



Logoi

a publication of the
Center for Philosophy of Religion

**Removing Guilt
from Original Sin**
Page 6

**Dangerous
Despair**
Page 12

- 3** **Around the Center**
- 4** **What is the Forgiveness of Sins?** *Brandon Warmke*
- 6** **Removing Guilt from Original Sin** *Oliver D. Crisp*
- 8** **Optimism: An Interview with Lisa Bortolotti**
- 10** **Freedom and the Ability to Sin** *Jeffrey McDonough*
- 12** **Dangerous Despair** *Anne Jeffrey*
- 14** **Skepticism: An Interview with Michael Bergmann**
- 15** **Philosophy as Vocation** *Paul Blaschko*
- 18** **Meet the Center**

Contact us:

Center for Philosophy of Religion
University of Notre Dame
418 Malloy Hall
Notre Dame, IN 46556

philreligion@nd.edu
574.631.7339
philreligion.nd.edu

Editors:

Rachel Jonker
Liz Jackson

Design:

Rachel Jonker

Logo:

Sami Sumpter

Printing:

Omega Printing

About *logoi*:

The Center for Philosophy of Religion is proud to present the third edition of *logoi*, a publication of high quality articles and interviews about the field of philosophy of religion and the Center's activities.

Artist Acknowledgements

Ted Barr—tedbarrart.com
Sheryl Budnik—sherylbudnik.com
Chris Elliman—daftpixel.com
Justin Kellner—justinkellner.com
Sarah Knill—sarahknill.com
Sabrina McLaughlin—
sabinamclaughlin.com
Asenath Mustang—
asenathmustang.com
Christopher Schneider—schneida.com
Sue Schneider—
sueschneidermixedmedia.com



AROUND THE CENTER

This year has been another exceptional one at the Center. Our staff and fellows, and their projects, keep us on the cutting edge of research in philosophy of religion and analytic theology.

Research Initiatives

Our two large grant projects, *The Experience Project* and *Hope & Optimism: Conceptual and Empirical Investigations*, are nearing the midway point. We funded 40 projects in philosophy, analytic theology, and the social sciences through these two research initiatives this year. This research explores a fascinating and diverse range of topics including whether hope justifies religious faith and whether we can experience God's absence, to list just two. Both grants are successfully building bridges to the wider public. We received nearly 800 submissions from playwrights for our Hope on Stage competition funded through *Hope & Optimism*. The winning play will premiere in New York and L.A. in Spring 2017. The *Experience Project* also has garnered the attention of many, including David Brooks in *The New York Times*.

The *Analytic Theology Project* continues to make a significant impact nearly two years after its official close in 2014. Through funding from this project, the annual Analytic Theology Lecture, in conjunction with the AAR and SBL, was established.



Past speakers include Eleonore Stump, Alan Torrance, Marilyn McCord Adams, and Oliver Crisp. In November 2015, Nicholas Wolterstorff delivered his lecture, "The Liturgical Knowledge of God." Sarah Coakley will deliver the lecture in 2016. This project is partly responsible for creating a new academic discipline. This year, no fewer than ten Ph.D. fellowships and postdocs in analytic theology are being offered worldwide.

Events

Our grant projects and annual fellowship program bring top scholars from around the world to Notre Dame. Such proximity fosters professional collaboration and friendships as fellows interact through a variety of activities. On most Fridays, fellows are joined by Notre Dame faculty, graduate students, and visiting scholars to discuss works-in-progress. This year, we have discussed a range of topics, including horrendous evils and optimism, Leibniz and

physics, disembodied animals, perceiving God's absence, and the nature of divine forgiveness. The engaging conversations often continue over lunch in the philosophy department lounge (or outside when the weather's nice!) and over a pint at our weekly pub nights each Thursday held at local venues, of which there are a growing number in the South Bend area.

On November 13, 2015, our Alvin Plantinga fellow, Jeffrey McDonough, Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University, delivered the Fourteenth Annual Alvin Plantinga Fellow Lecture, titled "Leibniz's Formal Theory of Contingency."

The Center continues to engage the undergraduate community at Notre Dame through our popular *Food for Thought* series. Along with a catered meal, we bring a speaker to campus to give a lecture followed by Q & A and small group discussions. In November 2015, Notre Dame philosopher Blake



Roeber presented “Can Atheists Know Anything?” In February 2016, one of our *Hope and Optimism Project* fellows, Anne Jeffrey (Ph.D., Georgetown), presented “How Tolerant Can Religious Believers Be?” To see our promotional video, visit philreligion.nd.edu and search for Food for Thought.

Videos

Our video archive of philosophy of religion and analytic theology interviews and roundtables is growing. This year alone, we’ve added nearly 20 new videos on topics ranging from transformative and religious experiences to experimental


philosophy of religion. Follow us on Facebook for an upcoming series of videos on hope and optimism to be released during the 2016-2017 academic year. All Center video content can be found by searching for Videos on our website: philreligion.nd.edu.

