to anyone who teaches anything that is obviously a skill (be it cooking or basketball). Alas, we too often tend to think of philosophy as a body of knowledge, rather than a set of skills, so we (teachers and students of it alike) tend to minimize the degree to which students need to practice doing philosophy. (True confession: sometimes we're not even quite sure what it would look like to involve students in actively philosophizing.)
2. Writing stuff down also works. If I had a nickel for every time one of my non-pencil-wielding classmates turned to me and said "what are we supposed to do now?" how do we do THAT?" I'd be able to take the next class at the CIA for free. I don't even know what else to say about this one, except, I guess, "hands on learning is NOT enough, especially when you reach the age in which memorization doesn't just happen automatically." I wanted to shout at the women in my class—really nice women, whom I liked a lot—"what are the chances that you are going to remember how to frost a cake in a week, if you can't even remember how to do it now, ten minutes after he showed us? Take notes!"
3. Making mistakes REALLY works. I learned this vividly the first day, when five groups made five custard sauces that were wrong in five different ways (from barely warm to scrambled) So impressed was I by this display that I asked our teacher if we couldn't be assigned different mistakes each day. He suggested that nothing quite this formal was necessary (and indeed, we did seem to make unassigned mistakes at a rate high enough to be edifying), but he did let me make a true pound cake, so everyone could see what a batter looks like when it breaks. But in all seriousness, errors are illuminating in ways that doing things right can only dream about. I just wish we could all remember that more often—and that our mistakes would be more appreciated for the learning tools that they are. (Note to self: think about ways to encourage students to make mistakes. Give better grades to people for making more mistakes?)
4. Being a brown noser is a tricky business. Most brown nosers aren't really brown nosing; we're really eager beavers, dying to learn more, and dying to try out what it is we already know. But we look like we're just trying to become Pet #1 of the teacher. I agonized a lot over this one. I was like the kid in the situation comedy, the one whose hand is always in the air, mentally shouting "pick me, pick me!" I didn't mean to be; that is, I didn't mean to show off. I've just read a lot, and I tend to remember arcane facts, especially food related ones. I wasn't even very good at a lot of the things we had to do; there were always three or four people (out of 10) who were way, WAY better than I at whatever skill we were practicing. I was just good at hazarding guesses and trotting out theories and asking questions. But I kept worrying that this group of grown women would be driven so wild by my constantly-waving hand that they would throw me down after school, beat me up, and take away my lunch money. In the end, they didn't; in the end, some of them even said they appreciated all my yammering. Imagine that; they said it helped them get more out of the class. Go figure. (Rest assured; I'll never try to tell my students this. There's no surer way for the brown noser to get beaten up on the playground than for the teacher to praise them to the rest of the class.)

Writing this all down makes it seem utterly obvious. I knew all this before, didn't I? So perhaps Plato is wrong about the pastry chef, but right about the doctrine of recollection?

[1] Nerd that I am, I actually have critiqued Plato's analysis of the pastry cook in print, laying out my various objections to it. If you want to read it, find someone who subscribes to *Philosophy Today,* and borrow Issue #31, the food issue.

Where are they Now?



Peg writes: It has recently been discovered that Simone de Beauvoir had a lucrative side career in the advertising world. Readers familiar with her magnum opus *The Second Sex* will recognize the quote in the picture at left.

Located in the context of the book, de Beauvoir argues that the category "woman" is not predicated on some sort of biological essence that somehow naturally unfolds itself. Rather, one's membership in the category is based upon successful participation in a set of social and cultural processes whereby one comes to embody the appropriate feminine attributes, and therefore is a woman. De Beauvoir says that the symmetry between the terms "masculinity" and "femininity" is only apparent. Using the imagery of the terminals of an electrical pole, masculinity is both the positive and the neutral, while femininity is solely the negative pole. As an achievement, "femininity" is truly double-edged.

In the context of a storefront window advertising jeans, one might wonder if Simone de Beauvoir was appealing to the original meaning or was using this ironically. Regardless of her intentions, its meaning is open to a number of interpretations. And ambiguity sells.

DESCARTES REDISCOVERED

When we last asked, "Where are they now?" Lauren Fleer reported that Descartes seemed to be missing in action, forced out of business at his Chicago coffeeshop. It appears that rumors of his death (or at least the death of his business) were greatly exaggerated, as this letter reveals....

