



UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

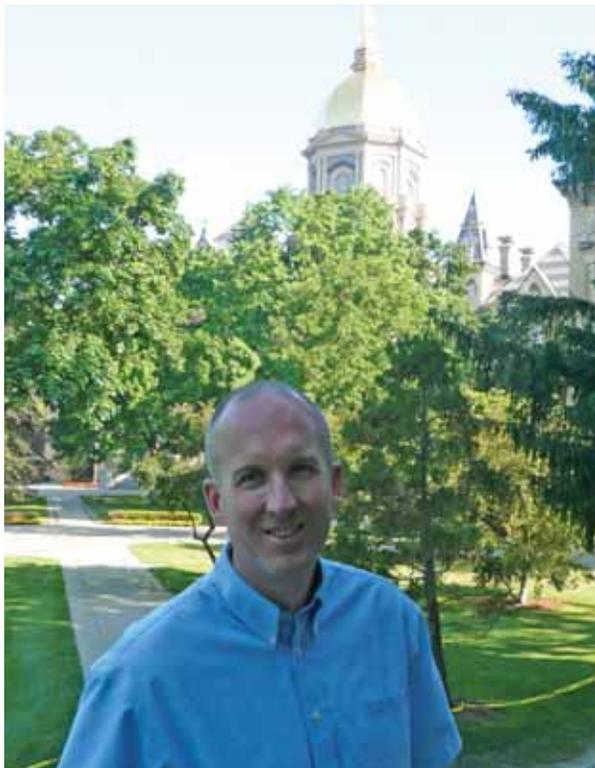
Center for Philosophy of Religion

Spring 2011 Newsletter

Notes from the Director

Dear Colleagues and Friends of the Center, We are now in our second year of the “Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought” project, which has funded three of our residential research fellows this year and supported a major academic conference in September in honor of the 300th anniversary of the publication of Leibniz’s *Theodicy*. We

also opened the 2010-2011 academic year with the announcement of another large-scale project, entitled “Analytic Theology: The Convergence of Philosophy and Theology.” This project, also funded with generous support from the John Templeton Foundation, is part of a multi-national endeavor to promote greater dialogue and cross-fertilization between the fields of philosophy and theology. We will be running conferences, supporting research fellows, funding interdisciplinary courses and discussion groups, and much more both here at Notre Dame and also abroad in Germany, Austria, and Israel. (For details, see www.analytictheology.org) We are also continuing to sponsor several programs for undergraduates, including the *Food for Thought* series and the second installment of “The God Debate,” featuring Sam Harris and William Lane Craig. Be sure to check out our re-designed web page to see if any of what we are doing might benefit you.



Center Director, Michael Rea

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History: Made and Making

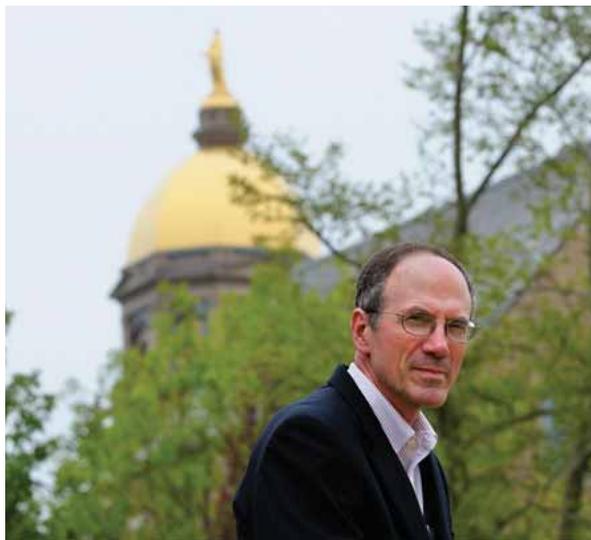
By Mark A. Noll, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History, University of Notre Dame

The Alvin Plantinga retirement conference at Notre Dame on May 20-22, 2010, was a feast for the philosophically minded. As a non-philosopher privileged to sit in on many of the sessions, I saw no reason to doubt the judgment of C. Stephen Evans from Baylor's philosophy department that "many papers displayed dazzling virtuosity and technical ingenuity." (Books & Culture website) Yet in addition, although the papers, with one exception, featured the philosophers' usual fastidiousness about precision of statement and logical ordering of propositions, they were obviously dealing with large questions affecting humankind in general instead of just in-group considerations of interest only to the guild. Making an effort to follow the arguments resulted not just in clarified argumentation, but also in challenges to think carefully about real-world ethics, human mental capacities, human moral responsibility, Christian doctrine, and God.

The one paper that broke the mold was Nicholas Wolterstorff's autobiographical tour d'horizon, "Then, Now, and AI." It offered Wolterstorff's reflections on the sixty years since as a sophomore at Calvin College he had first met Plantinga, on the dramatic alterations in professional philosophy that have taken place during the intervening six decades, and on the contribution of Al Plantinga to those dramatic alterations. The critical point of Wolterstorff's insightful and often moving address was that in 1950 the notion of Christian philosophy was almost unimaginable, while in 2010 Christian philosophy was very much

alive and well due in substantial part to the efforts of Plantinga, Plantinga's like-minded colleagues, the students they had trained, and the broad impact they had exerted. Wolterstorff, in other words, expatiated explicitly on what was being demonstrated implicitly as the conference unfolded.

Christian philosophy, as illustrated at the May gathering, does not mean a triumphalist or party-line parade of boisterous assertions; it means instead careful, analytical, refined, and penetrating philosophical inquiry where Christian questions, Christian frameworks, Christian dogma, and Christian attitudes are simply taken for granted as part of the enterprise. Moreover, although I'm quite sure I did not catch



Mark Noll, courtesy of William Koechling

the nuances of what was happening in many of the sessions, some of the best of them seemed to involve unbelievers challenging various points defended by Plantinga and other believers, or believing philosophers taking on various points in Plantinga's version of Christian philosophy. The sessions, in other words, exhibited a remarkable intellectual openness as well as a remarkable

transparency of Christian concern.