Global Calendar

We update our *Global Philosophy of Religion Calendar* (available on the Center website) weekly so those interested in philosophy of religion can stay informed of upcoming events and opportunities in the discipline. Please send updates to: philreligion@nd.edu.

Logos Workshop

The Eighth Annual Logos Workshop in Philosophical Theology will be held on May 5-7 at Notre Dame. The theme of this year’s workshop is *Sin*. The Logos Workshop fosters interaction between analytic philosophers and theologians on topics of common interest. Registration is required for the conference, but is open to anyone who would like to attend. Please visit our website to register and to find further details.

Thanks to all who have made 2015-2016 a resounding success at the Center! 

What is the forgiveness of sins?

Brandon Warmke

Many of us were taught from our mother’s knee that God loves us and forgives us for our sins. Indeed, billions of theists of many stripes take comfort in the thought that God has forgiven them for the wrong things they have done. But what is it for God to forgive us? I suspect many of us have some idea of what it means to forgive other humans. But what is the nature of God’s forgiveness? It is striking—to me, anyway—that this question is so difficult to answer.

One currently popular theory of human forgiveness says that we forgive by overcoming our anger, resentment, and bitterness towards those who have wronged us. If we apply this to divine forgiveness, then God forgives us by ceasing to be angry, resentful, and bitter towards us because of our sins. Yet this view assumes, not only that God has emotional responses to our wrongdoing (a rejection of the so-called doctrine of “divine impassibility”), but also that God has emotional responses that are morally suspect. Would a perfect moral being feel anger, resentment, and bitterness?

Here is a different way to think about divine forgiveness. Because of our sin we deserve divine punishment. God forgives us, however, by commuting our sentence. God forgives by pardoning us. One problem with this approach, however, is that pardon from punishment and forgiveness are two different things. A governor may commute a criminal’s sentence without forgiving him or her. Indeed, the

Perhaps we can glimpse divine forgiveness by attending more carefully to human forgiveness.

governor—as a relative stranger—may be in no position to forgive in the first place! And so it may be that God pardons us from deserved punishment, but this would not mean that God’s forgiveness *just is* pardon from punishment.

Perhaps, instead, God forgives us by reconciling a relationship with us. After all, when we wrong other humans, this typically hurts our relationships with

them: we withdraw friendly relations and lose trust, for example. Similarly, our sin separates us from God. God forgives, it might be thought, by reconciling with us and repairing this relationship. But here, too, we should be careful to distinguish forgiving from reconciling. It is natural to think that forgiveness typically leads to or results in reconciliation. But this does not mean that forgiveness *just is* reconciliation.

Let me suggest another approach. In multiple places, Scripture places divine and human forgiveness side by side (e.g., Mt. 6:12, 6:15; Eph. 4:32). Perhaps we can glimpse divine forgiveness by attending more carefully to human forgiveness. Consider what happens when someone wrongs us. Typically, we are permitted to blame him or her in various ways: we can demand apology, request restitution, perhaps even censure or denounce. Upon forgiving, however, we give up this blaming stance; we cease to hold the wrong against our wrongdoer. Additionally, when we forgive, we also release our wrongdoer from certain kinds of obligations. For when others wrong us, we are typically owed



CHRISTOPHER SCHNEIDER: ANOTHER PLACE, ANOTHER TIME #8

apologies, expressions of remorse and sorrow, restitution, and perhaps penance.

Forgiveness is a way of releasing the wrongdoer from many of these personal obligations. This is perhaps why being forgiven is often described as freeing, as a kind of release or cancellation of a debt. When we forgive, therefore, we give up our blaming stance and release wrongdoers from certain personal obligations to us. Can something similar be said in the case of divine forgiveness? Perhaps so.


One reason we blame others is to draw attention to their misdeeds, and to call them to apologize, repent, and reconcile. It might be that God engages in an analogous form of “divine blame.” Our doing wrong elicits from God a certain kind of response—an intervention into our lives that draws our sin to our attention, prompts us to apologize, make restitution, provide penance, and repent. This is

perhaps one work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When God forgives us, God does so by giving up this “divine blaming” stance. God moves on and no longer holds this wrong against us as we learn from our mistakes and continue to build our character. But we are to move on, too. Upon being forgiven, we are no longer obligated to

When we forgive we give up our blaming stance and release wrongdoers from certain personal obligations to us.

keep on apologizing, repenting, offering penance, etc. We are released from our debt. We are not required to wallow in our failure and defeat.

It is likely that there are problems with this approach as well. It might be thought, for

example, that God never takes up a kind of “blaming stance” towards us. But then what is God’s forgiveness? It is likely that there is an important sense in which the details of divine forgiveness will remain a mystery. But like many matters of life and faith, perhaps we are only expected to trust that we can be forgiven, and that this forgiveness, whatever it is, opens up a good life with God that is not otherwise possible. 



