



Logoi

a publication of the
Center for Philosophy of Religion

**Hope, Optimism
& Transformative
Experiences**

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

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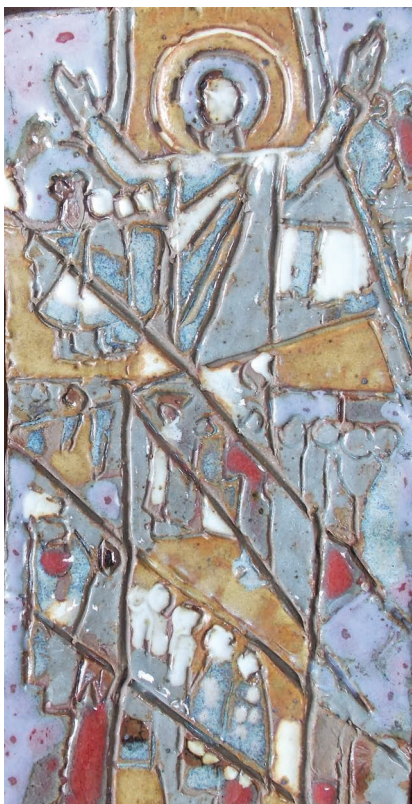
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AROUND THE CENTER

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.

In June 2014, we kicked off two large, interdisciplinary grant projects. *The Experience Project* is a \$4.8 million, three-year joint research initiative with the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill to explore the nature and implications of transformative experiences, the character of religious and spiritual experiences, and how work on transformative experiences may illumine our understanding of religious and spiritual experiences. Our other project, *Hope & Optimism: Conceptual and Empirical Investigations*, is a \$4.5 million, three-year joint research initiative with Cornell University to explore the theoretical, empirical, and practical dimensions of hope, optimism, and related states. It also



REDDY WHITE, TOUCHDOWN JESUS



REBECCA CHAN SPEAKS WITH ROBERT AUDI

includes stage and play competitions that creatively explore hope and optimism in human life.

These projects follow two highly successful grants: the *Analytic Theology Project* and *Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought*. The first of these ended in late 2014. It has already resulted in dozens of high-quality publications, and successfully raised awareness of analytic theology in the fields of theology, philosophy and religious studies. One way it did so was through the annual Analytic Theology Lecture. The 2014 Lecture was given by Oliver Crisp from Fuller Seminary.

Grant projects such as these, along with our annual fellowships, continue to bring top junior and senior scholars to the Center, along with the very best graduate students from around the world. This community of scholars fosters top-notch research, as well as friendships that far outlive the fellows' stay. Fellows participate in our Friday work-in-progress

discussion groups where we discuss their current work, along with that of Notre Dame faculty and visiting scholars. A fascinating range of topics has been discussed this year, including transformative experience, divine hiddenness, the atonement, the metaphysics of union with God, mysticism, and the problem of animal suffering. The engaging conversations often continue over a pint at our weekly pub nights each Thursday.

On November 14, 2014, our Alvin Plantinga fellow, Thomas D. Senor, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Arkansas, delivered the Thirteenth Annual Alvin Plantinga Fellow Lecture, titled "Evidentialism and the Diachronic Nature of Epistemic Evaluation".

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

2014, Notre Dame philosopher Jeff Speaks presented “Six words you say you believe: Some thoughts on the Nicene Creed”. In February, Western Washington’s Hud Hudson presented “Felix Culpa!” To see what Food for Thought is all about, take a look at our new promotional video at (<http://philreligion.nd.edu/calendar/food-for-thought/>).

The Center continues to experiment with and expand our media vision in an effort to bring important topics in philosophy of religion and analytic theology to a wider audience. Our archive of interviews with philosophers and theologians and roundtable videos is growing. This year we added interviews on topics ranging from Jewish systematic theology to how

philosophy can illumine theological inquiry. We also added two roundtable discussions, one on faith and reason, and the other on the atonement. In the near future, be on the lookout for new kinds of video content featuring our two large grant projects. All Center video content can be found on our video page at (<http://philreligion.nd.edu/videos/>).

We continue to update our *Global Philosophy of Religion Calendar* (available on the Center website) as a way of helping those interested in philosophy of religion stay apprised of upcoming events and opportunities in the discipline. We hope that this consolidated, user-friendly calendar is a helpful service to the philosophy of religion community. If you are aware

of opportunities not already on our calendar, please send relevant information to: philreligion@nd.edu.