For a historian witnessing such an event, it was inevitable that thoughts would go to how such maturity in Christian philosophy had come about and what that maturity represented. Those thoughts, in turn, led on to broader considerations of what scholars in other intellectual domains might gain from observing what has happened in philosophy.

Three related questions arose naturally from observing what was on display at the conference. How, intellectually considered, did Christian philosophy revive? How, considered in terms of social networks, did Christian philosophy spread so as to influence the discipline as a whole? And how, considered as a comment on the Plantinga celebration, does contemporary Christian philosophy reflect its Christian character?

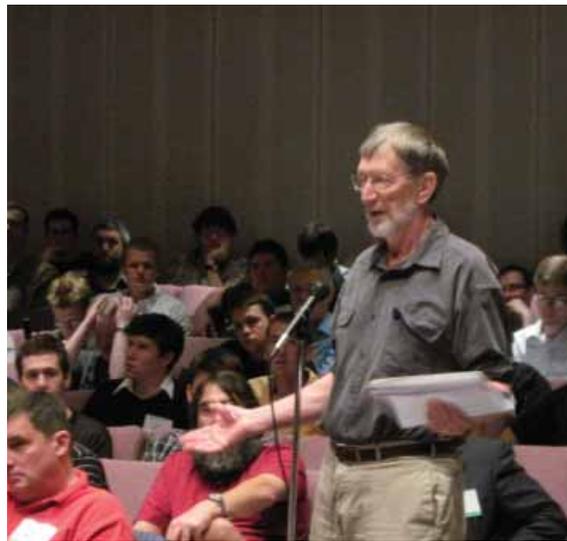
The outline of an answer to the first question was set out clearly in Plantinga's 1983 "Advice to Christian Philosophers," his inaugural lecture as the John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame. In that lecture, Plantinga stated explicitly as hortatory advice what he, Wolterstorff, and a small circle of others had already been doing for at least two decades. It was necessary, he said, for Christian philosophers to pay careful heed to the preoccupations and procedures of the discipline, but even more necessary not to allow those preoccupations and procedures to dictate what Christian philosophers tried to do. It was also necessary to think with greater integrity—or, in a philosopher's characteristic coinage, integrality—about how broader life concerns should properly encompass narrower disciplinary

concerns. And it was necessary to do philosophical work with courage of Christian convictions and self-confidence in Christian confession.

As an outsider to the discipline, it seems that the Plantinga injunctions come close to summarizing what has actually transpired. Christian philosophers have engaged fully in disciplinary practices and have in that process excelled in painstakingly careful analysis of language and also in deeply self-conscious reflection on how human perspectives shape the use of language. They have, in other words, contributed to both the scrupulosity of analytical philosophy and the heightened self-consciousness attending the modern “linguistic turn.” Yet, crucially, Christian philosophers have gone beyond the standard academic fixations on language, its inner relationships, and its hegemonic uses to insist that philosophers must never abandon concern for what language refers to. One of the most telling moments in Wolterstorff’s paper was when he pointed out how important it was that Plantinga’s 1967 book was entitled *God and Other Minds* and not *Language about God*.

Christian philosophy has also revived because of the skill with which philosophical insights have been used to explore theological issues. One of the hardest things to imagine from the perspective of 1950 is that within a generation first-order philosophical forums (articles, papers, conferences, university press books) would have become the venue for high-level philosophical engagement with topics like the Trinity, the Incarnation of Christ, the atonement, and other central Christian dogmas. Moreover, the flood tide of such work continues unabated, with a solid representation of such issues at the Plantinga conference. Christian philosophers have brought back

together philosophical and theological concerns. By doing so courageously and with integrity, they have not only redirected professional philosophy, but also given a much needed shot in the arm to professional theologians and great benefit to the interested lay public at large. Significantly, however,



Alvin Plantinga

they have done so mostly in service to generic “mere Christianity,” to a broad conception of traditional Christianity, rather than to any denominational variety of Christian faith.

The broad Christian basis of contemporary Christian philosophy helps answer the second question about how the networking developed that supports the intellectual and theological vitality so richly displayed at the Plantinga celebration. The conference itself showcased in microcosm the end products of an extraordinary history. Wolterstorff and Plantinga are two of the four APA presidents instructed by William Harry Jellema during his tenure at Calvin College (1920-1936, 1948-1963; the other two were O. K. Bouwsma and William Frankena). They were featured on a program with several scholars from Catholic institutions, with roughly one half of the presenters, commentators, and chairs from secular colleges and

universities, and with another fourth from evangelical Christian colleges. On the program were two philosophers from the Netherlands and one from Israel. Attending were philosophers from England, Iran (!), and China (!!). And the meeting was convened at the University of Notre Dame where Plantinga has taught for more than 25 years. The meeting witnessed, in other words, Abraham Kuyper and Thomas Aquinas in harness with the spiritual grandchildren of the philosophically inert D. L. Moody and aided by disparate representation from the old Christian West and the new Christian Non-West. Sixty years ago, most evangelicals colleges did not have philosophy departments; philosophy departments at secular universities might have tolerated philosophers who were Christians but not Christian philosophy; and the bridges between Dutch and American Christian traditions were few and far between. Fifty years ago Roman Catholics and confessional or

evangelical Protestants had very little use for one another for any purpose, including philosophy; China was considered “lost” to Christianity; and professional philosophy still pursued its positivist way.

In the changes that have taken place since and that were manifest at the recent conference, the efforts of philosophers like Plantinga and Wolterstorff have made a real difference. Yet that difference has played out against a large canvass that includes the Second Vatican Council (and the Catholic about-face on relations with other Christians), the intellectual awakening of American evangelical and post-fundamentalist Christianity (in which the Calvin crowd and Dutch-American publishers like Eerdmans played major roles), the exhaustion of secularism in mainstream academia (that was sped along by comrades in arms

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Nicholas Wolterstorff, Noah Porter Emeritus Professor at Yale University

like William Alston and conference attendees like Richard Swinburne), the Fulbright and other academic fellowships (which accelerated Dutch/European exchange with the United States), the dramatic cultural opening in post-Mao China (where the truth claims of Christian philosophers have proven amazingly interesting), and much more. The revival of Christian philosophy, in other words, has taken its place as both cause and effect in an

era of extraordinary change.