Removing Guilt



Oliver D. Crisp
Fuller Theological Seminary

From Original Sin

What exactly *is* original sin? There is no single answer to that question in the Christian tradition. In Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, the central idea is *privative*: original sin is the privation of something that human beings once possessed, original justice or righteousness. Much historic Protestant theology stemming from the Reformation takes a slightly different view: original sin is a *moral corruption* that affects human beings downstream from some act of primal sin committed by our aboriginal parents. Suppose we follow the Protestant tradition. Then, original sin is the moral corruption that applies to all human beings (barring Christ) after the fall of Adam and Eve. According to a number of Protestant theologians, each fallen human being (barring Christ) is not merely born in a state of sin but is also guilty of the sin of Adam. Thus, in addition to original sin as

moral corruption we have the claim that fallen human beings bear *original guilt* as well.

There are several deeply problematic aspects of this Protestant account of original sin. The first of these is the

Original sin is a *moral corruption* that affects human beings downstream from some act of primal sin committed by our aboriginal parents.

claim about an original human pair from whom we are all descended by natural generation, and whose primal sin affects all subsequent humans. Second, there is the question of the transmission of original

sin. How can the sin of one individual be transferred to another? Third, and closely related to this second point, is the question of the transfer of original guilt. How can guilt transfer from one individual to another?

Let us consider these difficulties in reverse order. It looks like guilt is a property that can't be transferred from one agent to another. Not only am I alone the person guilty of my sin, but in cases where the sin is entirely mine, I alone am blameworthy. Indeed, it seems deeply unjust for another to be held to account for a sin that is mine alone. (Some Christians think that this is just what happens in the case of atonement, where Christ steps in to take upon himself punishment that is due to other, fallen human beings. But even here it is not always clear that guilt really transfers to Christ since he is said to have

our sin and guilt *imputed* to him. To impute a thing to a person is to treat her *as if* she has that thing. It is to ascribe something to someone, which is hardly the same thing as saying that person *has* the property in question.)

What about the transference of original sin, then? If guilt does not transfer, what about sin? First, we need to be clear that original sin can be separated out from the rest of original sin. There are many Christian thinkers for whom original sin does not include original guilt. Suppose we leave original guilt to one side. What

is passed down via natural generation. The idea here is not that original sin is passed on by means of the biological process of procreation, like the passing on of genetic material. Original sin is not a physical quality, after all. It is a moral corruption. Nevertheless, it is transmitted via natural generation in a way analogous to the passing of a disease from parents to children.

Of course, if we inherit a disease, we may be sick as a consequence. But it is not our fault that we are sick or have the disease. Similarly, original sin may be like a

community from which subsequent human beings descend. Each of these options has

Similarly, original sin may be like a disease that is passed down from parents to children, and like a disease, it may be a corruption for which we are not culpable.

problems. But we may not have to decide between them. The idea that original sin is a moral corruption that is inherited, and



SUE SCHNEIDER: MISMATCH

about original sin? There are two main views on the transmission question in historic Protestantism. According to the first, the moral corruption of original sin may be transmitted from an aboriginal pair to the rest of humanity by imputation.

It seems deeply unjust for another to be held to account for a sin that is mine alone.

This amounts to God ascribing original sin to all humanity downstream of the first sin. According to the second, original sin

disease that is passed down from parents to children, and like a disease, it may be a corruption for which we are not culpable. Yet we may still be culpable for the sins we commit in a state of sin.

Finally, we turn to the matter of an aboriginal pair. Traditionally, theologians have insisted on an historic pair from which we are all descended. Under pressure from scientific advances and new developments in biblical studies, most modern theologians have treated it as a sort of myth or saga-like origins story, with Adam as a kind of everyman. Still others have taken Adam and Eve as mere placeholders for some first human

for which we are not culpable, alongside a rejection of original guilt, is consistent with each of these just-so stories. This may be a strength rather than a weakness of such an account of original sin—one that may commend it to theologians as well as those working in the natural sciences. 🙏





Optimism

BUDNIK: APPLE TREES DANCING

An interview with Lisa Bortolotti
University of Birmingham

How did you become interested in the topic of optimism?

LB: Optimism is a relatively new research interest for me. I have always been interested in irrationality, and for some time my main focus has been the investigation of delusional beliefs that are symptoms of mental disorders (e.g., “My wife has been replaced by an impostor”, “The FBI wants me dead”).

Delusions and excessively optimistic beliefs are both epistemically irrational. They are not supported by evidence and are not revised in light of counter evidence. Whereas delusions are thought to be harmful, excessive optimism is believed to enhance psychological wellbeing.

I am interested in investigating the relationship between the irrationality and the psychological benefits of excessively optimistic beliefs.

Self-enhancing beliefs can make us ill-prepared for the challenges lying ahead.

Is there more than one kind of optimistic belief?

