

History of the Susan Linn Sage School of Philosophy

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The Susan Linn Sage School of Philosophy, endowed by Henry W. Sage and promoted by Jacob Gould Schurman, opened in 1891. Sage, who had earned a fortune in the lumber industry, had been President of Cornell's Board of Trustees since 1875, and named the school for his wife, Susan Linn Sage, who was tragically killed in 1885 in a carriage accident on Slaterville Road. Schurman was simultaneously the Susan Linn Sage Professor of Christian Ethics and Mental Philosophy, a chair also endowed by Sage, and President of the University. Philosophy had been taught previously at Cornell, but (according to Morris Bishop's *A History of Cornell*) not very successfully. With the founding of the Sage School, philosophy became central to Cornell's curriculum. *The Philosophical Review* was founded at this time, again endowed by Sage, under the editorship of the faculty of the Sage School, and its initial number appeared in January 1892. It was the first genuine philosophical review in the country, and has continued to be published under the auspices of the Sage School.

The initial faculty included, besides Schurman, Frank Angell, James Edwin Creighton, William A. Hamond and Walter Francis Wilcox. Although psychology was initially among the subjects offered by the philosophy faculty, the arrival of the famous psychologist Edward Bradford Tichener in 1892 confirmed psychology as a separate discipline. Other philosophers in the early years included Frank Thilly, Ernest Albee, James Seth and F.R.S. Schiller. Later William Alexander Hammond, M.H. Fisch, E.T.

Paine, G. Watts Cunningham, William K. Wright, Richard Robinson, Harold R. Smart, and Arthur Murphy, among others, joined the Sage School.

Two significant figures in the early history of the Sage School were George H. Sabine and Edwin A. Burt. Sabine was author of the important *A History of Political Theory* (1937), which provides an account of political theory from the Ancient Greeks to the Nazism and Fascism of the time, and served as Dean of the Graduate School (1940-44) and Vice President of the University (1943-46). Burt, who was Susan Linn Sage Professor, wrote an influential book entitled *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*, published in 1924. This book grew out of his Columbia University dissertation on Isaac Newton of 1920, and continues to be of significant scholarly interest due to its untimely anti-positivism and anti-scientism. A number of Burt's main themes were later taken up by Thomas Kuhn in his groundbreaking *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Burt was a long-time faculty member of the Sage School, remaining at Cornell his entire career, and continuing to write well into his 90's.

Another prominent philosopher, Max Black, joined the faculty in 1946. Black was originally from the Russian Empire, but grew up and was educated in England. He was already a well-known scholar in analytic philosophy at the time he was hired, and was to remain at Cornell for the rest of his career, until 1977. He was a leading figure in the Sage School, and his accomplishments include the founding of Cornell's Society for the Humanities in 1965. Norman Malcolm followed him in 1947. Malcolm was from Kansas, and studied philosophy at the University of Nebraska under O.K. Bouwsma, who was one of the early expositors of the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Malcolm studied with Wittgenstein at Cambridge in England in the 1930's, and was to become the most prominent advocate of Wittgenstein's later thought in America. He

also wrote widely read papers on free will and determinism, in philosophy of mind, and in philosophy of religion. Malcolm was active in the Sage School until his retirement in 1978.

From the arrival of Black and Malcolm into the 1960's, the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein was strongly influential in the Sage School. Black was the author of a book on the early Wittgenstein, on his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) in particular, and George Henrik von Wright, a member of Wittgenstein's inner circle, gave a seminar at Cornell on the *Tractatus* in 1955. But it was especially Wittgenstein's later work, articulated in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) that engaged the interest of the faculty and graduate students. As noted, Malcolm was an advocate of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, specifically on such matters as the rejection of the possibility of a private language, whose upshot is the idea that for language to be meaningful it must be subject to public criteria for correctness; the view that the meanings of terms in a language is a matter of their use; and the proposal that skeptical claims in philosophy can be resolved by examining the ordinary linguistic practices from which they arise. Malcolm's own work was strongly influenced by these ideas. Wittgenstein famously stayed with Malcolm and his wife Leonida in Ithaca from July to October of 1949, and had several meetings with graduate students.

