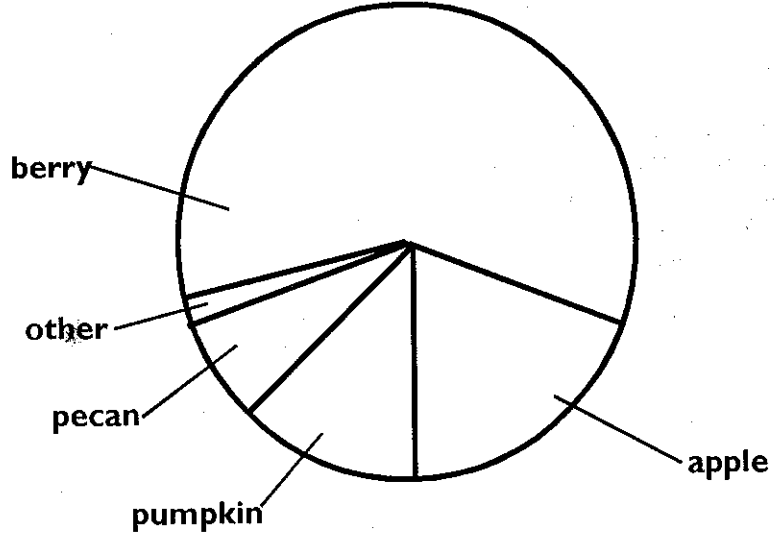


Philosophers on Holiday

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

Volume IV, number 4
Spring, 2001



Making the Pie Higher

Your *Phil on Hol* editors recently enjoyed the pleasure of Abby "World" Wilkerson on an extended conference-and-hanging-out visit. During the visit, much pie was consumed (as Richard Nixon might have said). There was a rhubarb pie made by Lisa that even she was forced to admit was truly delicious--once it was finally fully baked. (While she has a long way to go before she can claim the kind of crustmaking prowess possessed by her mother, she certainly had nothing to be ashamed of with this particular crust.) There was a slice apiece--rhubarb crumb, strawberry rhubarb and bumbleberry, a three-berry medley--at the legendary Betty's Pies in Two Harbors, Minnesota. (Betty's has new digs, and the pie seems to have suffered a bit in the move. But we were greeted by the "retired" Betty herself, who apologized for our ten-minute wait for a table.) And there was a single, breathtaking slice of--yes--rhubarb *raspberry* at the New Scenic Cafe between Duluth and Two Harbors. (This pie warranted an immediate phone call to Lisa's mother.) In the face of all this pie, the three of us started musing, as philosophers are wont to do: Just what makes a great pie, anyway?

And so, inspired by our "president," George Bush, who has enjoined us to "make the pie higher," we set out to establish, definitively, the necessary and sufficient conditions for pie greatness.*

Crust

- PO'C: It goes without saying that the crust must be flakey, right? With a two-crust pie, you should be able to *see* flakes blistering up on the top crust.
- AWW: I feel I'm out of my depth. I don't have much to say beyond "flakey."
- PO'C: Well, let me just add that the crust should be a rich, golden brown. Pale piecrust is putrid. And the bottom crust can't be soupy--or have disappeared completely.
- LH: It should taste just a *bit* salty, to offset the sweetness of the filling.
- AWW: When I think pie, I think first of the classic crust. Anything else is really a novelty crust that might have its place in the pie pantheon, but is really not the main event. This is all a bit ironic, given that when I make a pie--which is about once every two years--it doesn't even have a graham cracker crust, it has maybe a grape nut crust and a tofu-based filling. Not even a novelty pie.
- LH: That's true, but you did grow up eating fine crusts made by your Aunt Florene...
- AWW: ...who is still remembered as the legendary pie, cake and fried chicken queen of West Texas.

See Pie Height, p.7

From the Editors

(Lisa)

Your editors tried a little experiment with this issue of *Phil on Hol*. Knowing that Abby "World" Wilkerson would be spending several days at the editorial offices in St. Peter (prior to our all attending the National Women's Studies Association convention in Minneapolis), we decided to try to put together an issue during her visit, one comprised entirely of submissions people sent us over a two-day period. The result? *PonH: The Charette Issue*

(Peg)

With this issue, we complete our fourth year of publication. Our first stories came from the summer we spent at the University of Oregon in 1996 when Lisa was a participant in an NEH summer seminar. During her down time, we'd take off for the mountains or the ocean, looking for adventure, or at least a good hike. Invariably, midway through the weekend, some crazy thing would happen, that would have us turning to each other and saying, "Do you suppose this is because we're philosophers? On holiday?" A 'zine was born.

