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Philosopher Nancy Cartwright Honored for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement

UC San Diego distinguished professor is first woman honored with prestigious Hempel Award, says there is opportunity for more to contribute to field

UC San Diego Distinguished Professor of Philosophy Nancy Cartwright is the recipient of the Carl Gustav Hempel Award, recognizing lifetime achievement in the philosophy of science as well as scholarly excellence.

Given bi-annually by the Philosophy of Science Association, the Hempel Award was established in 2012. Cartwright is the fourth recipient, and first woman.

“It’s difficult to overstate the impact of Cartwright’s work and research,” said Jonathan Cohen, UC San Diego Department of Philosophy chair, in congratulating Cartwright. “Nancy’s achievements include influential contributions in to an astoundingly wide range of topics, all of which have steered the direction of research in the field.”

In accepting the Hempel Award, Cartwright said she was “exceedingly lucky” to have support and encouragement from a wide range of people: teachers and colleagues, students, administrative staff throughout her entire career, and family and friends.

“This support makes a big difference,” she said, “when we work together and encourage each other to bring out the best in our own work, and that of others. I think it is also important that we learn and think seriously about lots of different topics, as that not only helps us engage with the rest of the world, but it brings to our philosophy a far broader perspective.”



UC San Diego Department of Philosophy professor Nancy Cartwright. (Photo by Farshid Bazmandegan/ UC San Diego Division of Arts and Humanities)

A fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, the German Academy of Sciences and the British Academy, Cartwright is a MacArthur Fellow and member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences among many other scholarly institutions. She has received numerous awards and honors, including the Lebowitz Prize of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and was recently named one of the 50 most-influential living philosophers.

Additionally, Cartwright is professor and co-director of the Centre for Humanities Engaging Science and Society at Durham University in the United Kingdom. In the first half of her career at Stanford University, she specialized in the philosophy of the natural sciences; in the second half, at the London School of Economics, Durham University and UC San Diego, she specialized in philosophy and methodology of the social sciences with special attention to economics.

Her latest book is “Nature, the Artful Modeler: Lectures on Laws, Science, How Nature Arranges the World and How We Can Arrange It Better,” published in May 2019.

The Philosophy of Science Association acknowledged Cartwright’s inspiration and encouragement of multiple students in philosophy, calling her “legendary” for her support of students, junior colleagues and promotion of women in academia.

Cartwright recognized there was opportunity for more women to study and contribute to the discipline.

“Supporting women in philosophy is important because we are good at it, and we often take a different tack on it, which is good for the field,” she said. “Philosophy can be great fun, and it can be of serious practical import, too. I think it is important to make sure both of these come true.”

Cartwright’s dedication in sparking an interest in philosophy, particularly among women and other underrepresented groups, is well aligned with wider efforts in place in the Department of Philosophy. The department began and continues to organize the Summer Program for Women in Philosophy, a 10-day program for undergraduate women who are interested in pursuing graduate study.

The 2019 program will be held July 22 – Aug. 2, and feature seminar course taught by visiting and UC San Diego faculty members, as well as a number of workshops all geared toward providing both an engaging learning experience as well as helpful preparation for women applying to and, ultimately, succeeding at graduate school.

“Just as Nancy is famously dedicated to the generations of students she has advised and taught, the department continues to develop and support all students who have a curiosity about what can be achieved with a degree in philosophy,” Cohen said. “Nancy is both a force of nature as well as a theorist of it, and our students are lucky to have her as a mentor and contributor to the scholarly community.”

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