To answer the question about the Christian character of contemporary Christian philosophy it was only necessary to stay awake during the conference. Maybe I simply missed in-house barbs, put-downs, and grandstanding, but the strong impression with which I came away was that the conference was carried off with a graciousness exceedingly rare in academic circles. Arguments were contested but not ad hominem; intellectual blows were struck but not low blows; one upmanship seemed almost entirely sidelined by an effort to get at the truth of whatever was under discussion.

In addition, the number and vitality of younger philosophers was unusually impressive. As Stephen Evans noted, “it was amazing to see the number of superb younger philosophers at the conference.” The quantity of younger philosophers and the quality of their work testified eloquently to another reality: the older generation of Christian philosophers has been consistently

faithful to the vocation of teaching as well as to the vocation of scholarship. The fruits of their teaching—not as ego-enhancement but as self-giving empowerment passed on with insights, techniques, problems, and standards of integrity—were everywhere on display in Notre Dame’s McKenna Hall. Christian philosophy has been “Christian” for what it has done intellectually, but also for how its leaders have modeled Christian virtues and how they have expended energies on behalf of their students.

The Christian philosophical revival that Al Plantinga did so much to promote and that so many others have contributed so much to sustain offers much to other academics who hope to see the intellectual renewal and networking strength that now characterizes Christian philosophy. At least as expressed at the recent Notre Dame gathering, the balance of acumen and charity, “the greatest of these,” was the most impressive thing to watch as the philosophers got down to work.

The Year in Review

This last year has been an exciting one in every way for the Center. We have hosted scholars from around the globe and have significantly expanded our footprint in the problem of evil debate. The Center has likewise partnered with universities across the United States in developing workshops and seminars in philosophy of religion. At the same time we have renewed our commitment to the Notre Dame campus community and especially to its undergraduates by expanding our local lecture offerings.

In mid-September, with help from the John Templeton Foundation, the Center hosted a cutting-edge conference on Gottfried Leibniz’s *Theodicy*. The book is an early eighteenth-century classic in philosophy of religion and the problem of evil. The conference, entitled *Leibniz’s Theodicy: Content and Context*, highlighted a variety of topics in contemporary Leibniz scholarship. Among its program participants were such leading lights as Robert Merrihew



Center Director Mike Rea with Leibniz keynote speaker Robert Merrihew Adams

Adams (North Carolina), Marilyn McCord Adams (North Carolina), Jonathan Israel (Institute for Advanced



Philosophers Michael Murray and Robert Audi in debate at the Leibniz Conference

Study), and Daniel Garber (Princeton). Without exception, every one of the conference sessions was well-attended – both by scholars from around the world and by members of the Notre Dame community (lots of undergraduates too!). The success of the conference was so great that the organizers are already planning for a similarly-styled conference, ‘Leibniz’s Theodicy: Legacy and Relevance,’ which will take place in Lisbon, Portugal in 2012. Stay tuned for further details.

Immediately prior to the Leibniz conference the Center hosted an exciting workshop on Pierre Bayle and the problem of evil. Guests were treated to a full-course meal as they listened to accomplished lecturers deliver papers on Bayle, skepticism, and theodicy. Among the featured lecturers were visiting center fellows Michael Hickson (Santa Clara University) and Todd Ryan (Trinity College). During their year at the Center, Hickson and Ryan are working on topics at the forefront

of the recent revival in Bayle scholarship. The Bayle workshop is just one of the many activities that the Center has sponsored as part of its ongoing 4-year research initiative, “The Problem of Evil in Modern Contemporary Thought” (www.evilandtheodicy.com).

In October visiting Center fellow Paul Draper (Purdue University) delivered the Ninth Annual Alvin Plantinga Fellow Lecture to a full house in the Eck Center on the Notre Dame campus. Professor Draper’s lecture focused on natural evils and their implications for our debates about the existence of God. Supplementing his delivery with some well-chosen Powerpoint slides, Professor Draper spoke to an overflowing auditorium that included scholars from area colleges and of course a large contingent from the Notre Dame faculty and undergraduate communities. A vigorous question and answer session followed the lecture.

As part of its long-standing commitment to undergraduate education, the Center this fall hosted another one of its popular Food for Thought workshops. Undergraduates who attended the work-

shop were treated to a hearty meal and heard well-known philosopher of religion Michael Murray (Templeton Foundation) deliver a lecture on the relation of God to the natural order.

In addition to its special fall events, the Center’s weekly reading group continues to flourish every Friday morning at 10:00 AM. Scholars from around the world have presented papers at this group. The universal sentiment has been that the group is a unique forum and that it is particularly suited for generating insights into working papers in philosophy of religion. The lineup of presenters in the spring semester includes several of our own research fellows, as well as John Martin Fischer (University of California-Riverside) and Robert Merrihew Adams (University of North Carolina).

Jeremy Neill



The Friday reading group discusses a claim in Andrew Chignell’s paper

The Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought: Year One By Samuel Newlands

Last year, the Center received a \$1.7 million dollar grant from the John Templeton Foundation to fund “The Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought.” This four-year research initiative explores various historical and contemporary accounts of how and why evil exists in a world that has been created and sustained by a loving and powerful God. More concretely, the project provides funding for residential fellowships, empirical studies, conferences, seminars, workshops, publications, translations, contests, and public events. The goal is to stimulate new work on the problem of evil that is relevant to both the scholarly community and to a larger public audience.