Others then in the Sage School faculty were Arthur Murphy, Stuart Brown, Willis Doney, Harold R. Smart, and Gregory Vlastos. In 1948, Vlastos, one of the greatest scholars of Greek philosophy of the mid-20th century, left Queen's University in Canada to become Susan Linn Sage Professor of Philosophy at Cornell, where he stayed until leaving for Princeton in 1955. The Cornell years marked a critical stage in his intellectual development. Black and Malcolm introduced Vlastos to a mode of philosophy that influence his sense of which problems were important and, even more significantly, of the clarity and rigor with which they should be discussed. The result

was a decisive change in the way Greek philosophy was studied in the English-speaking world. Vlastos' work in this period resulted in a synthesis of the methods of analytic philosophy and the history of Ancient Philosophy that continues to the present day.

John Rawls, who was to become the greatest of American political philosophers, joined the Sage School in 1953 and stayed until the early 1960's, when he moved to MIT, and then almost immediately to Harvard, where he remained for the next forty years. Rawls' important paper "Two Concepts of Rules" was published while he was at Cornell, and he was then writing his masterpiece, *A Theory of Justice*, which appeared in 1971. The core idea of his liberal political philosophy is that the most reasonable principles of justice are those everyone would accept and agree to from a fair position. More specifically, principles of justice are to be determined by the device of the hypothetical original position, in which citizens reason to such principles from behind the "veil of ignorance," which conceals from them information that distinguishes them from others, such as information about their class, wealth, race and ethnicity, and gender.

Other philosophers in the Sage School during the 50's, 60's, and the early 70's were Rogers Albritton, John Hick, Irving Singer, Bruce Goldberg, Jack Canfield, Robert Coburn, Richard Henson, Thomas Patton, Zeno Vendler, Mendel Cohen, Nelson Pike, Richard Sorabji, Charles Chastain, David Keyt, Charles Parsons, David Sachs, Arthur Fine, Jaegwon Kim, Frank Sibley, Oswaldo Chateaubriand, Keith Donnellan, David Lyons, Nicholas Sturgeon, and Sydney Shoemaker. Some of these, like Jaegwon Kim and Charles Parsons, held faculty positions at Cornell for only a few years – others were here much longer. Sibley's topics included aesthetics, and Pike taught a large and very popular course on the philosophy of religion. Albritton was an exceptionally brilliant interlocutor, and went on to spend most of his career at Harvard and UCLA.

Hick was to become of major figure in philosophy of religion, and his most renowned work, *Evil and the God of Love*, was published in 1978. Kim, who spent most of his career at the University of Michigan and Brown University, was to become one of the major figures in philosophy of mind of the past thirty years. Fine left to take a position at Northwestern, where he did important work in philosophy of physics, in particular on the interpretation of quantum mechanics. Parsons moved to Columbia and then to Harvard, and made his mark in philosophy of mathematics and logic. While at Cornell Donnellan wrote his influential paper "Reference and Definite Descriptions," and went on to UCLA to become one of the most original and innovative philosophers of language of the time.

Although interest in Wittgenstein continued, beginning in the 1960s it was increasingly overshadowed by opposing currents in analytic philosophy. One of these was exemplified by the work of Saul Kripke, who, among other figures during the 1960's, revitalized metaphysics, which had been largely rejected in analytic philosophy as a result of the influence of logical positivism beginning in the 1920's. Metaphysics was now practiced rigorously, with the use of the logical methods and insights developed earlier on in analytic philosophy. A second strong influence was scientific realism, prominently advocated by Richard Boyd, who joined the Sage School in 1972. Scientific realism, which, by contrast with the instrumentalist anti-realism prominent during the positivist era, argues that the predictive success of scientific theories and their capacity to generate successful research projects indicates that they are approximately true and that their theoretical terms refer to really existing entities. Richard Miller, who joined the faculty in 1973, also advocated a version of scientific realism, and he and Boyd taught seminars together on this issue. Miller's work in philosophy of science culminated in his seminar work in philosophy of science, *Fact and Method: Explanation, Confirmation, and Reality in the Natural and*

the Social Sciences, which appeared in 1987. Scientific realism was also endorsed by Shoemaker and Sturgeon, among others at Cornell.