The Seventh Annual Logos Workshop in Philosophical Theology will be held on May 7-9 on Notre Dame’s campus. The theme of this year’s workshop is *Religious Experience*. The aim of the workshop is to foster 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 2014-2015 a resounding success at the Center! 🙏

Understanding Atonement

Joshua C. Thurow, UTSA

Central to the Christian message is the atonement—Jesus, God’s son, came to earth to put sinful humans back at rights with, or “at-one with” God. The letter to the Colossians expresses this concisely: “through [Jesus Christ] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things... by making peace through the blood of his cross. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in the fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him” (Col 1:19-22).

Christians proclaim that the atonement is very good news. Usually, it’s easy to see how good news is good. After a frantic afternoon of caring for kids, my wife calls to say she’s bringing dinner home.

This is good news because we’ll have good food to eat! I won’t have to create something edible from pasta and wilted, left-over vegetables. It’s harder to see how the atonement is good news. Clearly, it would be good to be reconciled with a holy God. But, how does Jesus’s work, especially his crucifixion, bring about this reconciliation? I’ve been privileged to spend this year at the Center for Philosophy of Religion working on a book that aims to answer these questions.

The New Testament uses various metaphors for the atonement, and it’s hard to see how to unify them into a single theory. Based on these metaphors, various theories of atonement have been developed. Each faces challenges, and almost no Christian bodies have officially



REDDY WHITE, BYZANTINE BVM

committed to a particular theory.

I believe that we can better understand the atonement by thinking carefully about an idea that shows up in the New Testament, especially in the book of Hebrews: Jesus’s death is a sacrifice for sin analogously to the sacrifices on the Day of

Atonement. When I first looked carefully at this, it struck me that the sacrifices are offered for the sins of Israel—the community as a whole, rather than individuals. This suggests that Jesus’s death is a sacrifice for the sins of a collective—humanity. I’ve developed this core idea in a way that, I believe, can help us understand how Christ’s work atones.


Here’s the basic idea. Not just individuals, but humanity as a whole has a responsibility to love God and neighbor. Neither individuals nor humanity have fulfilled these responsibilities, and individuals’ sins contribute to collective sin. Humanity as a collective, then, has guilt that needs to be atoned for. God desires that humanity as a group reflect his image into the world. Jesus’s work is aimed primarily at dealing with the collective sin of humanity (although individual sin, too, by extension).

Humanity’s situation is sort of like a company guilty of polluting the environment. The company hasn’t fulfilled its obligations to the community and ought to atone. No individual employees are fully responsible for polluting, but many bear guilt for contributing to the company’s polluting. (Perhaps some performed inadequate tests for pollutants; perhaps others approved policies clearly increasing pollution.) The company can atone by, e.g., paying fines, cleaning up the environment, and instituting policies that avoid future pollution.

This collective atonement enables guilty employees to more easily atone for their personal contributions—many of them need merely repent and commit themselves to the new policies.

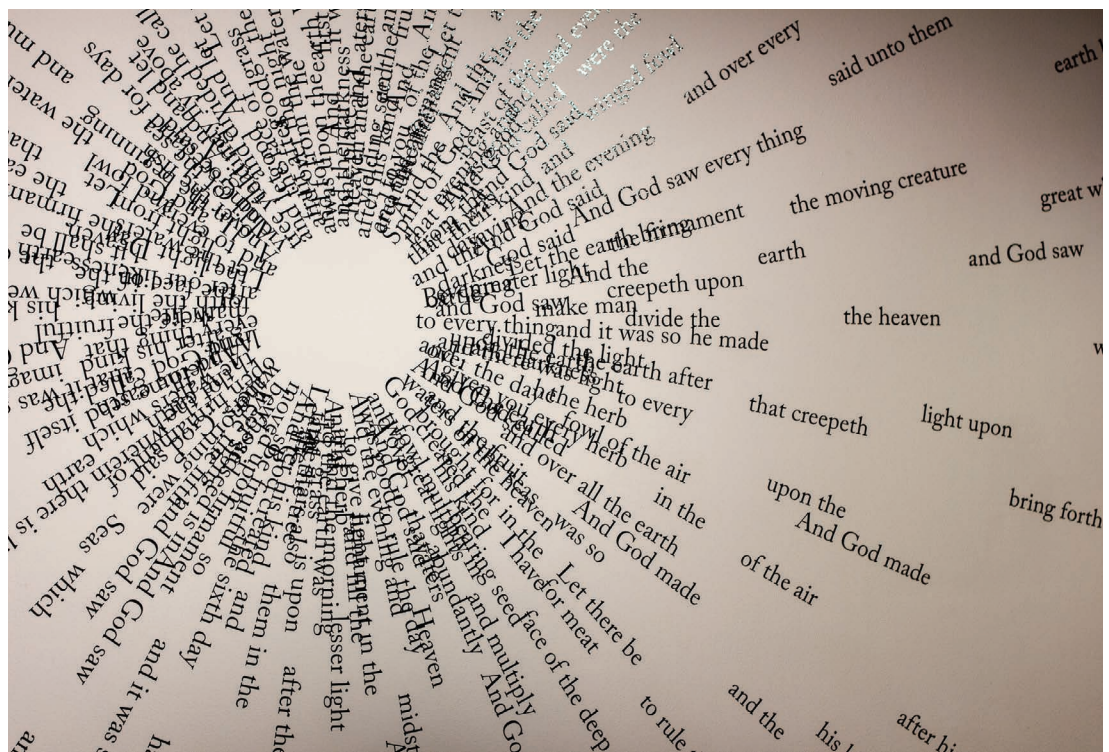
Jesus’s work atones for the collective sin of humanity. His teaching and acts of healing help humanity become