LB: A distinction can be made between the *optimism bias*, which is a cognitive bias leading us to overestimate the likelihood of positive events and underestimate the likelihood of negative events (e.g., I am

not likely to develop a serious illness in the course of my life), and *self-enhancing beliefs*, inflated evaluations of ourselves (e.g., “I am a very charismatic public speaker”) or of our romantic partners (e.g., “My boyfriend is more attractive than average”). My research focuses on self-enhancing beliefs.

How are self-enhancing beliefs bad for us?

LB: Self-enhancing beliefs are instances of epistemic irrationality. They are badly supported by evidence, resistant to counter evidence, and likely to be false. Self-enhancing beliefs can also make us ill-prepared for the challenges lying ahead. If we are convinced that we are smarter and more talented than average and that

we will achieve good outcomes, then we might underestimate the extent to which we need to work to achieve our goals, leading to disappointment.

How are self-enhancing beliefs good for us?

LB: Consider the following scenarios. I believe I am an excellent public speaker, based on distorted memories about my past performances. This belief contributes to my self-esteem, and allows me to face my audience with confidence. As a result, my performance is better than it would have been otherwise. Now imagine that I am experiencing a difficult time with my partner. My belief that he is a very kind, smart and attractive person may be false, but gives me the motivation to explore some strategies to improve our relationship, leading to resolving our

differences in a positive way. In these cases, self-enhancing beliefs have positive effects.

How does your project engage a larger, non-academic audience?

LB: For the duration of the project, my collaborator Dr. Anneli Jefferson, research fellow at the University of Birmingham, will prepare monthly posts on optimism for the Imperfect Cognitions blog, including snapshots of our research made accessible to the general public and interviews with experts.

On 14th March 2016, we held a public engagement event as part of the Arts and Science Festival in Birmingham. The event was called “Tricked by Memory.” During the event, I chaired three short talks and moderate a question and answer session

with the audience. Magdalena Antrobus talked about depression, memory, and negative bias; Anneli Jefferson presented her work on how we distort the past to serve our present needs; and Kathy Puddifoot considered how false memory can improve our perception of the world. We have a project website: philosophyofoptimism.com and a Twitter feed (@optimismbias) to disseminate our research outputs as widely as possible. 🌱



Saint Anselm never wanted to be Archbishop of Canterbury. Born into a wealthy family in Burgundy in 1033, Anselm's happy childhood soured in adolescence. His mother died. His father became difficult. He wandered the countryside in search of pleasure, but ended up finding a home at the recently established Abbey of Bec. Gifted and pious, he was soon promoted to prior, and then, in 1078, to abbot. It is reported

Freedom is tied to promoting virtue, not to destroying it, to doing what is right, not to doing what is wrong.

that he wept at the thought of his new responsibilities. Later, dukes, bishops and even the King of England pressured him to take up the position of archbishop. Anselm is said to have "almost worn himself to death" objecting before finally yielding and being enthroned 1093. He was soon thrust into the heart of the power struggle between church and state known today as the Investiture Controversy. More scholar than diplomat, Anselm was out of his depth. He endured being exiled twice before passing away 1109. One can only imagine him relieved.

When not occupied by the administrative responsibilities he hated, Anselm busied himself with the philosophical and theological reflections that he loved. In his elegant dialogue *On Free Choice of the Will*, Anselm asks a clever question: Does freedom of will presuppose the ability to sin? It is tempting to think so. One might suppose that a creature that could do no wrong could also do no right, or at least could do no right *freely*. Anselm, however, answers his own question negatively, insisting that "the ability to sin is no part of the freedom of the will." In support of his view, Anselm offers two lines of argument. First, he maintains that God, although incapable of sinning, is free above all. If God is maximally free and cannot sin, then, Anselm reasons, the ability to sin must not



ELIJAH: TWO FACES

Freedom and the

be essential to freedom itself. Second, he argues that no one is made freer by being susceptible to harm. One's freedom isn't increased by, say, the ability to be sick or injured. But what, Anselm asks, could be more harmful than sin? To be unable to sin, he concludes, is a sign of greater, not lesser, freedom. If the ability to sin is no part of freedom, we might wonder if we can sin freely. After all, it might seem that if the ability to sin is no part of freedom, then our ability to sin must not be due to our being free, and so must occur independently of our being free, that is "of necessity." Taking up precisely this worry, Anselm makes a subtle move. In effect, he argues that our ability to sin is grounded in our ability to preserve virtue, in our ability to uphold what is right. More specifically, we sin by failing to preserve our virtue, by failing to uphold what is right. Since we

are free not to preserve our virtue, not to uphold what is right, Anselm reasons, we are also free to sin, and that in spite of the fact that our ability to sin is no part of freedom itself. If we lost our ability to fail in preserving our virtue, if we were no longer able not to uphold what is right, we could no longer sin, but we would still be free.

No one is made freer by being susceptible to harm.