Lisa always held the belief that this enterprise would thrive while I, admittedly, was a bit more skeptical. That I was more skeptical was surprising to both of us because

of the two of us, I am always the more optimistic (usually knowing no bounds). Lisa is largely responsible for the momentum and enthusiasm that carry us to volume five. To her, I and our faithful readers, owe thanks.

(Lisa and Peg)

One way that we've grown in four years is in our number of contributors, both those who do so regularly and are now regarded in the category of "usual suspects to call when we need pieces" and those who surprise us with a story or photograph. We're not kidding when we tell you that we love getting submissions. It makes putting the issue together that much more fun. Sometimes we have so many that we've forgotten what we've received until we check our work folder, and are surprised all over again.

We received a letter of application for employment from Bruce ("Home as Place to Play," IV/3) Norelius. It seems as if our favorite architect is making some significant realizations about the influence he exercises in popular culture. Abby "World" Wilkerson (who not only is a regular contributor to this august publication but also is a bio-ethicist) reflects on referrals and HMOs. While we have attempted to remain advertisement free (so that the industry does not control our content like it does so many other publications), upon occasion we do run an ad for a company whose vision we support, and that will be of interest to our readership.

We are constantly adding new feature sections to *Phil on Hol*, and most often they develop more as a matter of serendipity than intention. While we have had great success in our film section with in-house critic Barb the Brief, we would like to expand to reviews in other media, including books and music. We would also like to invite our readers to suggest themes for upcoming issues. One theme in the hopper is poetry, terrain not yet deeply explored in this 'zine (but check out page 9 for a seasonal sampling). We take seriously Wittgenstein's warning about the dangers that follow from philosophy's having too much of a one-sided diet, and we want to provide you with the opportunity to think and write in nonanalytical and metaphorical ways. We want to help liberate your inner poet.

Travel Notes

Web Guy Jay Benjamin [check out his work at <http://www.gustavus.edu/~poconnor>] notes: There seems to be a trend developing in the Catskill Mountain region of the Hudson Valley to associate mottos with restaurant names--mottos that appear to be attempts to counter the growing fear of Frankenfoods. So, for instance, The Landau Grill in Woodstock uses "fear no food" in its print ads, and The Monkey Joe Roasting Company in Kingston prints "taste no evil" on its business cards, next to a monkey holding a cup of joe.

Philosophers on Holiday

A quarterly 'zine

Editors Peg O'Connor and Lisa Heldke

Staff Columnist Abby Wilkerson

Movie Reviewer, Immobile Reporter Barb Heldke

Phashion Philosopher Bruce Norelius

Hometown Tourist Carol Heldke

Web Virtuoso Jay Benjamin

Archivist Ann O'Connor

Subscriptions Send your check for \$10 for a one-year subscription. Make checks payable to Philosophers on Holiday!

Submissions We always welcome your essays, editorials, artwork, advertisements, photos, puzzles, letters, rants.

Direct all correspondence to:

Philosophers on Holiday

P.O.Box 355

St. Peter, MN 56082

poconnor@gac.edu heldke@gac.edu

Find us on the web at:

<http://www.gustavus.edu/~poconnor>

Letters from Our Readers

Dear Editors:

I was surprised to read in Peg's column ["Queremos Hablar Espanol, Chapter 2, Winter 2001] that Sister Mary Virginia became a saint; I did not know that the beatification process had begun. She was no saint when I had her fifty-three years ago.

Peg's Mom [Ann O'Connor]

P.S. Enclosed is my check for my subscription. Loved the issue.

Dear Editors:

I want it duly noted that I am sending in my renewal *right away*. I think *PonH* is *really* good and you can quote me on that.

Mike McNulty, SJ

Dear Dear Readers:

Note the common theme in these letters? No, no, not the one about the nun and the priest—the *other* theme. That's right! Subscribing! Subscribe now at our regular low, low price, and we'll throw in additional gift subscriptions at just eight dollars each. That's a two dollar savings over our regular subscription price! (And let's not even *talk* newsstand prices.) There's a convenient order form on the back page of this issue; tear it off, or photocopy it, if you're the sort of person who likes to keep each issue in pristine condition.