covering over the death due to us for our sins. But, his death communicates life in a way that the old sacrifices couldn’t, because his death is conquered by resurrection; and the power of his life is sent out to those who follow him through the Holy Spirit. Individual sin is atoned for as long as an individual confesses, repents, and commits to following Christ in the redeemed human community—the Church.

This theory has several advantages. It incorporates positive elements of other theories of atonement. For example, like moral influence views, it implies that Christ’s work atones, in part, by producing moral transformation in the guilty party. Notably, it grounds a robust notion of Christ as a representative for humanity who offers atoning work for the group while avoiding problems that other representational views (e.g., penal substitution) run into. Plainly, more is required to flesh out and defend this theory, but I think it shows promise. 

“Humanity as a collective... has guilt that needs to be atoned for. God desires that humanity as a group reflect his image into the world. Jesus’s work is aimed primarily at dealing with the collective sin of humanity.”

what it should have been. His death is a sacrifice—a gift to God of great value on behalf of humanity as a whole. This sacrifice is perhaps best understood as an offering of satisfaction to God, who accepts it because it communicates humanity’s commitment to follow God’s way and because Christ’s blood represents life



CREATIVE COMMONS

Still More Advice to Christians in Philosophy

by Thomas D. Senior, Alvin Plantinga Fellow 2014-2015

“What would a theist say about mind-body dualism?” So began another round of “Ask the Theist” in the Philosophy Department TA room at the University of Arizona during the 1980s. The game was played because being a theist made you something of an anomaly in that department at that time. There was genuine curiosity about what impact believing in God might have on your philosophical perspective.

It was around this time that Alvin Plantinga published his important paper, “Advice to Christian Philosophers.” I was tickled that my own doctoral program at the Arizona was one of the few places he name-checked as a department at which a Christian would do well to study, and the advice he gave – both to study philosophy at the very best

places (regardless of their reputation) and to not simply accept the research programs of the Powers That Be – was spot on.

Anyone familiar with Al’s career knows that he has exemplified what he commended. His work in metaphysics and epistemology was indisputably groundbreaking. And what he worked on, and the positions he took, were all his own, and reflected his deep commitment to the traditional Christian faith.

While Plantinga’s advice struck a chord with me, and has been influential in my thinking of how a philosopher should approach the relationship of her faith to her vocation, I’d like us to think not only about how Christian philosophers might approach their philosophical

research but also how we should approach our colleagues and our peers as we conduct our research. I will suggest that not only should our faith influence what *we do as philosophers* but also *how we are with philosophers*. That is, we ought to reflect on the behavioral norms of our discipline, and when appropriate, reject them because of our commitment to be Christians in philosophy. Let me explain what I have in mind.

Many of my friends in other disciplines are taken aback when I describe the structure and culture of the standard APA-type colloquium. The first thing they notice is that there is a designated commentator. When they learn that the work of the commentator is generally destructive (in graduate school, we used to call commentators “assassins”), the

response is usually confusion. Why would there be an assumption that the paper could be undermined?

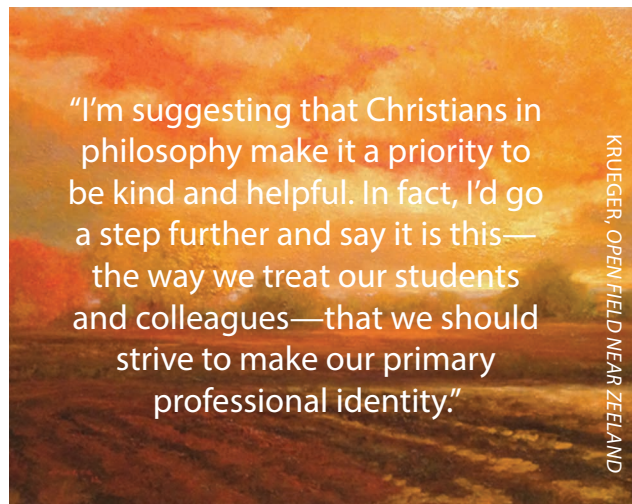
This signifies, I think, an important difference in what goes on in philosophy colloquia as compared professional presentations in many other fields. A physicist goes to a professional talk to learn *about* the research of her colleagues, and furthermore, to *learn* from the research of her colleagues. In philosophy? Not so much.

