An Interview with Josh Horn

Charles Joshua Horn is an MSU philosophy graduate, a recent recipient of the Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Kentucky, and a new assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point.

Where are you from? Why did you come to MSU? I am from Inez, a small town in Eastern Kentucky. My grandfather and I visited MSU and fell in love with everything about the place, from the surrounding mountains and lake to the small classes and excellent professors.

Before you came to MSU, what did you think philosophy was? Honestly, I had no idea! I remember signing up for my first class because the description was so different. I was deeply interested in questions about God, free will, right and wrong, and I wanted answers. I loved this class, and took another one to see if the first one was a fluke. After that second class, I knew I was hooked. When I graduated, I had taken 17 different philosophy classes!

Why did you pursue graduate study in philosophy? I had wanted to practice criminal law for a long time, but realized as I took more philosophy classes that I enjoyed theory more than anything else. I ended up being accepted by both a law school and a doctoral program in philosophy, but I decided I would rather work with philosophers than lawyers. Philosophy still excites me more than any other field.

Why did you choose to become a philosophy professor? I love to teach. I like to get other people excited about the same things I'm excited about, and I especially enjoy it when students realize that many of the things that they believe to be simple and obviously correct aren't so simple at all.

How did your studies at MSU prepare you for success in the Ph.D. program at the University of Kentucky? First, MSU is very strong in the history of philosophy, which is important for its own sake and for understanding contemporary issues. Second, I gained strong analytical skills from my classes. Finally, the professors at MSU seem to love what they do – their enthusiasm for philosophy is pretty infectious.

What skills does a person gain from studying philosophy, whether or not they pursue graduate study? Philosophy teaches us to write well, to communicate clearly, to think critically, and to know when to be open minded and when to draw a line in the sand for injustices in the world.

Do you have any advice for current MSU students who are considering graduate study in philosophy? You do not need to have an advanced degree to do philosophy, so you should pursue graduate study only if you can't live without it and you enjoy teaching. In that case, test the waters by enrolling in a good Master's program. Take a wide range of classes at MSU and get out of your comfort zone – you never know what kind of philosophy you're going to like until you try it. Don't be afraid to study new things.