A further theme in the Sage School was the antireductionism championed by Boyd, Shoemaker, Sturgeon, and Miller. The logical positivists had argued for the unity of science, by which they meant the reducibility of all the sciences to the single foundational science of physics. By contrast, Cornell antireductionists argued that the entities and laws that figure into the various successful special sciences do not reduce to laws and entities in physics. Sciences such as biology and psychology thus have a metaphysical integrity and autonomy from physics that they are claimed to lack by the opposing reductionist camp.

Two long-time members of the Sage School working in metaphysics and epistemology, especially prominent and active from late 1960's and early 1970's to the present day, are Sydney Shoemaker and Carl Ginet. Shoemaker and Ginet did their graduate work at Cornell – Shoemaker with Malcolm and Ginet with Rawls. Although Shoemaker studied Wittgenstein with Malcolm early on, his work reflects the realism and lack of discomfort with metaphysics that characterized analytic philosophy more generally beginning in the 1960's. Over four decades, Shoemaker did groundbreaking work on a realist theory of causation, on personal identity, on self-knowledge, and on the metaphysics of nonreductive physicalism. In philosophy of mind, his take on functionalism, according to which mental states are to be characterized in terms of the structure of causal relations in which they have a place, and his theory of the realization of the mental by the physical, are widely appreciated. Shoemaker, along with Malcolm and Black, was one of the three members of the Sage School to serve as the President of the American Philosophical Association.

Ginet is well known for his work in epistemology and in theory of action. His book in epistemology, *Knowledge, Perception, and Memory*, was published in 1975.

In action theory, Ginet one of the most prominent contemporary proponents of a non-causal theory of basic action, according to which we are subjects of basic actions, such as decisions, without causing them; and of an incompatibilist theory of free will, according to which the ability to do otherwise is incompatible with causal determination. Ginet's position is set out in his 1990 book, *On Action*, which continues to be widely read and cited. Ginet and Shoemaker retired in 1999 and 2004 respectively, but are still very active in the Sage School.

In the 80's and 90's the faculty of the Sage School also included John G. Bennett, Milton Wachsberg, Jon Jarrett, Anthony Appiah, Mark Crimmins, Jason Stanley, Zoltan Szabo, Frederic Neuhouser, and Karen Jones, all of whom left the Sage School after a relatively short time. The turn of the century brought a number of new members: Jennifer Whiting, Michael Fara, Delia Graff Fara, Tamar Szabo Gendler, Andrew Chignell, Michelle Moody Adams, Benj Hellie, Brian Weatherson, Matti Eklund, Nicholas Silins, Michelle Kosch, Karen Bennett, Tad Brennan, Derk Pereboom, Erin Taylor, Jill North, Ted Sider, Will Starr, Kate Manne, and Julia Markovits. Some of these have moved on to other universities, but many are still in the Sage School.

Beginning in the 1970s, Robert Stalnaker was prominent in logic and philosophy of language while at Cornell, and also after he left for MIT in the late 1980's. Stalnaker made important and influential contributions to logical theory, to the analysis of counterfactual statements and in possible worlds semantics in particular, and also to various areas in the philosophy of language. Harold Hodes, who began his career at Cornell in 1976 and is still a faculty member of the Sage School, authored a number of highly regarded papers in mathematical logic, notably "Logicism and the Ontological Commitments of Arithmetic" (1984). Other important figures in philosophy of language and related areas of logic who were at Cornell for

less than a decade are Jason Stanley and Zoltan Szabo Gendler, now at Yale University; Delia Graff Fara, currently at Princeton, Matti Eklund, who moved to Uppsala University in Sweden, and Brian Weatherson, currently at the University of Michigan. Most recently, philosophy of language is being taught by Will Starr, who has published important papers on conditional statements and on deontic modals, several of which are co-authored with his wife, Sarah Murray, a faculty member in Cornell's Linguistics Department.

This also period featured a steady interest in ethical and political philosophy at the Sage School. Stuart Brown, who was department chair when Black and Malcolm joined the faculty, was a specialist in ethics; (Brown was subsequently Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences). David Lyons, who joined the Sage School in 1963, had a distinguished career as a legal and moral philosopher, and had a joint appointment with the Law School before moving to Boston University in the mid-1990s. Nicholas Sturgeon joined the Sage School in 1967, and did important work in ethics and the history of ethics. Reflecting the influence of Richard Boyd, Nicholas Sturgeon, Richard Miller, and Terry Irwin, since the 1980s a strongly non-reductive version of moral realism has come to be called Cornell Realism. In this view, moral properties are irreducible and real features of the world, and their reality is grounded in the success of moral explanations, much as the reality of the properties that physics invokes is grounded in the success of physical explanations. Sturgeon and Boyd published the seminal articles on this position in the 1980s and 1990s.