I don't mean to exaggerate the difference between what we do as philosophers and what our colleagues in other fields do. Surely, we are often motivated by a desire to learn about what others are working on, and to learn from their research. But underneath that motivation often lurks something considerably less positive. We go to philosophy talks to poke holes in the speaker's main argument, or to show that something important was overlooked. We are there as much to *instruct* as we are to *learn*—and this is so even if we don't take ourselves to know as much about the subject of the talk than the speaker does. Our hands shoot up when the Q&A starts because we want to get in our own clever objection before someone beats us to it. And just to be clear, when I say "we," I mean to include myself as much as anyone. I know this story from the inside.

Now, of course, subjecting our philosophical arguments and analyses to serious scrutiny is a good thing. We do our colleagues a favor by raising objections and noticing infelicities, particularly for works-in-progress. Dealing with a difficulty before you send your paper off to a journal

makes it more likely that your work will be accepted. Progress is made in our discipline because of pointed and direct criticism.

That is all true and good, but beside the point I aim to make. If you see a potentially important objection to a line of argument, you do the speaker a real favor by pointing it out; and the more serious the objection is, the bigger the favor. So by all means, say something. But sometimes the Q&A isn't the best place to do it, at least not if you are primarily interested in



helping the speaker produce a better paper.

I have been the recipient of such kindness. Very early in my career, I was presenting a paper at the Central APA. A more experienced, better-known person had been assigned as my commentator, and although he had his objections to my paper, they were mostly minor and not particularly troubling. The discussion had gone well, too. As I was making my way to the next session, a prominent philosopher sidled up to me and asked to speak to me for a moment. He then pointed out a serious defect in an analysis I had given, a problem at the core of my paper. Had I been presented this in the Q&A, particularly if it had been

early on, my confidence would have been wrecked.

The bigger the professional gap between the objector and the speaker, the worse it is for the former to make a potentially devastating objection publically. A full professor with a significant reputation has no business laying waste to the paper of a graduate student or untenured recent PhD in the context of a presentation. The kind—the *Christian*—approach is to seek out the speaker after the talk between sessions or at a reception or even via email, and to respectfully present the objection, preferably with a suggested fix.

I'm suggesting that Christians in philosophy make it a priority to be kind and helpful. In fact, I'd go a step further and say it is this—the way we treat our students and colleagues—that we should strive to make our primary professional identity.

I don't expect everyone to agree with this as our number one priority. Some may think that the ultimate professional goal is the presentation of an objection-proof argument for theism, or an impenetrable defense of the rationality of Christianity. But these goals, while understandable and laudable in principle, should not be our primary focus. This is so for two reasons. First, they are unachievable. I don't have an argument for this other than we've been aiming at them for a long, long time, and have yet to come close to accomplishing them. Philosophers are nothing if not adept at finding reasons to resist conclusions we'd rather not reach. As long as there are folks for whom Christianity is not a live option, there will be no


objection-proof argument for either the existence of God or the rationality of Christianity.

The other reason that apologetics-driven philosophy is misguided is that it presupposes that people reject—or are open to—faith for largely intellectual reasons. But that is neither the teaching of Scripture nor of experience. It is notoriously difficult to say what it is that leads someone to faith (be it in Christ or in dogmatic atheism) but there is almost never a direct connection

between conversion and the product of research in philosophy of religion.

As Christians who do philosophy, we want our colleagues to take us seriously. How do we accomplish that? Do good philosophical work. But we also want to represent Christ in our work (as we do in our lives generally). How do we do that? Well, of course we can work on arguments for the existence of God and the rationality of what we believe. While I don't think that should be the end-all of the work of Christians

in philosophy, such projects are certainly worth pursuing. But, by my lights, the community of Christian philosophers can best follow Jesus by demonstrating a spirit of charity toward our colleagues, and by showing respect and kindness, particularly to those in our discipline who lack power and prestige.

May they know we are Christians not by our self-assured pronouncements of the intellectual superiority of our worldview, but by our helpfulness and our intellectual humility. 