We are now in the middle of our first full year of activities – and what a year it has been! Most of the project’s activities this year have centered on the historical component, as this year marks the 300th anniversary of the publication of Leibniz’s *Theodicy*, one of the grandest attempts to reconcile the goodness and justice of God with the evils of our world. In September, the Center hosted a large conference on the *Theodicy*, inviting top-notch early modern scholars to discuss the content and context of Leibniz’s mature work on the problem of evil. It was an international affair: 10 different countries were represented on the program alone. The conference was very well attended and work is already underway

to publish some of the proceedings. The whole conference, including audience discussion, is now available in HD streaming on the Center’s YouTube channel (see the Center website). We also welcomed our first set of Templeton residential fellows this year: Michael Hickson (Santa Clara), Ryan Nichols (Cal-State, Fullerton), and Todd Ryan (Trinity College). All three are specialists in early modern philosophy, and they have added a rich historical dimension to the Center’s weekly discussion group. Hickson and Ryan are both working on the problem of evil in the work of Pierre Bayle, whose contributions to the topic have been unfortunately overshadowed by others in the 17th century. Nichols’ work this year centers on Thomas Reid, a leading philosopher from the Scottish Enlightenment. Although prominent Christian philosophers such as Alston,

Wolterstorff, and Plantinga have found in Reid a philosophical ally, little attention has been given to Reid’s work on the problem of evil, a neglect Ryan will help correct with his book-length project.

In connection with the work of these fellows, the Center is hosting two workshops this year. The first, on Bayle’s contribution to the problem of evil, occurred on the eve of the *Theodicy* conference and brought both established and up-and-coming Bayle experts together with our fellows to discuss their projects. The Bayle experts also had the rare opportunity to defend Bayle against the many Leibnizians who attended the pre-conference banquet. (Leibniz originally wrote the *Theodicy* as a response to Bayle, and it is full of objections to Bayle, who died shortly before it was published.) The second workshop, held on March,



The Holocaust Memorial, Miami Beach, FL, Kenneth Treister, FAIA, Sculptor



2010 Summer Seminar on the Problem of Evil

Interview with Paul Draper

Paul Draper is the current Plantinga Fellow at the Center for Philosophy of Religion. A graduate of the University of California-Irvine, he specializes in philosophy of religion.



(1) Why did you decide to specialize in philosophy of religion?

I had a lot of doubts about my religious beliefs, and I felt that pursuing philosophy of religion was the best way to resolve them. Ultimately, studying philosophy of religion didn't remove my doubts, but it made me more confident that those doubts are justified. I look at philosophical arguments about religion, not as a means of justifying religious or anti-religious beliefs, but instead as a way of testing them. This method of inquiry requires me to construct and evaluate arguments both for and against religious beliefs. For example, after I complete the book I am writing now on

the argument from evil against theism, I hope to write a second book on a new sort of cumulative case for theism.

(2) What problems/puzzles in philosophy of religion do you find most pressing?

As my answer to (1) suggests, I'm very interested in the argument from evil against theism and in cumulative cases for theism. I'm also very interested in the fine-tuning design argument for theism.

(3) How have your religious experiences (or lack thereof) affected your work?

They have helped me to remain in the agnostic camp instead of the atheist one.

(4) As an agnostic, do you wish more people involved in debates about philosophy of religion were in your camp?

No, I just wish that camp membership depended more on evidence and less on accidents of birth and inflexible orthodoxies.

(5) What's the one philosophical text or argument with which you wish non-philosophers were familiar?

I wish non-philosophers were familiar with the philosophical literature on human obligations to other animals. If more people realized how badly we currently treat animals and how powerful some of the arguments are in favor of treating them better, then progress on this important moral issue could be made more quickly.

(6) As a philosopher, you will have taken yourself to succeed if ----?

I get a skeptical theism fellowship so that I can come back to the Center next year.

(7) What philosophical idea or argument do you wish you came up with?

Pascal's Wager. But only because then my name would be "Paul Pascal," which sounds so much cooler than "Paul Draper."

11-12, 2011 was on the Scottish Enlightenment and the problem of evil. One exciting aspect of this workshop is that many of the participants are approaching this topic for the first time, giving it a true "workshop" feel.

Another major source of activity this year has been translations. In order to promote broader interest in Leibniz's *Theodicy*, we've funded a much-needed new translation by Robert Sleigh and Sean Greenberg. The new translation, under contract with Oxford University Press, will be available in both scholarly and student editions and will make the text more accessible to a wider audience. One of our fellows this year, Michael Hickson, is completing a translation of Bayle's final work, the

Dialogues of Maximus and Themistius (under contract with Brill Academic Publishers). This work has not been translated into English before and provides Bayle's final word on the problem of evil: it was completed on the evening of his death in 1706. We have also created Leibniz Texts (<http://leibniztexts.com>), a website that will publish new translations of 17 papers by Leibniz on the problem of evil and related topics. The translations, by Robert Sleigh, will only be available online. There are also plans to fund a translation of Paul Rateau's new book on Leibniz's *theodicy*, one of the few book-length studies on the topic.

This past summer, we ran a seminar for graduate students on the problem

of evil in early modern philosophy, conducted by Sleigh and Greenberg on the idyllic Skidmore University campus in upstate New York. The applicant pool for the 10 slots was very competitive and those selected were extremely capable Ph.D. students from top early modern programs in the US, such as Harvard, Yale, and Rice. We hope that the impact on these students at this early stage in their career will be long-lasting.

We are currently making plans for the next set of workshops, conferences, and public events. If next year is as full and rich as this year has been, we'll consider the project a rousing success to date.

2010 – 2011 Center Fellows



Paul Draper, Alvin Plantinga Fellow

Professor of Philosophy, Purdue University

Paul Draper is visiting this year from Purdue University, where he is a Professor of Philosophy. He is currently writing a book on the question of whether the suffering in the world makes it unlikely that a loving God exists. Paul grew up in Southern California and lived for 20 years in Miami, Florida, which is why he is both a Laker and a Heat fan (life is good!). He has been married to his wife Linda for 32 years. They have one child, Caitlin, who is 20 years old. Paul's hobbies include playing table tennis and poker, reading novels, and New Testament history. His favorite novel is 'Peace like a River.'



William Abraham, Frederick J. Crosson Fellow

Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies and Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor, Southern Methodist University

William J. Abraham is visiting the Center this year from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, where he is the Outler Professor of Wesley Studies and Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor. His current work focuses on divine action; it started as a monograph and has exploded into a multi-volume project. Originally from Northern Ireland, Professor Abraham identifies himself as living in the cracks: Ireland/Britain, Europe/USA, theology/philosophy, academy/church, theory/practice. He finds the United States a fascinating theological experiment politically, and is proud to say that he has signed on as a fighting Irishman!