Miller's first book in ethics and political philosophy was *Analyzing Marx: Morality, Power and History* (1984). Subsequently, in 1992, he published *Moral Differences: Truth, Justice and Conscience in a World of Conflict*. In 2011, *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power* appeared, in which Miller constructs an original account of international justice. That same year Irwin published a

monumental three-volume work on the history of moral philosophy, *The Development of Ethics*. Erin Taylor now works in moral and political philosophy, in particular on the role of convention in an account of political obligation. Kate Manne, a recent MIT PhD, specializes in moral philosophy and moral psychology. Most recently, Julia Markovits was hired away from MIT with a prominent record in ethics, including a book just published, *Moral Reason*, in which she develops an original theory of what it is to have a reason to perform a moral action. The next addition to the Sage School will be Andrew Marmor, who will leave USC for Cornell in the summer of 2015 together with his wife, incoming President of Cornell Elizabeth Garrett. Marmor is an acclaimed scholar in philosophy of law, and the focus of his research is on the complex relations among law, morality, and politics. He is the author of many books in this area: *Interpretation and Legal Theory* (1992); *Positive Law and Objective Values* (2001); *Law in the Age of Pluralism* (2007); *Social Conventions* (2009), *Philosophy of Law* (2011); and *The Language of Law* (2014).

Ancient Philosophy has always been taught at Cornell. From the late 1940s through the mid-1950s, courses covering this historical period were taught by Gregory Vlastos (before his move to Princeton). Albritton taught seminars on Aristotle while he was at Cornell, and subsequently Richard Sorabji taught in this area from 1962-70, after which he went on to a highly distinguished career at King's College, London. The appointment of Terry Irwin and Gail Fine in 1975 opened a new chapter in the Sage School's treatment of this topic, with regular courses at all levels on Plato, Aristotle, the Pre-Socratics and the Stoics. Fine and Irwin are among the most highly acclaimed scholars in this area worldwide, and they attracted a significant number of talented graduate students in Ancient Philosophy to Cornell. Fine's books in Ancient Philosophy include *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms* (1993) and *The Possibility of Inquiry: Meno's Paradox from Socrates to Sextus* (2014), and Irwin is

author of *Aristotle's First Principles* (1990) and *Plato's Ethics* (1995). Well-known Ancient scholar Jennifer Whiting also worked and taught at Cornell from 1997-2003 before moving to the University of Toronto. With Irwin's departure to a chair at Oxford, Cornell's strong tradition in Ancient Philosophy is being continued by Charles Brittain and Tad Brennan. Brittain has done important work on a number of key figures in Hellenistic Philosophy, including his monograph *Philo of Larissa: the Last of the Academic Sceptics* (1990). Brennan's *The Stoic Life* (2005) is a highly respected account of Stoic moral philosophy and moral psychology.

Norman Kretzmann's appointment in 1966 made Cornell a major center in the study of Medieval Philosophy. His writing and teaching in this area has been extremely influential. A number of important figures in the field did their graduate work with him at Cornell, including Scott Macdonald, who is now a member of the Sage School faculty. Macdonald specializes in Aquinas and Augustine, and Brittain, Brennan, and Macdonald make Cornell one of the world's premier centers of Augustine scholarship.

The area of modern philosophy most fully covered by the offerings of the department is the philosophy of Kant. Allen Wood joined the Sage School in 1968 and regularly offered courses on Kant's philosophy. While at Cornell – he left for Yale in 1996 – Wood published two books on Kant's philosophy of religion, one on Hegel's ethics, and another on the thought of Karl Marx. During this period he was also the co-translator of what has become the standard Cambridge translation the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Terry Irwin, as well as Derk Pereboom, who joined the faculty in 2007, have also taught courses on Kant's philosophy. As noted, Richard Miller also published a book on Marx (1984). Michelle Kosch, in the Sage School since 2007, and Andrew Chignell, who arrived in 2003, have done important work on Kant. Kosch is a prominent scholar of the moral philosophy of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Kierkegaard. She is the author of *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling and Kierkegaard*, and of a

forthcoming book on Fichte's ethics. Chignell has done significant and original work on Kant's views on belief and faith, and on his metaphysics of possibility and necessity.