Logos 2015: Religious Experience

May 7-9 University of Notre Dame

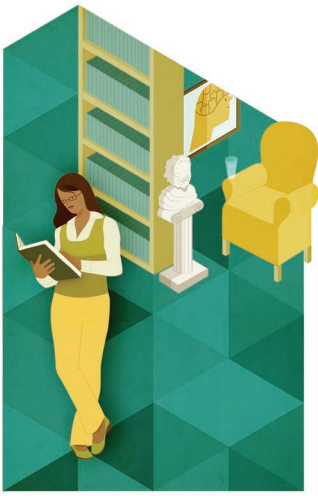


For more information and to register, please visit: philreligion.nd.edu/logos



HOPE OPTIMISM & TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Interviews with Two of the Primary Investigators



An Exercise in Hope

An Interview with Andrew Chignell

Hope & Optimism: Conceptual and Empirical Investigations is a \$4.5 million, three-year research initiative at the University of Notre Dame and Cornell University, also funded by The John Templeton Foundation. The project explores the theoretical, empirical, and practical dimensions of hope, optimism, and related states. The project will fund a number of residential and non-residential fellowships, conferences, workshops, a playwriting competition (Hope on Stage), and an amateur video competition (Hope on Screen). The project is led by Samuel Newlands of Notre Dame and Andrew Chignell of Cornell.

What impact did your work in the history of philosophy have on this project?

AC: Sam Newlands and I initially thought of the project as a philosophical and theological endeavor, as Leibniz and Kant did. Leibniz uses the term 'optimism' when describing this world as the best of all possible worlds, and Kant claims that one of the three main questions of his philosophy is 'What can we hope for?' However, there is a large body of research on optimism in the social sciences, particularly psychology. So we later expanded the project to incorporate these.

What benefits are there in having philosophers, theologians, and scientists interact on the same project?

AC: Researchers in the sciences have been interested in developing measures for optimism, identifying physical correlates of optimism, and distinguishing between expectation, hope, and various kinds of optimism—things that philosophers and theologians haven't really thought about. We're hoping that the philosophers and theologians will benefit from interacting with these pre-existing structures in

the sciences. But the philosophers and theologians will contribute conceptual skills that could benefit some of the current research paradigms in the sciences.

Are there connections between the research on hope and optimism and more 'mainstream' philosophical problems?

AC: I think that there is a connection between conditions on hope and the role of reasons in justifying action. I think hope has a second-order character that links up with reasons debates in action theory and moral psychology. Also, careful attention to hope might offer alternatives to paradigms in contemporary moral psychology, like the view that we can reduce hope to belief-desire pairs. Hope and optimism also relate to philosophy of religion and political philosophy.

What sorts of research will the grant fund?

AC: Most of the money goes to researchers in psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science. They are doing experiments to establish correlations between canonical measures of optimism and

new empirical data.

On the hope side, we are conducting research that challenges the standing model of hope in psychology, the correlation of hope with the 'Agency-pathway model'. This model posits that agents balance their willingness to sacrifice certain goals with the energy expenditure expected to achieve those goals. We are hoping to generate new longitudinal studies that establish new, ground-breaking scales of hope and new ways of thinking about hope that are empirically testable and quantifiable.

Why should people outside of academia care about this project?

AC: The words 'hope' and 'optimism' are important to people, and appear often in ordinary contexts. I hope that we can disperse our research through popular channels and steal some rhetoric away from politicians and marketers who wield these phrases for selfish benefit. We want to help people understand these concepts so that they aren't manipulated by them. 🙌

If you are interested in hope, optimism, and related states, we encourage you to visit the project website and consider applying for one of our many funding opportunities (<http://hopeoptimism.com/>).

The Human Experience

An Interview with L.A. Paul

The Experience Project is a \$4.8 million, three-year research initiative at the University of Notre Dame and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, funded by The John Templeton Foundation. The project explores the nature and implications of transformative experiences, the character of religious and spiritual experiences, and how work on transformative experiences may illumine our understanding of religious and spiritual experiences. This project will fund research -- in the form of residential and non-residential fellowships, cluster groups, conferences, and workshops -- on the nature of experience in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and religious experience in philosophy of religion, theology, and religious studies.

The project is led by Michael Rea and Samuel Newlands of Notre Dame and L. A. Paul of UNC, Chapel Hill. Harvard psychologist Fiery Cushman and Duke sociologist Steven Vaisey lead the psychology and sociology wings of the project.

Can you describe what a “Transformative Experience” is, and how your current research fits into the Experience Project?

LP: Big life choices often involve epistemically transformative experiences, compromising your ability to rationally assign values to that future lived experience. And because of the personally transformative nature of the epistemically transformative experience, your preferences concerning the new outcomes can also change. As a result, having the new experience may change how your post-experience self values the outcomes, but before you make the choice, many of these important changes are epistemically inaccessible to you. My book develops the general form of this argument, tying it to questions about agency, rationality, and authenticity, but a very salient example is the choice to have one’s first child.