Indeed we would be freer since freedom is tied to promoting virtue, not to destroying it, to doing what is right, not to doing what is wrong. Anselm's reasoning points the



their account is the thought that the sense of freedom we have most reason to care about is the freedom to achieve well-being, and that the freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of our ability to promote ends we have

Like Anselm, Christians are in a position to distinguish between bare freedom from constraints and freedom to realize what is right, good, and truly beneficial.

reason to value. A child born into a society with few laws but much poverty should, in their view, be counted as less free than a child born into a society with many laws but little poverty. To promote freedom, in their view, is to promote people's capacities to lead healthy, happy, human lives.

The capabilities approach has largely been a secular movement, a movement grounded in public policy and Aristotelian philosophy. But it is a conception of freedom that Christians might find attractive as well. For Christians, as Christians, have recourse to a robust conception of a full human life and what capacities are required to realize such a life. Like Anselm, they are in a position to distinguish between bare freedom from constraints and freedom to realize what is right, good, and truly beneficial. Perhaps they are also uniquely positioned to appreciate how Anselm, compelled to serve the Church throughout his life, might nonetheless have counted himself as supremely free. 

Ability to Sin

Jeffrey McDonough

way towards an understanding of freedom that is often neglected today.

Many people today think of freedom in terms of the absence of constraints. Philosophers may argue that we cannot be free if our actions are constrained by causal laws and antecedent events. Citizens may think that civic laws — constraints imposed by the government — necessarily diminish our freedoms. To Anselm's way of thinking, however, the essence of freedom is not to be found in either the absence of constraint or in the right to do anything whatsoever. By such a measure, he reckons, we would have to say that God, unable to do wrong, is less free than we are. On Anselm's understanding, the essence of freedom is to be found rather in the ability to do what is right, good, and beneficial. On

such an understanding, our freedom isn't necessarily diminished by the imposition of constraints. We might be free even if our actions are constrained by causal laws and antecedent events. We might be more, not less, free when constrained by laws that promote the good and prevent the bad.

To promote freedom, in their view, is to promote people's capacities to lead healthy, happy, human lives.

One can see an echo of Anselm's conception of freedom in the "capability approach" recently developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Central to



Dangerous Despair

“Nothing is more hateful than despair, for the man that has it loses his constancy both in the every day toils of this life, and, what is worse, in the battle of faith.”

—Aquinas on Proverbs 24:10



Could despair be a sin? Thomas Aquinas calls despair “the most dangerous sin” in his treatment of habits in the *Summa Theologica*. On reflection, it is hard to see how he could be right. First, despair seems to assail us: it is not the result of free decision. But sin is voluntary. So despair is just not the right kind of thing to be a sin. Second, despair is a fitting response in certain circumstances. It is hard to see anything wrong with a Syrian refugee despairing when she witnesses another ISIS attack or with a person despairing after getting news that her cancer is back.

When Aquinas calls despair the most dangerous sin, he is not referring to despair as an aversion to particular things that seem good but hard to obtain. Such despair could be involuntary — as when my stomach starts churning just thinking about the job I want because it’s so unlikely I’ll get the offer. It could also be appropriate — for instance, becoming a Heisman trophy winner might be a great good, and perhaps it was a dream of yours for many years; but if you are not a world-class athlete by the time you reach college, it seems entirely appropriate to despair of and abandon that dream. Driving across the state to pay your relative a visit might be a good under some circumstances, but not in a blizzard; you are hardly to blame if the weather causes you to despair and give up on pursuing that good in light of the other goods, like your health and safety, that outweigh it in that case.

While it may be appropriate for us to despair about things that are good in a qualified sense — good sometimes but not others, or good but outweighable by other goods or bads — Aquinas says that it is never appropriate to despair about this universal good. The universal good is anything that constitutes our final end as human beings, in which we find ultimate happiness and satisfaction. Despairing about this good is a grave sin.

If despair is justified when the good desired is unattainable and so we would pursue it in vain, couldn’t despair about the universal good be justified if it were

impossible for us to bring it about? This question is even more pressing for Aquinas, since he claims that the universal good is union with God. And this is hardly something achievable by the efforts of finite and sinful creatures.

If our natural capacities had the last word, then despair about the universal good would be appropriate since such a good would be impossible for us to achieve. But, Aquinas explains, it’s possible for a friend to help me attain a good. As it happens, God mercifully offers us His help in achieving union with Him. So it is possible for us to attain union with God.

Hope draws our attention away from our own inadequacies and towards God’s commitment to our good.

Aquinas explains that, unlike cases where we justifiably despair about qualified goods having reasoned rightly about them, we only come to despair about the unqualified good through a *willful neglect* of God’s offer of help. Such neglect comes about through voluntary acts on our part: either through sloth — dwelling on sorrows about our own inadequacies — or through lust — treating lower pleasures as outweighing the ultimate good because they are easier to obtain.