Andrew Chignell, Research Fellow

Associate Professor, Sage School of Philosophy, Cornell University

Andrew Chignell is visiting this year from the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell University, where he is an Associate Professor. Andrew is a noted Kant scholar and this year he is writing on Kant and the question of hope. He was born in Dundee, Scotland, but then he lost his Scottish accent when his family moved to Wheaton, Illinois. Andrew attended Wheaton College and received a doctorate from the Yale University philosophy department in 2004. Most of Andrew's family now lives in Hawaii, which means that he gets to escape the cold during winter break. His non-philosophical interests include music, theater, traveling, and motorcycles.



Patrick Todd, Visiting Graduate Fellow

Patrick Todd is visiting the Center from the University of California, Riverside, where he is currently working toward his Ph.D. in philosophy. His main philosophical interests are in metaphysics, free will and moral responsibility, and philosophy of religion. Having recently taken up boxing, he hopes that whatever philosophical talent he may have in these areas does not deteriorate once he begins participating in Notre Dame's annual charity boxing tournament, Bengal Bouts.



Todd Ryan, Early Modern Research Fellow

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Trinity College

Todd Ryan is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. He is visiting the Center this year as part of its Early Modern research project. His research these days is focused on 17th Century French philosophy and its reception. In particular he is interested in the philosophical and theological thought of Pierre Bayle. He grew up in Illinois and because of this is excited to return to the Midwest this year. In his spare time he enjoys classical music, travel and languages.



Michael Hickson, Early Modern Research Fellow

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Santa Clara University

Michael Hickson is currently preparing an English translation of the last work of the 17th-century French philosopher, Pierre Bayle. These *Dialogues of Maximus and Themistius* (1707) articulate an enigmatic view of the relationship between faith and reason which has been interpreted variously as representing or entailing Orthodox Calvinism, atheism, skepticism, fideism, radical tolerance, or some combination of these. Next year Michael, his wife Andréanne, and their new baby, Isaac Émile, will move to northern California where Michael will begin teaching philosophy at Santa Clara University.



Ryan Nichols, Early Modern Research Fellow

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, California State University, Fullerton

Ryan Nichols is visiting the Center this year from California State University, Fullerton. There he researches eighteenth-century Scottish thought, Philosophy of Religion, Experimental Philosophy and, recently, Early Confucianism. While at the Center this year, Ryan is examining changes to the concept of 'natural evil' in the eighteenth-century in the wake of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. He hopes to understand the relationship between interpretations of natural disasters like the earthquake as divine punishments and interpretations of them as cases of natural evil. Nichols is originally from Pawnee, Illinois. He plays ultimate Frisbee and enjoys reading science fiction.



Wu Tianyue, Templeton Research Fellow

Tianyue Wu is visiting the Center from Peking University in Beijing, China, where he teaches ancient and medieval philosophy. He is now working on Aquinas' conception of passion, with the hope of better understanding our sentiments of desire and anger. His wife Hui Hui is a medieval historian and also focuses on Aquinas. Besides their common interest in the Angelic Doctor, they spend most of their time with their two little angels, their children Jeremy and Rebecca.



Wang Shi, Templeton Visiting Graduate Student

Wang Shi, who is going by 'James,' is a visiting graduate student from from East China Normal University in Shanghai, China, where he is studying for a doctoral degree. Most of his main research areas are in analytic philosophy – largely in metaphysics and epistemology. He likes reading, music and jogging in his spare time. He is married and his wife is also a philosophy student. Among his favorite books are classic Chinese works, including especially history and poetry.



Huang Wei, Templeton Visiting Graduate Student

Huang Wei, who is going by 'Brian,' is a visiting graduate student from Fudan University in Shanghai. He is currently working in metaphysics, in particular modal metaphysics and actualism. He was born and raised in Shanghai, China, and after he returns to China next year he hopes to apply for a PhD. in philosophy in the United States. Eventually he wants to be a professor in philosophy. Among his hobbies are listening to Mozart and John Denver after work. His wife is also a philosopher and they enjoy discussing together current affairs and various philosophical topics.

Tolerating God?

Bayle on the Problem of Evil

For as long as there has been the idea of an infinitely powerful, wise, and good God, there has been the problem of evil: why would such a God permit suffering and wickedness to enter the world?

The issue has often led people to draw a line in the sand: you are either a theist who thinks that some explanation can be given for why God permits evil (a “theodicy”), or you are an atheist who thinks that no explanation can be given and that God’s existence is therefore unlikely. Pierre Bayle (1648–1706), always enigmatic, had a foot on either side of that line. His position was that an all-perfect God exists, but that every theodicy is bound to fail.

Bayle’s *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697) was “the philosophical blockbuster” of the eighteenth century. Its most widely-read articles levelled objections against the most popular rational justifications for the evil in the world. Bayle’s stated goal, however, was to thereby humble reason and show the necessity of faith. In response to Bayle, G.W. Leibniz wrote the only book he would ever publish, the *Theodicy* (1710), for he, like many in his and our day, believed that the logic of Bayle’s position was intentionally subversive of religion. What else could Bayle’s goal have been in demonstrating the failure of theodicy, if not to justify atheism?

A first clue to answering this ques-

tion lies in Bayle’s publications prior to the *Dictionary*, especially the seven works dealing with religious toleration. Bayle’s *Philosophical Commentary* (1686) was one of most influential pleas for toleration in its day and new editions continue to be printed. Since toleration was on Bayle’s mind at the time of the *Dictionary*, it makes sense to read his position on the problem evil in terms of it.



A Philosopher Lecturing with a Mechanical Planetary, Joseph Wright, 1766, Derby Museum and Art Gallery, Derby

Tolerance, for Bayle, involves refraining from judging others’ moral characters on the exclusive basis of one’s own limited moral categories. It involves accepting that our ways of doing things and the ways of others can differ without either being bad. The more somebody’s culture differs from ours, the more we should be open to the possibility that their behaviour which seems wrong to us has a hidden justification. There are, however, limits to what anybody should tolerate.