Philosophy of science was taught for several decades by Boyd and Miller, and most recently by Jill North, who moved to Cornell from Yale in 2011. North works primarily in philosophy of physics, and her current research concerns whether the structure of space and time has a fundamental ontological status, as Newton maintained, or whether it is derivative, as Leibniz famously argued.

After Ginet's retirement, epistemology was ably covered by Tamar Szabo Gendler, and she was also very active in the interdisciplinary cognitive science program. Gendler moved to Yale in 2007 and there became Dean of Arts and Sciences. Nico Silins, who arrived in 2006, is the Sage School's current specialist in epistemology, and he has published a number of prominent articles on the nature of justification, the problem of skepticism, and in the philosophy of perception.

Karen Bennett and Ted Sider are recent additions to the faculty in metaphysics, and they contribute substantially to making the Sage School one of the best departments in the world in this central area of philosophy. Bennett arrived from Princeton in 2007, and her research focuses on issues in constitution and grounding, with extensive applications to the philosophy of mind. Her much anticipated book in this area, *Making Things Up*, will be published soon. Sider, a high-profile figure in metaphysics with an impressive publication record, including his *Four Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (2003), left New York University to join Cornell's faculty in 2011. His much anticipated book on the nature of the fundamental, *Writing the Book of the World*, was published soon after arriving at Cornell. Work by Derk Pereboom, who also arrived in 2007, focuses on the metaphysics of agency, with two books on this topic, *Living without Free Will* (2001), and *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life* (2014) developing a skeptical view about

human free will. His other work centers in metaphysics and philosophy of mind experience with a book, *Consciousness and the Prospects of Physicalism*, appearing in 2001. Michael Fara made original contributions in the metaphysics of dispositions and agency before leaving for Princeton in the mid-2000s. In addition to his research in philosophy of language, Matti Eklund (who, as mentioned, recently left for Uppsala University) has done significant work on personal identity and on topics in the metaphysics of mind.

The Cornell Program on Ethics and Public Life has been affiliated with the Sage School since the 1980s. This center promotes interdisciplinary learning about morally central questions concerning public policies and social, political, and economic processes. Richard Miller is its current director, and in the last several years it has sponsored extensive lecture and seminar programs on American Politics and on contemporary China.

Prior to Gail Fine's appointment there were no women in the Sage School faculty. The record has improved. Women faculty at the Sage School since then include Karen Jones, Jennifer Whiting, Delia Graff Fara, Tamar Szabo Gendler, Michelle Moody Adams, Karen Bennett, Michelle Kosch, Kate Manne, Erin Taylor, Jill North, and Julia Markovits.

The department has had an active graduate program, and those completing their degrees here have had positions in a number of the country's leading philosophy departments. Among the most prominent of these are John Perry Ph.D. '68, Robert Adams M.A. '67, Ph.D. '69, Marilyn Adams Ph.D. '67, Eleonore Stump, Ph.D. '75; Hilary Kornblith Ph.D. '79; John Martin Fischer Ph.D. '82 and Richard Moran M.A. '86, Ph.D. '89. A number of the products of the graduate program have at some point in their careers been members of the Sage School – these include Keith Donnellan M.A. '54, Ph.D. '61, Sydney Shoemaker Ph.D. '58, Carl Ginet Ph.D. '60, Karen Jones M.A. '92, Ph.D.

'94, Jennifer Whiting M.A. '81, Ph.D. '84, and Scott Macdonald '78, M.A. '84, Ph.D. '86.

The Sage School has long had an active philosophy discussion club, which brings visitors from outside Cornell to present papers. At one time papers presented to the discussion club included ones by Sage School faculty and graduate students, but in recent years such papers have been read to a workshop which meets regularly during term.

Those who have served as Chair of the Susan Linn Sage School of Philosophy include Arthur Murphy, Stuart Brown, Max Black, Norman Malcolm, Norman Kretzmann, Sydney Shoemaker, David Lyons, Carl Ginet, Nicholas Sturgeon, Terry Irwin, Gail Fine, Scott MacDonald, and Derk Pereboom.