

Socrates is alive and well... and living in the upper Midwest

By Héctor E. Ramos-Ramos

Even the most dedicated philosophers have to leave the privacy of their heavenly libraries and hallowed books at times, if only to talk about philosophy with other philosophers. Many of Minnesota's most prominent academic philosophers came to Macalester Nov. 8 for this very reason, for the 2008 meeting of the Minnesota Philosophical Society. MPS is an organization of philosophers that meets annually to discuss meaningful issues in the field.

Philosophy professor Geoffrey Gorham, a new addition to Macalester's Philosophy department, chaired the event. Gorham said that while St. Olaf originally, "agreed to host the 2008 meeting with me organizing, when I moved to Macalester, I carried the honor/burden of organizing along with me."

Philosophers of all sorts attended and held talks open to their colleagues and fellow scholars and to the general public. The thematic variety of the conferences was a testament to the versatility of the discipline. There were presentations on just about every philosophical topic under the sun, from the impact of natural selection on moral philosophy to the nature of scientific progress and the uses and consequences of friendship.

A personal highlight was seeing recently retired professor emeritus Henry West respond to a paper on the moral utility of male-female friendship presented by University of Minnesota professor Marisol Brito. As always, the man delighted and engaged his audience with his own particular combination of intellectual rigor and down-to-earth pragmatism.

The problems tackled at the MPS meeting were certainly of interest to those who aren't academic philosophers as well as those who are. Evolution, which provides philosophy a wellspring of important issues to wrestle with, is one of the field's "hot areas," Gorham said.

But, even less obviously polemical issues, like those about Ancient philosophy, are relevant in this day and age. They also remind us that we are the inheritors of an approach to inquiry many centuries in the making. We would do well to remember that every controversy regarding Socrates' skepticism also brings up all manner of questions about knowledge and wisdom, questions we still find the need to try to answer.

The history of philosophy itself is a contentious subject. Macalester's own professors Karen J. Warren and Joy Laine, along with St. Olaf professor Vicki Harper, spoke to the MPS on contributions made by female philosophers that have been largely ignored or unknown for centuries. This matter is the subject of Warren's most recent book, "An Unconventional History of Western Philoso-

Professor Karen J. Warren is undertaking a project nothing quite like anything in Philosophy's 2,000 year history

phy," where she compiled the writings of traditionally touted male philosophers side-by-side with their unfairly overlooked female counterparts, along with commentaries by a variety of scholars, including Laine and Harper.

The temerity of Warren in undertaking this project and presenting it to the academic community, as she did at the MPS, is exemplary. Nothing quite like this has ever come out in philosophy's history of more than 2,000 years, and many would say that it has been a long time coming.

It is important for a field as long-lived and storied as philosophy to take account of its role and its practices, and where better to attend to this necessity than in the company of prominent philosophers with myriad interests and specialties? The keynote speaker at the MPS meeting, Eugene Garver from St John's University, did exactly this in his address. He spoke of the idiosyncrasies of a discipline that

simultaneously engages in the interminable search for truth while urging its practitioners to focus on reading texts and writing about them. Garver used the term "grave-robbor" to describe those who would remove historical philosophical texts from their original context to weed out only the arguments they would like to examine. He also said philosophers have to juggle roles comparable to the separate, yet related, duties and practices of musicians and musicologists. Philosophers have to produce innovative and interesting new work, while also keeping in mind and studying the tradition which they have come into.

Gorham said he believed the keynote address "made provocative arguments" and pointed out "the perils of excessive professionalization in academic philosophy."

I agree wholeheartedly. Garver did an excellent job of showing how philosophy is a very different animal, in a way, than it was in the days of Socrates. Professional philosophers need to meet the demands and constraints of academic journals and all sorts of other deadlines and expectations and cannot go about like that ancient conversationalist

who wrote nothing at all and taught in the forums provided by everyday life.

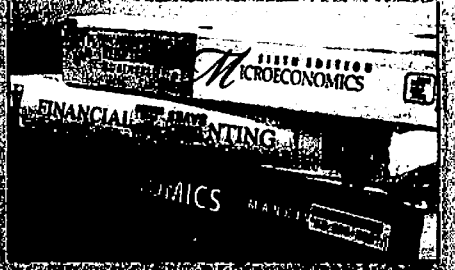
Yet, in many other aspects, philosophers today are the heirs to Socrates. At a party in Old Main that followed the keynote speech, the philosophers were patient enough to sit down with my fellow undergraduates and me. Our hunger for knowledge had only been intensified by the day's proceedings and we still wanted their answers and guidance. They obliged and ruminated and inspired. A professor from University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire was kind enough to explain the confusing and fascinating positions of the ancient philosopher Heraclitus to me while I listened in admiration, eating my crackers to avoid having to interrupt him.

The philosophers I spoke and listened to last Saturday are certainly people committed to scholarship. Long after they had abandoned their lecterns, they displayed a passion for inquiry and an interest in sharing that passion that an Aristotle or a Nietzsche would recognize as his own and that thankfully still exists today.

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YES and Know: Economics with Elias Tezapsidis Obama's Economic Policy-Part One

After a very long rally and a painful election which ended many's hopes for a better future, the change happened. As we all struggle to recover from our election defeat, trying to get away from CNN monitors or Fox News for an additional dose of laughter, we recognize that the economy was a major factor for that determined the race. Barack Obama's (aka) word (credit to both) began to spread. The Depression, considering how the economy is doing and a possibility of the Great Depression, you may be surprised to hear my journey to explore the economic policy of the newly elected president.



Obama's economic policy is a key to his success. He has a plan to create jobs and stimulate the economy. He has a plan to reduce the deficit and pay down the national debt. He has a plan to reform the financial system and prevent another crisis. He has a plan to reform the energy system and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. He has a plan to reform the education system and improve the quality of our workforce. He has a plan to reform the health care system and provide universal coverage. He has a plan to reform the social security system and ensure that we can all retire with dignity. He has a plan to reform the immigration system and attract more talent to our country. He has a plan to reform the justice system and ensure that everyone is treated fairly. He has a plan to reform the transportation system and improve our infrastructure. He has a plan to reform the environment and protect our planet for future generations. He has a plan to reform the foreign policy and promote peace and stability around the world. He has a plan to reform the federal government and make it more efficient and effective. He has a plan to reform the state and local governments and make them more accountable to the people. He has a plan to reform the media and ensure that we have access to accurate and unbiased information. He has a plan to reform the culture and promote the values of freedom, justice, and equality. He has a plan to reform the economy and create a more prosperous and equitable society for all of us.

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