The problem of evil arises when the

universe appears to be run in a way different from how we think it should be run: I would not permit sin and suffering, so why does God permit them? But if an all-perfect Creator exists, His “culture” would differ so radically from our own that we should expect His conduct to confound us. Since it may be impossible to put on the mind of a human culture not our own, a fortiori it may be impossible to understand the ways of God.

So we can reframe the problem of evil: is it possible that the evil in the world should be tolerated because some “divine culture” exists from the perspective of which it is justified?

The answer for Bayle was “yes.” However, he insisted on the impossibility of translating that culture into human terms. Bayle might have said that the best reason can do is not to explain God, but merely to tolerate Him. It’s not a very pious position, but it does give atheists a hard

time. The atheist says, “from my perspective there is no justification for evil, therefore there is likely no justification for evil period, and hence no all-perfect God exists.” Bayle’s argument demonstrates the intolerance underlying this reasoning: the atheist makes his own moral concepts the rule over the entire universe.

Bayle has been read for three centuries as a “tolerant atheist.” But if I’m right, such a thing was impossible for Bayle.

Michael Hickson

Feature Article: *Living in the Cracks*

I live in the cracks: between Ireland and England, between Europe and America, between philosophy and theology, and between the church and the academy. I took up philosophy because I had a vague sense that it would help me sort out my theological convictions; it quickly became the site of primary interest over against psychology because the issues addressed were so much more fundamental. The focus of my current work is on divine agency and divine action. The topic initially surfaced within theology within the nineteen sixties when the Old Testament scholar G. E. Wright argued that theology should be construed as drawing inferences from the mighty acts of God in history. As a theologian Wright waxed eloquent about the crucial place of divine action; as a historian divine action melted into thin air. The theologians, led by Langdon Gilkey, had a field day showing up the equivocation involved. Gilkey's solution was simple: develop a doctrine of general providence (of how God works everywhere) and we can then figure out how God acts in a special way in history. This move already assumes some notion of divine action; so the issue quickly migrated to conceptual work on the concept of action.

However, the work on divine action in the analytic tradition arose in a different context, that of the debate about meaning and verification. In this world the central problem was the coherence of discourse about divine action. On the theological side, many in North America turned to Process Philosophy as a way forward; aside from one exception, until recently this never took off in England in part because of the dominance of the analytic tradition. My initial work has involved sorting

out the contours of the debate: in the analytic tradition, in the Process tradition, in forms of the Thomist tradition, and in recent literature on science and religion.



The Crucifixion, El Greco, 1596-1600, Museo del Prado, Madrid

The debate about divine agency and divine action can be posed in terms of two simple questions. Take any claim about divine action, say, God created the world *ex nihilo*. Then we ask how we are to understand the subject of these sentences (God) and the predicates (action discourse). Most attention has been given to the latter. Much of this work involves the search for a closed conception of human action. Once secured, then one looks to

a doctrine of analogy to understand divine action. It is far from clear that action is a closed concept; the quest for the necessary and sufficient conditions of the idea of action has turned out to be something of a dead-end. My own view is that the concept of action is an open concept, as revealed by the host of contrasts that it evokes in ordinary usage. If this holds, then this calls for a fresh look at what to do with the idea of divine action. Even if one had a closed concept of action suitably honed to apply to divine action, this tells us nothing about how to unpack the myriad specific acts, actions, and activity of God that one finds in the Christian tradition. William Alston came close to seeing this when he confessed that his work on divine action turned out to be surprisingly sparse when applied to particular cases. Similar results show up in the work of Process theologians and in the extensive volumes on scientific perspectives on divine action.

Crombie early on noted that in dealing with divine action, doing theology was simply unavoidable. One job of the theologian is to articulate who God is and what God has done. The relevant work requires serious attention to the history of theology and to the precise problems that theologians have pursued. To take an obvious example: the Augustinian-Pelagian debate is both about material issues in soteriology and about how best to understand causation in claims about divine action. I think we can solve this one. Hence we are already into a new form of theology: analytic theology. Maybe living in the cracks has its benefits after all.

William Abraham

Jewish Philosophical Theology

While Notre Dame's Center for Philosophy of Religion hosts its Analytic Theology project over the course of the next three years, a "sister project" devoted to Jewish Philosophical Theology will be hosted by the Shalem Center in Jerusalem. Both of these projects are generously funded by the John Templeton Foundation (as is the third "sister project," hosted by the University of Innsbruck in Austria).

The aim of the Jewish Philosophical Theology project, broadly speaking, is to develop a distinctively Jewish contribution to the burgeoning field of philosophical theology and to explore the ways in which insights from contemporary philosophical theology can help illuminate traditional Jewish topics and texts. It will feature annual conferences, summer workshops, and residential fellowships, all of which will bring together philosophers and theologians who are currently working on this exciting new venture, and will hopefully spur further interest among younger scholars.

But the project has a more narrow aim as well. According to Yoram Hazony, provost of the Shalem Center and director of the project, "Jewish tradition is text based, and the guiding questions for the Jewish component will be whether it is possible to profitably investigate the Hebrew Bible, Talmud and Midrash as works of genuine philosophical interest." Hazony notes that scholars of the Hebrew Bible, Talmud, and Midrash – texts that form the core of Jewish tradition - have usually focused on issues pertaining to compositional history, philology, and literary character, and seldom on

developing systematic accounts of the metaphysics, epistemology, or ethical and political philosophy that emerge from these texts. This project seeks to rectify this imbalance. However, the project is decidedly not one whose aims are to chart a "history of ideas" from the Hebrew Bible through the Talmud. Rather, as Hazony writes, "The aim of this project is ultimately to attain philosophical insight into traditional texts where such work is



Depiction of Temple candelabrum in the ancient synagogue

capable of shedding light on, and being illuminated by, questions of current importance."