Such despair is especially dangerous because it causes us to give up hope, draining our motivation to avoid evils or pursue goods in everyday life. If my ultimate happiness is unattainable, why bother trying to do what’s right or avoid what’s bad in order to obtain that happiness? On Aquinas’s view, if I think union with God is impossible for me, I will fail to be motivated to do good works to prepare for that union, and I will “fall headlong into sin.”

The general principle is that we lose the will to pursue mundane goods when we despair about more ultimate goods. This is borne out poignantly by a story a friend recently told me. This friend worked with women in a slum in Uganda who had been raped and contracted HIV. They were given free medicine, but the majority of them didn’t take it. When my friend asked why, they said saw no point in getting healthy because they didn’t think their lives had any meaning.

The turning point for these women was an invitation to join a local Christian community, whose members loved and valued the women more than they loved and valued themselves. The women reported that this gave them hope for a meaningful life, and they started taking the HIV medicine they’d been given.

How do we steer clear of the most dangerous sin? Well, strictly speaking, we don’t do anything. God, rather, gives us the virtue of hope. Hope draws our attention away from our own inadequacies and towards God’s commitment to our good. Aquinas takes Job to be an exemplar of hope; Job refused to believe that God was not able to work out the devastating losses he experienced for his ultimate good.

Hope’s importance in the life of faith can’t be easily overstated, as it is the motivational ground of our pursuit of being united with God. And fortunately, there is no such thing as having too much hope. For “it is impossible to hope too much for Divine assistance.” 🙏





Paul
Blaschko

University of
Notre Dame

Philosophy as Vocation

One thing academic philosophers occasionally laugh about over cocktails is the puzzling reactions we get when we tell strangers what we do for work. This information is met, with surprising frequency, by a question along the lines of “So what’s your philosophy?”

I didn’t then, nor do I now, think that my work in philosophy is “just my day job.”

The question is funny because it comes across as confused and a little absurd. It’d be like asking a physicist what *her* physics is. Contrary to the role it plays in the popular imagination, philosophy is just an academic discipline. It’s a profession, and it bears little resemblance to the wandering schools of thought led by our bearded Greek ancestors.

Until recently, my response to this question reflected this understanding — call it “The Professional View” — of my discipline. “Being a philosopher,” I would say, “is just my day job.”

But lately I’ve been growing increasingly anxious about this answer.

In my view, there are three main problems with it. First, there’s the notorious question of whether and how philosophy

makes intellectual progress. Unlike doctors or scientists we philosophers are unable to point to medical or technological breakthroughs to justify the cultural value of our profession. Our most celebrated breakthroughs — Descartes’s *Cogito*, for instance, or Kant’s *Categorical Imperative* — only seem to underscore the abstract, impractical nature of our discipline. Finally, conceiving of philosophy in the aforementioned way seemingly vindicates the widespread suspicion that philosophy is trivia, an esoteric game played by a privileged few.

In addition to these concerns, there’s the fact that The Professional View just doesn’t do justice to my own vision of what philosophy can be. The reason I

Like Samuel, many of us Christian philosophers feel that we have a special calling to pursue philosophy, that our profession provides us the occasion to respond to “vox dei,” the voice of God.

majoring in philosophy, decided to get my Ph.D., and the reason I’m training to write complex academic articles, is that the value of truth got a grip on me. The emptiness of ideological rhetoric paints

over a vibrant, pulsing world with dull and obscuring shades of gray. My pursuit of a career in the *discipline* of philosophy is, in some ways, instrumental: I took it to be my best shot at garnering the time and resources to pursue truth full time. I didn’t then, nor do I now, think that my work in philosophy is “just my day job.”

So we need to abandon The Professional View, but what could we put in its place? And how would such an alternative get around the problems outlined above?

This past semester I explored this question with a number of my colleagues. Together, we asked whether there was any value in seeing our work in philosophy as a “vocation,” a concept we had mainly inherited from our religious traditions.

To modern ears, the word “vocation” might sound like a job one feels particularly passionate about, or to which one feels a “special calling.” The latter is a bit more etymologically accurate. “Vocation” comes (through Middle English and French) from the Latin “vocare,” which means “to call.” Its Latin root is “vox,” meaning “voice.” It’s the word Jerome used in the Vulgate to describe the prophetic call of Samuel: “Et venit Dominus, et stetit, et vocavit...” *And the Lord came, and stood, and called...*

This conception — call it “The Vocational View” of philosophy — takes on special significance for the Christian philosopher.

Like Samuel, many of us Christian philosophers feel that we have a special calling to pursue philosophy, that our profession provides us the occasion to respond to “vox dei,” the voice of God.

How does The Vocational View fare with regard to the problems we raised for The Professional View above?

First, the pursuit of truth and understanding is given both individual and communal applications within this framework. The Christian philosopher pursues truth wholeheartedly, and trusts that her efforts will result in a deeper understanding of God, the source and summit of truth. This aspect of Christian spirituality has often been referred to as

Christian philosophers are called to put their love of the truth above all other commitments *for the good of the communities to which they belong.*

“contemplative” activity, and has long been held as essential to a full, healthy Christian life.