Eds



About the motto

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.

Hot Philosophers

Peg writes: Perhaps with a headline like this, you might think that the staff of *Philosophers on Holiday* was offering a new swimsuit edition of our publication. We're not.

My office and Lisa's are in different buildings, and hers is closer to the place where we usually park. This means that I walk over to her office, and we head out together with her locking her office door and the philosophy department office. One rainy day, I was bundled up in my raincoat and backpack, assuming that I would be in her building for only a minute or so. But Lisa needed another minute or two to pack up her things, so I was left standing around cooling my heels for a while. While she was locking up her office, she suddenly noticed a burning smell. I don't have much of a sense of smell, so I took her word for it at first, but soon even I could smell it.

The philosophy department is housed in the oldest building on campus, so there is some legitimate basis for concern when there is a burning smell. Lisa, convinced that this could be serious, called Safety and Security, who responded that they would send someone over "in a while."

While we were waiting for Safety and Security to arrive, Lisa and I were busily sniffing around. We went outside the building, in the event that someone standing outside was smoking, their fumes carried into the building on a stiff westerly wind. Then Lisa went downstairs to the Classics Department, because we saw enough fire prevention film-strips in elementary school to know that smoke rises. But, in the event of some weird barometric pressure variable, we also went upstairs to the education department. Lisa also went next door to the suite of religion department offices, in the event that someone over there was doing something involving incense. We were stumped; none of these was the source of the burning odor. In the course of our fire investigation, we were joined by several of our Gustavus colleagues (a meeting had let out across the hallway). All assembled agreed that there definitely was a burning odor, more specifically the burning odor of paper. An officer from Safety and Security arrived, opened all the office doors, and discovered nothing.

By this time, there were at least eight people in the very tiny office. We all agreed that, yes, indeed, it smelled like burning paper. The smell was quite strong; I particularly noticed it when I was near the computer printer. The printer as source of the smell seemed plausible; printers

See Hot, p.8

bn

We're sure you'll join us in welcoming Bruce Norelius to the regular staff, once you read his credentials. Watch upcoming issues for his sure-to-be-stylish logo. -Eds

dear esteemed editors of the esteemed philosophers on holiday:

i would like to apply for the position of fashion editor for your magazine. well, maybe fashion editor is a little too *vogueish*.

i would like to apply for the position of phashion philosopher.

i have so much to give. i understand so much about fashion. for instance, you know the combination of orange and chartreuse that you see in the gap this year? that's me. it's me because in graduate school in 1986 i did a monoprint that combined those two very colors in one piece. it's obviously influenced a whole generation of young, talented clothing designers.

and the fact that i don't use capitalization in my email correspondence? soon everyone will be doing it, because it expresses the *immediacy* of the medium. and i know all my references. e. e. cummings did it first. and he was brilliant.

my knowledge about all things fashionable is amazing. for instance, i know that it was christian dior in 1947 who started using lots of fabric (up to 50 yards per dress, they say) in his collection and changed the world of fashion away from the austere lines of world war two era fashion.

and this is what i have to say today, if i can say it without stepping on your esteemed movie critic's toes, which i think i can because this isn't really a review:

go see "moulin rouge"

that is, if you're at all interested in fashion. because it's too late to know the source of the trend toward horizontal glasses (except that it was probably somewhere in germany, from where all good glasses designs seem to flow). but if you want to see the aesthetic expression of a generation on the move, you should see this movie.

just when you were getting comfortable with minimalism, this will prove that minimalism is on its way out. this production is lush and baroque and over-the-top. some of us who want to think that minimalism is really about *discipline* rather than trendsetting will argue that every age has its minimalists and every age its maximalists. but there

is definitely a pendulum swinging here.

if you want to study this crucial aesthetic dichotomy further, buy an issue of the magazine *nest* and one of *wallpaper**. it's all there. social anthropologists are going to be really confused in 7 million years when they find out these two magazines were being published simultaneously.

i hope this sheds a bit of light on a time that, for many of us, is most aesthetically tumultuous.

*No, no. That's not a there's-a-footnote-below asterisk; it's a that's-part-of-the-name-of-the-magazine asterisk. -Eds

Incident Reports:

Thai restaurant in St. Paul has extraordinary power over philosophers

Following are two actual cases of philosophical inattention, sent in to these offices by anonymous observers. The names have been suppressed, to protect the unobservant.