A successful pilot conference, called "The Bible and Philosophy: Rethinking the Fundamentals," was held at the Shalem Center in October 2009. It brought together roughly sixty participants, and its aim was to begin developing a Jewish philosophy that is at once "in tune with" contemporary

philosophical theology and at the same time true to the Hebrew Bible. Each of the three annual conferences that are to be held under the auspices of the Jewish Philosophical Theology project will hopefully build on the success of the pilot, but will focus on a narrower topic and engage a broader range of texts and periods than the pilot. The first annual conference – to be held June 26-30, 2011 – is entitled "Philosophical Investigation of the Hebrew Scriptures, Talmud, and Midrash" and will focus on metaphysics and God's nature. The titles of the 2012 and 2013 conferences are (respectively) "Human Knowing: Prophecy, Narrative, and Law" and "Human Action: Justice, Righteousness, Love, and Awe."

Although the Jewish project will, by its nature, touch on subjects that are of particular significance to Jews, the hope is that that the fruits of the Jewish project will benefit philosophical theologians of other faiths, and vice versa. Michael Murray, vice-President for philosophy and theology of the John Templeton Foundation, hopes the Analytic Theology project as a whole furthers "personal connections and collaborative work between Jewish Analytic Theologians and their Christian and, hopefully, Muslim counterparts, with the goal of finding ways to use the tools of philosophy and science to make new spiritual discoveries that transcend sectarian boundaries."

For more information on the project, visit <http://www.bibleandphilosophy.org> <http://www.shalem.org.il/Events/Philosophical-Investigation-of-the-Hebrew-Scriptures-Talmud-and-Midrash.html>.

Aaron Segal

Book Review: *Wandering in Darkness*, by Eleonore Stump

Eleonore Stump has written what may be her magnum opus, *Wandering in Darkness*, a text that is the culmination of much of her recent work.

Her project is a defense to the problem of evil. As in traditional defenses, she argues for a possible morally sufficient reason (MSR) for why God might allow suffering. The massive work is divided into four parts. First, Stump introduces her topic and unique methodology, which is to incorporate narratives and recent scientific research in a philosophically significant manner. In part two, she presents several salient features of Aquinas's worldview, providing a description of the possible world of her defense. In the third part, she offers an exegesis of four biblical narratives wherein suffering and a benefit for it are pictured. Finally, part four is devoted to expanding Aquinas's theodicy to include a benefit for the unfulfilled desires of the heart. This review will focus on this last feature of Stump's project.

Stump maintains that an adequate response to the problem of evil must account not only for the objective suffering of human beings—the undermining of flourishing—but also for their subjective suffering. Stump writes:

“Suffering can arise when a human

being fails to get a desire of her heart or has and then loses a desire of her heart.” ...“What is bad about suffering, then, is that it undermines or destroys what the sufferer centrally cares about, her own flourishing or the desires of her heart, or both. In my view, suffering so understood is what is in need of explanation in the problem of evil.” (7, 11)

The ‘Desires of the Heart’ are a unique



Eleonore Stump lecturing at the Plantinga Retirement Conference

feature of Stump's formulation of the problem of evil. Although she offers no precise definition, she suggests that we have an intuitive grasp of the notion—they are the desires at or near the center of a person's desire structure. The object of a desire of the heart, whether it is a person or project, has value for a person derivative from the person's care for or commitment to it. A parent cares about his child not only in virtue of the child's objective value as a human being, but in virtue of the fact that he has set his heart on his child.

A person can objectively flourish in

this world, but still suffer heartbreak on account of failure to achieve a particular task, such as winning a Nobel prize or political office. It is Stump's contention that God must provide a benefit that defeats the suffering that results from the deprivation of these desires

This requirement will undoubtedly strike some people as unreasonable.

God is not required to give us anything we set our hearts on, just as a parent is not required to give his child anything the child happens to want. After all, a person could set his heart on something destructive or evil. We should recall that the desires of the heart are not just any desires we happen to have, but our core desires—the desires most important to us. Furthermore, Stump maintains that it is characteristic of human beings that they “set their hearts

on things in addition to and different from their own flourishing,” and thus there is ‘something inhuman’ about the suggestion that these desires should be simply forgotten once one flourishes. It is “essential to a person's flourishing that he have desires of the heart.” (431)

Stump articulates the paradoxical nature of the demand she places on an MSR: Suffering involves losing something we care about—whether flourishing or the desires of our hearts: “To defeat suffering so understood, a benefit must be also something that we care about....but what could one care

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about more than one's flourishing or the desires of one's heart?" (419) The paradox lies in the expectation that the benefit will consist in the same thing the loss of which was the cause of the suffering.

The defense is a nuanced mix of stories and philosophy, both of which Stump considers essential to a full understanding.

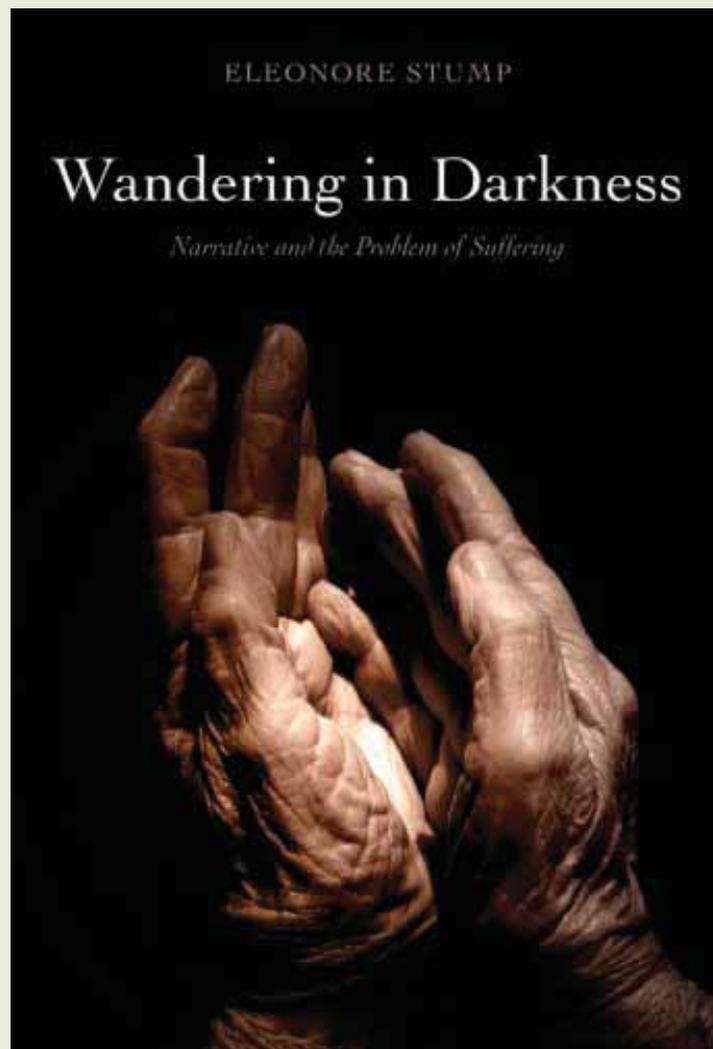
Thus, I should note that any attempt to represent her defense without recourse to the stories will inevitably be incomplete. The defense has two main divisions: First, on Aquinas's theodicy, union with God in the afterlife defeats any deprivation of objective flourishing in this life. Flourishing in the afterlife is objectively more valuable than flourishing on earth, and so the latter can be traded as a means to the former.