Dear Philosophers on Holiday:

FLASH. The Cafe Descartes is alive and well and living on my campus, University of Illinois at Chicago, indeed in two locations: the Behavioral Sciences Building and the Student Center. The proprietor, who hales from somewhere in the mideast and was an MBA student, detected a rather large lacuna on our campus: you couldn't get a decent cup of coffee anywhere. So, he started serving cappucino, espresso, etc. Initially, the administration only let him have only one location and he ran his business from a cart–hence the clever pun, "Cafe Descartes." Eventually the cart gave way to a stand and he is now, as I say, in two locations. He has been so successful that I believe he dropped out of graduate school! I believe that the empty storefront found by Lauren Fleer was an unsuccessful attempt by this same young entrepreneur to start something off campus, but I'm not sure.

Anyhow, I am addicted to this cappucino and since I shouldn't but do almost always have something sweet with the coffee, I spend nearly four dollars at the Cafe Descartes every day I'm on campus, which is often four out of five. It is the elixer of life, coffee. One of history's mysteries is how the Greeks and Romans were able to build such complex civilizations *without coffee.* How did they get up in the morning?? And Alexander the Great (not a very nice person, but that's neither here nor there) conquered much of the then known world, again, without coffee!!! Sagenhaft!

Regards,
Professor Caff Een
(a.k.a. Sandra Bartky)

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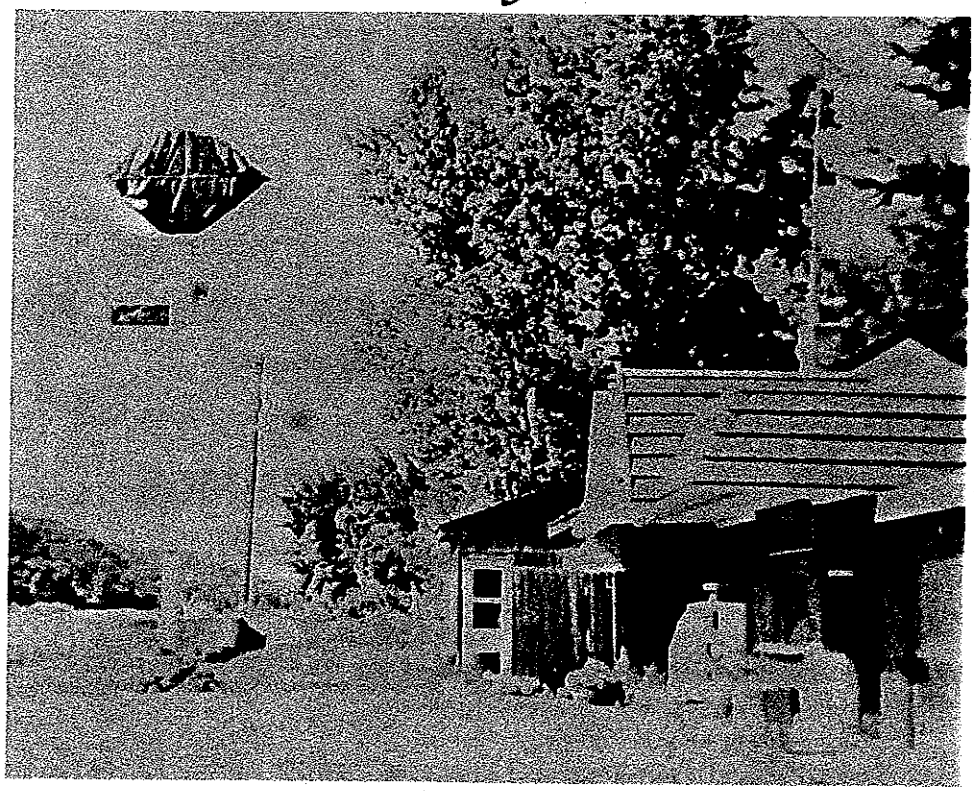
My favorite feature in Philosophers on Holiday:

*Erased DQning**



*Explain the headline and win a prize! That's right; here's one more opportunity to win the coveted *Phil on Hol* Dental Kare Kit for your Kar or Karry-On (POHDKKKO). Just explain the witty, ironic reference being made here, and the key to dental health on the road is yours!

Philosophers on Holiday
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