Case one: Two philosophers decide to go to Thai restaurant for dinner. They take one car and, with good fortune shining on them, secure parking spot right in front of restaurant, which features large plate glass window. Conversation in the car is quite interesting and animated, and philosophers alight from car to restaurant and are shown to a table having a direct view of car. After excellent meal and conversation, the two return to car. Philosopher One, owner and driver of car, has hand in bag while Philosopher Two says in an impressed tone, "I didn't know you had a remote car starter." Philosopher One replies "I don't."

Caught up in such interesting conversation, neither of them noticed exiting and locking a car whose engine was still running.

Case two: Several philosophers are gathered together for a meeting. During meeting, one member of group keeps pulling on bottom of pants leg, complaining about the pair of socks s/he's wearing. At end of meeting, three members (including problematic sock wearer) decide to have Thai food for lunch. They take two cars, and arrive at same time. They park and get out of their cars to walk short distance to the restaurant. As they are on street in front of large plate glass window, out of pants leg of sock-complaining philosopher falls a pair of loud waist-hugging plaid underpants. Two accompanying philosophers practically fall down in street with laughter, drawing attention of restaurant diners.



Wilkerson's World

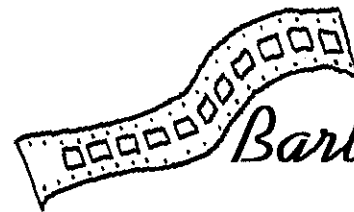
If a symptom manifests itself in the specialist's office but is not specified on the primary care provider's referral, is the pain real? Whether this is a problem of metaphysics, rhetoric, or distributive justice, I learned that it is at least one of these when I broke my foot and experienced a variety of annoying complications, only some of which were physiological (also rediscovering the astonishing truths contained in the old song that goes "The leg bone's connected to the knee bone..."). As it happened, I had recently switched over to an HMO for the first time, and my accident presented the first opportunity to try it out. I quickly learned that in this new world, just like on the television show *Voyager*, you have to understand the system if you want to see the doctor (well, unless you are some kind of alien life form whose mere presence may constitute a threat to the entire population of the ship and maybe the galaxy but they have to examine you to be sure, in which case standard rules may not apply).

When 7 of 9 gets banged up a bit helping the *Voyager* crew ward off Q or some other menacing creatures whose names I can't remember, she knows she's not going to get any help from the doctor if she shows up when he's off on the Holodeck, or more to the point, when his program is not activated. Similarly, I had learned the important lesson: if a tree falls in the forest and breaks something, it won't get in to see the nearest tree surgeon (on its plan, it goes without saying) without a referral from its primary care provider.

On what was probably my third or fourth visit to the orthopedist after my accident, I brandished my fresh referral cheerfully and confidently (to the extent one can make such a gesture teetering precariously on crutches), proud that at last I understood the System. (One might think an alert philosopher would instantly recognize this as a sign of delusion, expecting order and coherence where one knows it is not to be had. It's true they did warn me those painkillers might have "cognitive effects.") I reported my new symptom of knee pain to the nurse, and asked whether she thought the doctor would want an x-ray. "Is it on the referral?" she asked. "What do you mean?" I replied uneasily, in my last moments of innocence. "Each injury has to be specified," she said sternly. "But this is all from the same injury!" "No, each body part has to be specified on the form in order to be treated. Which knee is it?" she asked briskly. "The right one." "Well, if the referral doesn't list your right knee, then you can't talk to him about it and he can't look at it or treat it," she said before shutting me in the examining room. I felt a little uneasy sitting there alone with the Body Part

That Dares Not Speak Its Name, but by the time the doctor entered, I had mustered the courage to speak out, defying the Health Maintenance Regime and yes, taking perverse pleasure in it. Yes, I was part of the Resistance, waiting to see how this act of defiance would be met. Thrillingly, the doctor was more than ready, discussing knee pain and even glancing at my right knee once or twice. Of course, it was behind closed doors, so he may well have denied the whole thing later.

The significance of the referral form as primary ontological determinant surely has startling philosophical implications (not unlike the lyrics of the artist formerly and currently identified as Prince—and it's still not too late to send in those contest entries to alw@gwu.edu! But I digress). I will leave these to others, only noting that the HMO, not unlike *Voyager's* doctor when he experiences a Holodeck malfunction, is in dire need of (medi-)metaphysical therapy. But what does the referral form look like? (It's a new contest! Maybe even a new philosophical specialization! Please send your answer to alw@gwu.edu.)