The Christian philosopher also sees her intellectual efforts as part of a greater communal enterprise. The pursuit of truth advances the mission of her church to spread the gospel in charity. Far from an impractical exercise, then, the Christian philosopher trusts that her efforts will culminate in an encounter with truth that will transform her, and allow her to spread that transformative understanding to those in her community.

Finally, Christian philosophers are called to put their love of the truth — and their skill in uncovering it through argumentation —

above all other commitments *for the good of the communities to which they belong.* This might mean bolstering the reasonability of faith by carefully examining the grounds for particular doctrines and dogma, but it can also

“My philosophy,” I’ll tell him, “is that life is best lived in the humble pursuit of understanding, for the glory of God, and for the good of his creation.”

mean helping our communities engage with the most pressing political, social, and personal problems in our world. By critically examining the sources of systematic injustice, for instance, we put ourselves and our characteristic skills at the service of the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So the next time someone asks me what “my philosophy” is, I’ll take it as an opportunity. Not to preach, or to wax eloquent about an abstract love of wisdom, but to do what I think characterizes my vocation as a philosopher: I’ll tell the truth and invite him to join me in pursuit of it.

“My philosophy,” I’ll tell him, “is that life is best lived in the humble pursuit of understanding, for the glory of God, and for the good of his creation.” 🙌



Skepticism

KELLNER:
LISTEN FOR THE SWEET SWEET SWEET AT MAPLE RIVER

An Interview with Michael Bergmann

How did you become interested in the topic of skepticism?

MB: As an undergraduate, the philosophy classes that drew me to studying skepticism were those on the modern period, roughly from Descartes to Kant. These philosophers wondered whether we can trust our senses and how we can know there is an external world. In reading them I was surprised by how difficult it was to respond to these skeptical challenges in a satisfying way. It wasn't until I discovered the works of the 18th century philosopher Thomas Reid that I found a way of approaching skepticism that seemed plausible to me. Reid was convinced by his predecessors that we didn't have any good arguments that independently verified the trustworthiness of our senses. What was refreshing to me was his view that it is philosophically respectable to deal with skeptical worries by trusting our senses without relying on such arguments.

What is radical skepticism and why should we care about it?

MB: Radical skepticism is the view that large groups of our beliefs, ones we rely on in everyday life, aren't rational. One example is the view that our perceptual beliefs aren't rational. Similar skeptical attitudes could be taken toward our memory beliefs or beliefs based on

logical or mathematical insight. Although many people have a passing interest in this kind of skepticism (enough to find a movie like *The Matrix* interesting), few spend much time worrying about whether their perceptual beliefs are mistaken or irrational. Nevertheless, I think it is worth thinking about how best to respond to the challenge of radical skepticism because doing so provides valuable lessons concerning how best to respond to the more interesting and worrisome skeptical challenges that are directed at our moral and religious beliefs.

How does skepticism threaten our moral and religious beliefs?

MB: One worry is that we could have the evidence we do have for our moral and religious beliefs even if they were false, which shows that the evidence for these beliefs doesn't guarantee their truth. Another concern is due to a recognition of persistent disagreement on moral and religious topics with people who seem to be as well-informed and as good at responding to evidence as we are. A third difficulty comes from evolutionary accounts of the origins of our moral and religious belief-forming habits. Hearing that these belief-forming habits would have evolved as they did *whether or not* they were reliable casts doubt on these beliefs.

What would you say to a religious believer who worries that skepticism threatens her religious belief?

MB: Be cautious about accepting the assumptions behind skeptical threats; they often rely on epistemic principles that are independently problematic. For example, it's not plausible to think it is a general truth that evidence is adequate only if it guarantees truth or that belief sources must be independently verified before we can rationally trust them or that in order to know something we must be able to give an argument for it or an uncontroversial explanation of how we know it. Also, keep in mind that one's goal in responding to skepticism needn't be to satisfy the skeptical objector. Instead, it might be to consider, from one's own critical perspective, what is rationally required in the face of skeptical threats, which might not be what the skeptic thinks. These points apply to radical skepticism and to moral and religious skepticism. 🙏



The Center for Philosophy of Religion presents

The 8th Annual **Logos Workshop in
Philosophical Theology**

fostering interaction between analytic philosophers
and theologians on topics of common interest

Sin

May 5–7, 2016
University of Notre Dame

**Registration required
by April 29, 2016**

Information

philreligion.nd.edu/logos
logos@nd.edu



Women and the Church – Panel Discussion

Thursday, September 22, 2016, 7-9 pm

Notre Dame Conference Center at McKenna Hall



Rachel Held Evans
Columnist, Blogger, Author



Mary Rice Hasson
Fellow at the Ethics and
Public Policy Center



Sister Simone Campbell
Executive Director of NETWORK



Moderator:
Kathleen Sprows Cummings
Director of the Cushwa Center for the
Study of American Catholicism

Visit philreligion.nd.edu/womenandthechurch for more information.