Second, Stump adds to Aquinas's theodicy in order to account for the desires of the heart: "What defeats the loss of the desires of the heart for a person is his gaining of the desires of his heart in another mode." (449) For the person who is willing, God takes his heart's desires, reconfigures them, and gives them back in an altered form, still recognizable as the original desire, except desired even more for the fact that it is interwoven into his deepest desire, God. The same object becomes more valued when it becomes

a gift from the beloved. In this way, the re-gifting defeats the suffering that comes from the initial loss of the object of desire.

This explanation depends on a normative constraint on the subjective desires of the heart. Although "anything can be the deepest desire of a

Of course, while a person ought to take God as the deepest desire of her heart, not everyone will. It is the cases of those who resist flourishing that present most clearly the nature of the benefit Stump defends. Thus, it is important to see how Stump's account defeats the suffering of a person who resists accepting the desires of her heart and her flourishing.



Eleonore Stump's new book 'Wandering in Darkness,' published by Oxford University Press

Near the end of her defense, Stump reformulates the central question of her work: "Does God's allowing the evil a human being suffers enable her to flourish, or enable her to have the desires of her heart...?" (455) Here Stump makes clear that what defeats suffering is not flourishing or receiving the object of the desires of one's heart, but rather a capacity for each. Stump claims:

"Since what is at issue is the role of suffering in conferring a kind of power or capacity on the sufferer, it would not disprove the Thomistic defense if there were cases in which suffering did not result in the flourishing or the fulfillment of the heart's desires of the sufferer. To have a power is one thing; to exercise it successfully is another." (457)

person's heart ...only persons ought to be the deepest desire of a person's heart." (439) Specifically, God ought to be the deepest desire of a person's heart.

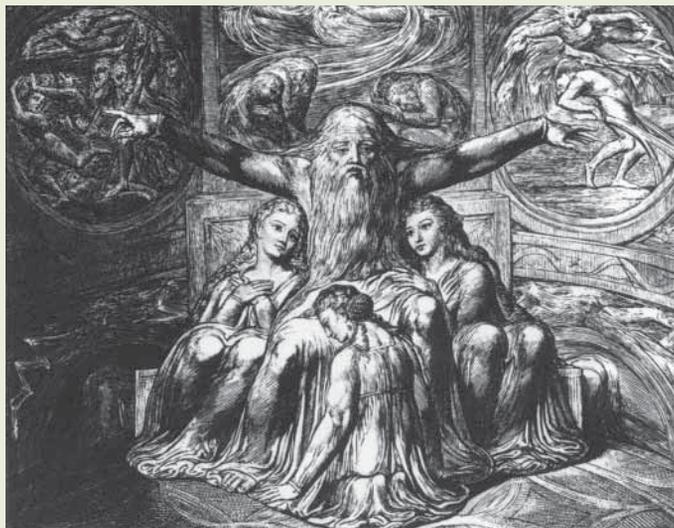
Suffering is defeated by the enabling of a person to accept her flourishing or heart's desire. For a person's suffering to be defeated, a person need not

actually flourish or have the desires of her heart fulfilled. It is enough that the suffering enable her to flourish, if she should so choose, and that it enable her to have the desires of her heart, should she accept them.

The distinction between flourishing and being enabled to flourish is significant, though it could easily be overlooked given how little Stump emphasizes it throughout the work. The illustrations of defeated suffering Stump presents are almost exclusively of people who flourish as a result of their suffering or who gain their heart's desires.

It is not as clear how this benefit will look in the life of the sufferer who eternally rejects flourishing. It would be helpful to have an illustration of a sufferer who rejects flourishing and yet whose own suffering is defeated through the capacity for flourishing, even while it is rejected.

What Stump does make clear is that even God cannot force someone to flourish. For a person to flourish, his will must be in a state that does not resist flourishing.



Job and his Daughters, William Blake, 1823-26, Tate Gallery London

Although there is not space here to discuss the nuances involved in this explanation, one question remains unanswered: Would the sufferer who rejects flourishing care about the ben-

efit of this capacity enough to endure the suffering he underwent? Stump's account does not make clear that every sufferer would be willing to undergo suffering in exchange for this capacity.

But it seems Stump's defense requires such willingness.

Whether or not everyone is persuaded by her defense, Stump's project contributes, as does much of her other work, to making Aquinas relevant to contemporary philosophical topics. The book is the product of a lifetime of rigorous and careful study that is characteristic of Stump's work. This review skips over many of the incredibly rich themes in this formidably sized work, all of

which deserve attention in their own right.

Charity Anderson

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 - October 2012 Conference, 'Leibniz's *Theodicy*: Reception and Relevance,' in Lisbon, Portugal
 - Logos 2011: "Divine Revelation: Meaning, Authority and Canon"
 - Logos 2012: "Minds, Bodies, and the Divine"
 - Logos 2013: "Theorizing About God-Realism in Theology"
- <http://philreligion.nd.edu/analytictheology/logos.html>
- Conference in 2011-2012 on Skeptical Theism
 - Conference in 2011-2012 on Pain and the Nature of Mind

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