Barb's Briefs

Watched Almost Famous last night--it was ALMOST (but not quite) good.....enough said. If you are longing for that music, there are any number of "classic rock" radio stations who will satisfy that need more effectively.



We want YOU to submit

to

Philosophers on Holiday!

Send your traveller's tales, philosopher's photos, and other philosophical travel-related stuff to:

PonH

Box 355

St. Peter, MN 56082

Carted off to Jersey

Web guy Jay Benjamin writes: I don't do well with deadlines. Peg's email plea to participate in a two-day charette to complete our spring issue triggered some anxiety. But she was clever, providing just enough background on the term "charette" to hook me. She explained that architecture students know that a charette is a challenging exercise that forces them to work together to meet a short deadline. Architects adopted the French word for "cart" based on the tradition of wheeling a cart around to pick up results at the deadline.

Our editors' cunning tactic played on my curiosity about words, and my appetite for scavenger hunts on the world wide web. Why a French word? Why just architecture students? I volunteered to write a short piece that answers these questions as my contribution to our two-day charette. With the web at my fingertips, this would be a snap!

First I tried the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, certain that it would answer both questions. It didn't. According to the *OED*, the word is obsolete, and its only meanings are "a wheeled vehicle or conveyance" and "a war-chariot (in biblical or classical use)." The *OED* identifies the French origin as the word for "cart," but gives no clues on usage to mean an intense effort by aspiring architects to meet a deadline.

Thinking only American architects use the term, I tried web searches of several American English dictionaries, but didn't do much better. Most don't include "charette." A few do, and they agree that it is an all-out effort to complete a project in a very short time, but disagree about confining the effort to architectural design. None clarifies why a French word is favored by architects.

Frustrated, I tried wider searches using my favorite search engines and tactics to focus on architecture or education. Finally, I got some useful results. The web site of a company that offers charette design services (www.masterplanning.com) includes a brief history of "charette" that makes both the architectural and French connections. It states that in the 1800s architecture students in Paris rushed their drawings to the Ecole Des Beaux-Arts in a charette (cart), and usage of the word broadened, first "to describe any intense, short-term student design project," and now "to describe any intense, on-the-spot design effort."

Were there other sources to support this history? One search result listed the "International Pedestrian Lexicon" site, described as a "guide to pedestrian and traffic-calming terminology around the world." (See <http://user.itl.net/~wordcraf/lexicon.html>) This sounded intriguing, if nothing else, so I took a peek. The lexicon entry for "charette" reinforces the Paris Ecole des Beaux-Arts connection and adds that "projects were collected at

designated times on a cart where students would be found putting finishing touches to their schemes."

Should I trust the authority of a site about "pedestrian and traffic-calming terminology?" A link on the page identifies the Jersey Pedestrians Association as the owner. Thinking that New Jersey could certainly use some traffic-calming, I clicked on the link to check out the owner. The home page of the Jersey Pedestrians Association mentions that "*the Island needs a better deal for pedestrians.*" Suddenly I realized that I wasn't in New Jersey anymore.

Digging deeper, I tried the "Walking in Jersey" link. There I discovered that "*the existing ped precincts are congested and do not provide a high-quality ped experience.*" Also: "*We lack a proper acceptance of transportation hierarchy.*" In addition: "*Pedestrians should be valued as a primary mode rather than (as is usual) regarded as a nuisance that 'holds up the traffic'.*"

Delighted with the language, and charmed by the concern for pedestrians, I probed deeper, hoping for more quirkiness as I tried to confirm that I had stumbled onto the Island of Jersey in the English Channel. In the "Word from our Founder" section I discovered that Simon Crowcroft's traffic-calming crusade takes inspiration from his son being hit by a car in Bath Street. This was serious stuff. Nevertheless, I smiled at his encouragement to everyone on the Island "*to drive more slowly ourselves, for starters. Don't curse those rush hour tractors: bless them.*" But I had to wonder about this:

Let me put it bluntly: as a motorist I always give way to pedestrians, no matter how many Ford Escorts are tail-gating me, except, I guess when I'm on Victoria Avenue.