MEET THE CENTER: 2015-2016



Max Baker-Hytch—*Religious Experience Residential Fellow*

Max completed his D.Phil. in philosophy at Oxford in 2014 under the supervision of Brian Leftow. Subsequently he went on to hold a postdoctoral fellowship as part of John Hawthorne's New Insights in Religious Epistemology project which was based in the philosophy department at Oxford. Max's research interests are principally in epistemology and philosophy of religion, and he has published on such topics as epistemic defeaters, divine hiddenness, the epistemological implications of naturalistic explanations of religious belief, and the problem of religious diversity.



Matthew A. Benton—*Hope & Optimism Residential Fellow*

Matt Benton is Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Hope and Optimism project. Before coming to Notre Dame, he was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in philosophy at the University of Oxford, in the New Insights for Religious Epistemology project led by John Hawthorne. He earned his Ph.D. from Rutgers University in 2012. Matt's main research is in epistemology and some related areas of philosophy of language and philosophy of religion. He is completing a monograph on *Knowledge and Language* and is co-editor of *Knowledge, Belief, and God: New Insights*, under consideration at Oxford University Press.



Michael Bergmann—*Senior Fellow in Religious Experience*

Michael Bergmann is Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University, where he has taught since 1997, the same year he received his Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame. Professor Bergmann's research areas are epistemology, philosophy of religion, and metaphysics. He is currently working on a book responding to radical, moral, and religious skepticism.



Anne Jeffrey—*Hope & Optimism Residential Fellow*

Anne Jeffrey received her Ph.D. in philosophy from Georgetown University in the spring of 2015. Anne specializes in normative ethics (especially the history of ethics) and metaethics. Other of her research and teaching interests include political and legal philosophy, ancient Greek philosophy, bioethics, and philosophy of religion. While at Notre Dame, Anne will be working on questions about the virtue of hope.



Jeffrey McDonough—*Alvin Plantinga Fellow*

Jeff McDonough is Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University, where he has taught since 2005 after receiving his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of California—Irvine. His research interests include early modern and medieval philosophy, philosophy of science, metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of religion. Jeff will be spending the year at the Center working on a number of book length projects including a course book on the philosophy of religion, a monograph on optimality in Leibniz's philosophy, an edited volume on teleology for the Oxford Philosophical Concepts series, and a number of shorter pieces.



Carl Mosser—*Visiting Scholar*

Carl Mosser received his Ph.D. from the University of St. Andrews and is formerly Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. His research focuses on the Second Temple Jewish context of the New Testament, the epistle to the Hebrews, Christian doctrines of deification, Mormonism, and select issues within philosophy of religion and constructive Christian theology. Professor Mosser has co-edited three books and published some twenty academic essays.



Francisco O'Reilly—*Visiting Scholar*

Francisco O'Reilly is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Montevideo (Uruguay), where he has taught since 2010, after receiving his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Navarra (Spain). He is also Adjunct Professor of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy at the University of the Republic (Uruguay). His research interests include medieval philosophy, metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Professor O'Reilly has received one of the Oxford Templeton Latin America Scholarships given by the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion (University of Oxford) in order to spend twelve weeks at the Center working on a paper on creation as the action of a personal God.



Allison Krile Thornton—*Visiting Graduate Fellow*

Allison is visiting from Baylor University, where she is in her fifth year of the doctoral program and is currently writing a dissertation directed by Alex Pruss. Allison's primary research is in metaphysics. She also has interests in epistemology and philosophy of religion, and has written and presented papers on fallibilism, epistemic modals, divine causation, personal identity, prayer, and the afterlife. During her fellowship, Allison plans on completing her dissertation on animalism, the view that we are animals.



Brandon Warmke—*Religious Experience Residential Fellow*

Brandon received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Arizona in 2014. He spent the 2014-15 year as a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Character Project at Wake Forest University. His primary areas of research are ethics and moral psychology, with a particular focus on the nature and norms of forgiveness, blame, and punishment. Brandon also works on the morality of public discourse, the nature of moral responsibility, and the virtues. He is editing (with Michael McKenna and Dana Nelkin) a collection of new essays on forgiveness for Oxford University Press.

Center Staff



Graduate Student Research Assistant

Liz Jackson



Graduate Student Research Assistant

Rachel Jonker



Director of Research; William J. and Dorothy K. O'Neill Associate Professor of Philosophy

Samuel Newlands



Director; Professor of Philosophy

Michael Rea



Program Director

Joshua Seachris



Administrative Assistant

Joyce Zurawski



Center for
Philosophy
of Religion

418 Malloy Hall
Notre Dame, IN 46556

Subscribe to Logoi:
philreligion.nd.edu/subscribe

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Notre Dame, IN
Permit No. 10

Complete our 3-minute survey
by May 10, 2016 to enter to win
a \$50 Amazon gift card:



philreligion.nd.edu/survey