How did the Experience Project originate? What “sparked” it?

LP: The collaboration began as a result of conversations with Michael Rea...we discussed the importance of experience and the role it had in big life choices, and in understanding and thinking about religious belief.

Are there any traditional problems you expect the project to help resolve?

LP: I see the project as raising new questions more than solving traditional problems. However, the project definitely points to a tension between rationality and authenticity, and in this way it connects with existentialism.

Can you say a bit more about authenticity here, and the connection with existentialism?

LP: Roughly, the idea is that you should live your life by choosing to discover who you’ll become through transformative experience, rather than choosing what you want your life to be like in any fine detail. If you choose to have the transformative experience, to choose rationally, you must prefer to discover whether and how your preferences will change. If you choose to avoid the transformative experience, to choose rationally, you must prefer not to discover whether and how your preferences would have changed.

What paradigms or standard views are likely to be challenged by the research resulting from the project?

LP: The research challenges the assumption that an implicitly behaviorist or “non first personal” stance is sufficient when assessing the rationality of individual decisions. It also challenges the notion that we can construct and follow a coherent, rationally planned life for ourselves as agents.

Your own work on transformative experiences has already found its way into mainstream media outlets. How did this come about?

LP: It happened by chance—I co-wrote a blog post about it and a ton of places picked up on it and

engaged with the issues. It was a surprise, because sometimes it can be hard to get nonacademics to care about philosophical problems.

Something about your work has piqued the interest of non-academics. Why do you think that is?

LP: People care about ideas, and they care about philosophical issues, when they can see how those ideas and issues connect to things they value in their own lives. Nonacademics see the idea of transformative experience and understand how it connects to their own major life choices.

Right now, what’s the most exciting aspect of this project?

LP: The possibilities for future work in philosophy...are very exciting. I’m especially interested to see how others will engage with the project and to see what directions they want to take. I’m also very excited about the interdisciplinary work, particularly the psychology side, since this is an opportunity to build a new research project that draws on several different disciplinary perspectives, as opposed to being dominated by a traditional disciplinary idea or method. 🙌

If you are interested in transformative experience and religious experience, we encourage you to visit the project website and consider applying for one of our many funding opportunities (<http://the-experience-project.org/>).



The Atonement Tradition: Redemptive or Corruptive?

by Kathryn Pogin

WARNER, WHEN I SLAY MY DRAGONS

Sociological data indicate that while domestic abuse is not any more common within the Christian community than it is within the broader cultural context, religious Christian women are “more vulnerable *when abused*. They are less likely to leave, are more likely to believe the abuser’s promise to change his violent ways, frequently espouse reservations about seeking community-based resources or shelters for battered women, and commonly express guilt—that they have failed their families and God in not being able to make the marriage work.”¹ This difference is not reducible to belief in Christian theologies of divorce. Research suggests that conservative

Protestants have higher than average divorce rates, and Evangelical Americans have higher divorce rates than atheists and agnostics.² This implies that an aversion to procuring

“It’s possible that dominant social groups exert undue influence on the shape of the conceptual landscape. This, in turn, may prevent those who are oppressed from understanding the nature of their own oppression.”

divorce on theological grounds cannot fully explain Christian women’s special vulnerability to abuse.

I suggest that one contributing factor

is the way traditional understandings of the atonement and redemptive suffering have influenced Christian thought more generally. Conceiving of redemption as arising out of sacrificial submission to unjust violence has corrupted the shared intellectual resources through which we conceptualize ethical conduct, love, and virtue. As the most salient example of divine love for Christians, how the atonement is understood has significant consequences for understanding love broadly.

Consider this:

[My husband] beats me sometimes. Mostly he is a good man. But sometimes he becomes very angry and he hits me. He knocks me down. One time he

broke my arm and I had to go to the hospital. . . I went to my priest twenty years ago. I've been trying to follow his advice. The priest said I should rejoice in my sufferings because they bring me closer to Jesus. He said, 'Jesus suffered because he loved us.' He said, 'If you love Jesus, accept the beatings and bear them gladly, as Jesus bore the cross.'³

Stories like this are all too common.

What we can know is dependent upon the concepts we have. To a large extent, these concepts come from our society. An ancient Greek could not know she had contracted a virus—she could not even think about viruses—because the concept of a virus was not socially available. Since many concepts we use are social constructions, it's possible that dominant social groups exert undue influence on the shape of the conceptual landscape.⁴ This, in turn, may prevent those who are oppressed from understanding the nature of their own oppression. Likewise, religious concepts may be shaped without proper regard for the experiences of those who are marginalized.