To check whether Simon Crowcroft is an authoritative source of lexical claims, I clicked on his name. His personal home page reveals an association with the Jersey School of English, and deeper pages confirm that the school is on the Channel Island of Jersey. Jersey tourism web sites are but a click away. But, still curious about Simon, I backtracked to his "Missing Persons Page." There I discovered a message to his missing brother: "*The fatted calf has got BSE and may have to be slaughtered before your homecoming.*" The entry for another missing person indicates: "*We got on well, saving each other from the clutches of the perverts in the dormitory - after lights-out "rooting" (Aus. slang) was their favourite pastime...*"

Recovering from this digression into personal territory, I returned to the Jersey Pedestrians Association page. I resisted the link to the "European Charter of Pedestrian Rights," but appreciated learning that there is such a thing. After reading a few of the "Poetry in Motion" poems about walking, and browsing the list of links to other walking sites, I quit for the day, knowing that I still had my charette assignment ahead of me.

Pie Height, cont.

LH: Another thing about crust. Never, never, put pie in the microwave to warm it up. Great crust becomes flabby rubber in the micro.

AWW: Lisa, you just did the other night, when the rhubarb pie you made came out of the oven crunchy.

PO'C: That's different. That was a continuation of the cooking process in an emergency. But then she put the rest of the pie back in the oven to continue the cooking process.

AWW: You haven't said anything about the top crust

PO'C: I would be more likely to seek out a crumb top crust if I was worried about the crust maker's ability.

AWW: Would you even choose to eat pie if you doubted the crust maker's ability?

LH: We just did. Twice in one day.

PO'C: Anyway, if there is a top crust, it shouldn't be thick. You shouldn't have to apply a lot of downward pressure with your fork to pierce it. Crust is not a barrier. And another thing; I don't like fancy crusts....

AWW: Really? I like lattice crusts!

PO'C: Fancy in terms of ingredients. Crushed almonds don't belong. They just make it greasy.

AWW: Adds fiber though! Lots of it!

LH: I *have* made a great apple pie recipe that had cheddar cheese in the crust.

PO'C: Really? You have? Was this pre-P[eg]?

LH: I guess so.

Fruit Filling

LH: It *also* goes without saying that we are not talking about canned, gloppy fruit filling here. Start with plain berries. Frozen is okay, and some canned ones can even be okay, so long as you don't get the pre-thickened, pre-sweetened junk. Obviously fresh is best, but hey, it isn't always Oregon in August now is it?

AWW: In a berry medley pie, it's important to be able to distinguish individual berries and berry flavors.

There should be flavor melding, but not homogenization.

PO'C: Pie shouldn't wiggle.

LH: Wiggle?

PO'C: From too much tapioca.

LH: True. Abby's Bumbleberry was a bit too jiggy perhaps....

AWW: Hey, wait a minute! Let's restrict ourselves to pie here!

* And we invite you, dear readers, to add your criteria. (Send them to PonH, Higher Pie Division, Box 355, St. Peter, MN 56082.) If we publish your criterion, you'll receive the coveted Phil on Hol dental care kit—just the thing to scrub off those nasty blueberry stains from your teeth.

Hometown Tourist

Carol Heldke writes: What is so rare as a day in June? So said the poet James Russell Lowell, and he didn't even know what the weather patterns were going to be in 2001. But in spite of the complaining we do, there was a perfectly wonderful, rare June day only last week, that we had the opportunity to really enjoy.

Because we just happen to be the parents of one of the *POH* editors, we get some special attention at times, and this was one of them. They had a furniture pick-up trip scheduled for a little town called Stockholm. Sounds foreign, doesn't it? They asked if we might like to meet them and have lunch, and we said sure, providing it wasn't too COLD and if our critically ill friend did not need us. (Reasons such as this can only come from the parents of a philosopher, don't you think?) It turned out to be perfect in every respect.

Stockholm is famous for its Amish furniture and quilts, and other things. In the winter, I'll wager you can barely find it. But on this day it was in full bloom, with outdoor patio dining, people walking about admiring the flowers and shops. My very favorite part was a brief rest, outside the Amish shop on a park bench. We watched a tour bus come and unload their travelers. The driver then proceeded to back up and go forward, trying to get this enormous vehicle into a parking space—all the while we were wondering if he was going to crush Peg's pickup truck into an accordion.

Philosophers on a holiday do not need gigantic entertainment themes to make them happy. Some good food, some interesting people, and a little rest on an outdoor park bench before taking off for the next peaceful stop. We recommend it for anyone. The rates are reasonable. The rewards are tremendous.



