*Tsinghua Studies in Western Philosophy* (清华西方哲学研究)

**匹兹堡大学科学史与科学哲学系**

——**过去与现在**

**Department of History and Philosophy of Science in**

**University of Pittsburgh: Past and Present**

**The Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh: Yesterday and Today**

Greg Frost-Arnold

The Department of History and Philosophy of Science (HPS) at the University of Pittsburgh, US, was created in 1971, so it is much younger than a typical North American academic department with a strong philosophy faculty. It was not the first HPS program in North America: Indiana University’s History and Philosophy of Science Department (originally named the ‘History and *Logic* of Science Department) was founded earlier, in 1960. In Australia, on the other hand, the University of Melbourne established its HPS program even earlier, in 1949.

At its founding, the department only had two faculty members whose primary appointments were in the HPS Department: Larry Laudan and J. E. “Ted” McGuire. Much of Laudan’s work concerns scientific growth over time; he also founded the journal *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* in 1970 (with Gerd Buchdahl). McGuire’s most famous research is on Isaac Newton, in particular, on aspects of Newton’s work that would not be considered ‘scientific’ today, such as alchemy and interpretation of sacred texts. However, although there were only two professors whose primary appointments were in HPS at its founding, several existing Pittsburgh faculty were given secondary appointments in the new department: historian Robert Colodny, Popper’s student William Bartley III, the logician and philosopher of science Gerald Massey, the pioneers of relevance logic Alan Ross Anderson and Nuel Belnap, the prolific philosophical polymath Nicholas Rescher, the author of *Empiricism, Philosophy, and the Mind* Wilfrid Sellars, and the philosopher of relativistic physics and Freudian psychoanalysis Adolf Grünbaum.

In many ways, Grünbaum could be considered the first cause of the Pittsburgh HPS department. He had arrived in Pittsburgh in 1960, and upon his arrival, the Pittsburgh Center for Philosophy of Science (which is still thriving today) began. After his arrival, Grünbaum began recruiting many of the professors listed above who would eventually become founding members of the HPS program.

The emergence of the Pittsburgh HPS department coincides with a shift in the field of philosophy of science, away from highly abstract studies that remained at the very general level of ‘Theory *T*’ and ‘Observation *O*,’ and towards inquiries that more closely examined the specific details of particular scientific theories and practices—both current and historical. The spirit of this age is captured by Norwood Russell Hanson’s pastiche of Kant: “the philosophy of science without the history of science is empty” (1962, p. 580). The causes of this shift are complex and multifaceted, and almost certainly differ in different local contexts (why did Melbourne’s HPS department appear so early, in 1949, while the Cambridge (UK) HPS department appeared relatively late, in 1972?). But the most famous and emblematic moment of this shift from abstract to particular, from general to specific, is Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, published in 1962. (Laudan, for example, explicitly saw much of his own work as primarily in dialogue with Kuhn (Laudan 1984, *xii*); Kuhn’s first year as a professor at Princeton overlapped with Laudan’s third and final year as a Ph.D. student there.) Kuhn’s book opened up scholarly space for trying to understand the fundamental nature of science—the traditional provenance of *philosophy* of science—via detailed historical case studies.

Around the same time Kuhn’s work was making history of science vitally important for philosophy of science, the growing unease with the highly abstract philosophy of science led also to increasing philosophical analysis of particular *current* scientific theories, especially physical theories of spacetime and quantum mechanics, and to a somewhat lesser extent, biological theories. For example, one of the earliest recruits to the HPS department, Kenneth Schaffner (who arrived in 1972), exemplifies this trend. Many of Schaffner’s early papers argue that the highly abstract models of reductionism that philosophers had developed in the preceding decades would not work for cases of biological reductionism, such as the reduction of classical genetics to molecular genetics.

Pursuing philosophy of science via focusing on specifics of particular scientific theories—both historical and current—characterizes a great deal of scholarship in the philosophy of science today, both at Pittsburgh HPS and elsewhere. Speaking from my own time as a Ph.D. student in the Pittsburgh HPS department, in the early 2000’s, faculty and students alike placed a great deal of value on knowing, in minute detail, particular current or historical scientific theories, equipment, and practices. Books and articles in philosophy of science that were not intimately engaged with particular, concrete scientific activities were not held in high regard.

Finally, it is perhaps worth noting that, from a genealogical or sociological point of view, Pittsburgh HPS exerts a very significant influence on the field of philosophy of science. The primary philosophy of science conference in the world currently is the Biannual Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association (PSA). Four of the last eight Program Chairs for this conference have been graduates of the Pittsburgh HPS program (Wendy Parker, Chris Smeenk, Andrea Woody, and Sandra Mitchell). And three of the last eight Presidents of the PSA have been Pittsburgh HPS faculty (Sandra Mitchell, James Woodward, and John Earman). These facts show that the Pittsburgh HPS department really is central, from an institutional perspective, to the discipline of philosophy of science in recent years.

**Bibliography**

Buchdahl, Gerd (1988). “*Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*. Origins and Aims: Some ‘Birthday Thoughts’,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* **19**: 1-3.

Buchdahl, Gerd (1989). “*Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*: Some Anecdotal Memories,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* **20**: 5-8.

Grau, Kevin T. (1999). “Force and Nature: The Department of History and Philosophy of Science at Indiana University, 1960-1998,” *Isis* **90**: S295-S318.

Hanson, Norwood Russell (1962). “The Irrelevance of History of Science to Philosophy of Science,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, **59**: 574-586.

Laudan, Larry (1984). *Science and Values: The Aims of Science and Their Role in Scientific Debate.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

*Online sources*

Center for Philosophy of Science, University of Pittsburgh. “Celebrating 40 Years: A History.” <https://www.pitt.edu/~pittcntr/Images/40%20years%20of%20CPS%20Booklet%20SMALL%20OCR2.pdf>.

Accessed on January 17, 2018.

Department of History & Philosophy of Science, University of Pittsburgh. “Early History.” <http://www.hps.pitt.edu/people/history.php>

Accessed on January 17, 2018.

# Documenting Pitt: Historic Records of the University of Pittsburgh. “Department Of History And Philosophy Of Science Formed At Pitt.” <http://documenting.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt:pittpressreleases19710147>

# Accessed on January 17, 2018.