It seems that 'atonement' is one such concept. Though the tradition itself is varied, there is a unifying theme: the suffering of Christ is thought of as central to our redemption. Of course, atonement theories are not meant to encourage vulnerability to abuse, but when redemption is thought of as the result of a moral exemplar willingly submitting to unjust violence so that others might be saved it is natural to

think of wrongfully inflicted suffering as something that we should endure. In understanding the atonement as an exemplar of loving action, and Christ's suffering as taken on *in order* to redeem us (rather than a necessary consequence of some other redeeming action), we obscure the import of resistance. We unwittingly justify submission to violence. To better account for the redemptive nature of the atonement without encouraging submission to abuse, consider why Rosemary Radford Ruether rejects the atonement wholesale:

Suffering is a factor in the liberation process, not as a means of redemption, but as the risk one takes when one struggles to overcome unjust systems whose beneficiaries resist change. The means of redemption is conversion, opening up to one another, changing systems of distorted relations, creating loving and life-giving communities of people here and now, not getting oneself tortured to death.

What Ruether believes is reason to give up the atonement provides fertile ground for constructing a better model.

Making use of the notion of active, non-violent resistance, Christ can provide an example of a life dedicated to resisting injustice, even under threat of death. Submission to violence on this understanding would be neither an ideal nor an inconsistency. Christ's willing crucifixion would itself be an act of resistance. In allowing violence to be

done to himself, Christ subverted the intentions of his oppressors, rather than allowing them to achieve their aim. The purpose of crucifixion was not simply to kill those who were so sentenced by the state, but rather to silence those who would fear such a fate. Christ was certainly not silenced. Perhaps death has no central role in what redeems us, nor sacrificial love, but rather an unreserved refusal to cooperate with injustice. 



WINSHIP SMITH, UNTITLED FIGURE

¹ Nancy Nason-Clark, "When Terror Strikes at Home: The Interface Between Religion and Domestic Violence," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43:3 (2004). p. 304

² Council on Contemporary Families report, "Civil Rights Symposium: Fifty Years of Religious Change: 1964-2014" <https://contemporaryfamilies.org/50-years-of-religious-change/>

³ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*. (2002) pp. 20-21

⁴ Cf. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. (2007)

MEET THE CENTER: 2014-2015 Center Fellows



Thomas D. Senior
Alvin Plantinga Fellow

Tom Senior is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Arkansas. He has just finished a 17-1/2 year run as Department Chair. Prior to that, he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Arizona, taught at Arkansas, and was Visiting Assistant Professor at Georgetown University. Professor Senior's research areas are epistemology and philosophy of religion. He is currently working on a book on the epistemology of memory and essays on the nature of faith.



Rebecca Chan
Visiting Graduate Fellow

Rebecca Chan is a graduate student at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She is writing a dissertation in metaphysics that focuses on grounding, essence, and modality. During her time at the Center, Rebecca plans to complete her dissertation and work on projects in philosophy of religion, which is her other main area of interest.



Joshua Thurow
Research Fellow

Josh Thurow is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at The University of Texas at San Antonio. Professor Thurow's main areas of research are epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of religion. Josh will be spending this year at the Center working on a book in which he uses contemporary work on collective responsibility to develop a theory of the Christian doctrine of the atonement.



Carl Mosser
Visiting Scholar

Carl Mosser is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies (on leave) 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.



Christina Van Dyke
Research Fellow

Christina Van Dyke is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, where she has taught since 2001. She specializes in medieval philosophy (particularly metaphysics, ethics, and the philosophy of mind) and the philosophy of gender. Her research for the 2014-15 academic year focuses on Aquinas and happiness in the afterlife, with particular emphasis on its implications for embodiment and temporal experience.