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Everyone has an action figure—even the governor of Minnesota. But why not be the first person on your block to own a *cognition* figure—or, better yet, a whole *series* of them?

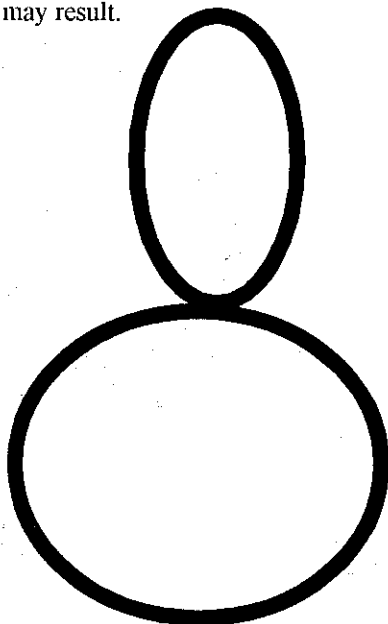
Think-o®, the name you've come to trust for quality philosophical toys, games, and puzzles, has come up with another product line that's sure to be a winner--Think'rs, the philosophical cognition figures everyone's talking about!

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Or select your cognition figure from the "Average I.Q. Joe" line. That's right--a Think'r who's just like you, an ordinary Joe (or Jane!) who just likes to do some casual thinking on the weekend--nothing heavy, mind you, maybe a few syllogisms or a little light conceptual analysis. If this is your kind of thinking, there's a Think'r out there for you!

Note: because these are cognition figures, they are not fully jointed. Do not try to put them in action settings, or severe damage may result.



Hot Philosopher, cont.

have been known to misbehave in all sorts of stupid ways and this one was loaded with a lot of paper. As I was saying how strong the odor was, one colleague mused aloud if the smell might be coming from someone's clothing—a raincoat perhaps that had recently been out on a camping trip. Well, Lisa had worn my raincoat on a canoe trip (see Vol IV, number 2) and it had been quite smoky when she brought it back. But no, that wasn't the smell. Another colleague warned me in a joking way that perhaps I might be combustible. And at that moment, I knew.

"It *is* me!" I whelped, as I whipped off my backpack. I unzipped it, and a plume of smoke curled out. I reached in—and grabbed out a smoldering spiral notebook; it was charred all the way through. I quickly doused it under the handy Culligan water dispenser.

At this point, the assembled crowd was wondering what the heck was going on. Just how did I come to have a fire on my back?

In a word, batteries. Yes, batteries for outdoor rechargeable solar lights in my backpack. (Don't ask about those lights right now; they are another story, for "Consumer Complaints" section of a future edition.) The metal spiral on the notebook had connected the positive and negative terminals, and Bob's your uncle. In fifteen minutes, we had smoldering and charring. Half of my paycheck stub was gone.

I was teaching logic when this happened, and it gave me a whole new way to explain the usefulness of logic (something in addition to its fulfilling a general education credit and the other reasons I trot out at the beginning of every semester). I reached the conclusion I did by deduction. The smell was concentrated in one area. And everywhere that Peggy went, the smell was sure to go. *I* was the source of the smell.

My conclusion had nothing to do with my back getting hot. It was only after I had taken off the backpack and raincoat that I realized how hot my back had become during the search.

I don't need to say that news travels like wildfire in a small community. That evening, I received an anonymous telephone call from someone making the sounds of fire engines. The next day one of my students brought a fire extinguisher to class. The administrative assistant in my building left a badge for me to wear (complete with clothespin), warning people that I carry fire. And when the fire alarm went off in my building, that same administrative assistant demanded to know my whereabouts.

Things have cooled down since then.

ODE DE SPRING

Spring is Here
 Fresh skunk odor flows up from the pavement
 Spring is Here
 Large black ants scamper across the kitchen floor and counter
 Spring is Here
 Thick green pollen covers auto hoods and benches and chokes me fast
 Spring is Here
 The purple "everlasting" weed is choking out the last five blades of grass in my sad lawn
 Spring is Here
 Oh My Goodness, we'd better enjoy it or blink once and it will be summer and blink twice and it will be fall.

Barb the Brief writes: This was written (in my head only) on my way to work, inspired by the almost daily "skunk carcass" somewhere on Route 9. It will look real dumb when the "spring" issue comes out around the 4th of July, but...

Barb the Poetry Pedagogue writes: note the subtle format--each line getting a little longer.

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