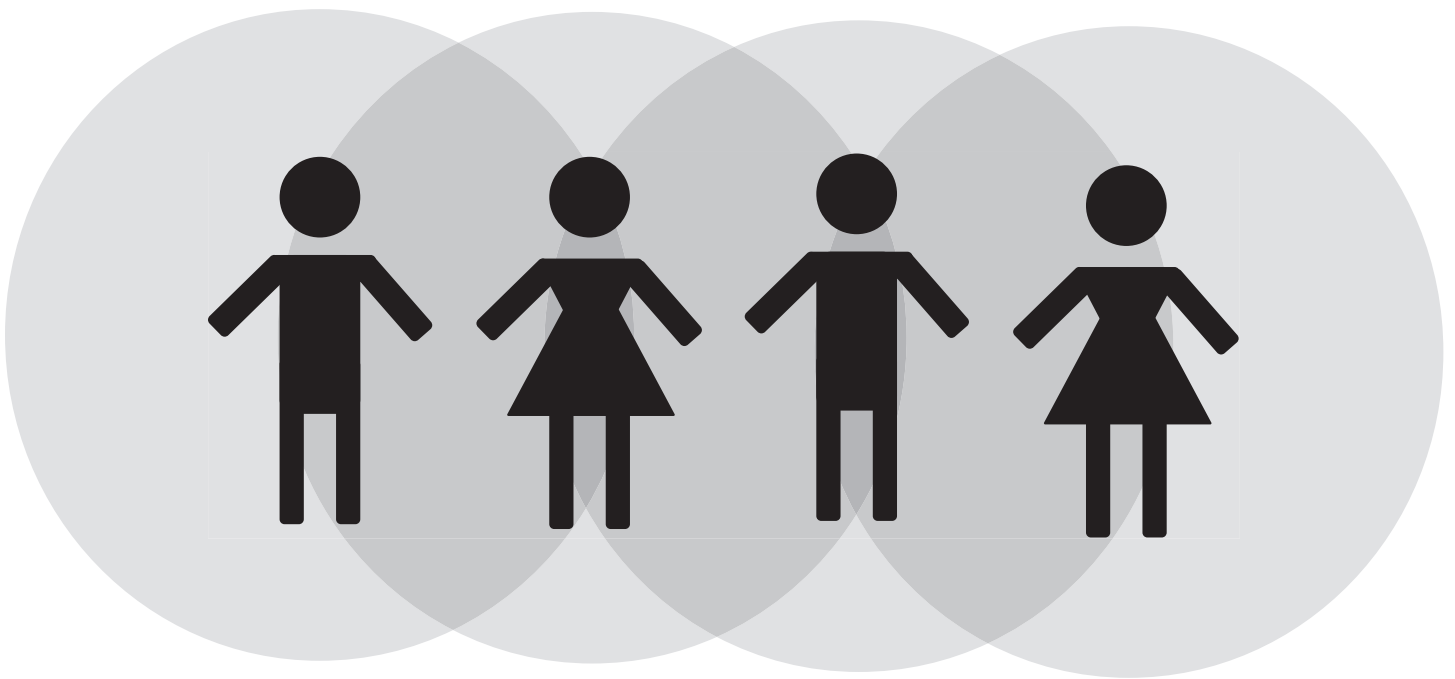
Connie Svob
Research Visitor

Connie Svob received her doctorate from the University of Alberta in cognitive psychology. Her research has focused on the structure and organization of memory for transitional and historical events. During her studies, Dr. Svob spent two terms at Oxford University studying theology and philosophy at Blackfriars Hall. During her tenure at the Center for Philosophy of Religion, she will explore the cognitive processes implicated in religious experiences.



Leigh Vicens
Research Fellow

Leigh Vicens is an assistant professor of philosophy at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Since completing her dissertation on theological determinism in 2012, Leigh's research has focused primarily on the metaphysics of mind and action, as well as related issues in philosophy of religion. While here at the Center, she plans to work on questions regarding the nature and extent of human freedom and moral responsibility.



A Social Religious Epistemology?

John Greco

In the later part of the 20th century religious epistemology underwent somewhat of an “externalist turn.” That is, religious epistemology became less concerned with epistemic standings that are internally accessible from the point of view of the believer, or that carry some internal guarantee, and more interested in standings associated with reliable cognitive practice and proper cognitive functioning. In this respect, religious epistemology was following epistemology more generally, and the results were dramatic. It is no exaggeration to say that the field experienced a kind of renaissance, cumulating in achievements such as Alston’s *Perceiving God* and Plantinga’s *Warranted Christian Belief*.

More recently, epistemology has taken a “social turn,” focusing attention, for example, on the ways that an individual’s epistemic standing depends on his or her social relations and social environment. Another concern of social epistemology is the “epistemology of groups,”

which asks whether and how social groups (corporations, nations, research teams) can themselves be the seat of knowledge, understanding, and other important epistemic standings. I want to argue that religious epistemology should follow suit here as well – it is time for a “social turn” in religious epistemology. In fact, in many ways religious belief cries out for a social approach. This is especially so in the Abrahamic traditions, where the importance of community, testimony, authority, and other social phenomena are clearly central to the life of faith.

One of the first and most important foci of social epistemology has been the epistemology of testimony. Granting the extent to which our justified beliefs and knowledge depend on the testimony of others, epistemologists have developed an intense interest in the nature of testimonial evidence and testimonial exchanges. One result is a building consensus (in so far as philosophers are capable of consensus) that testi-

monial knowledge does not fit easily into traditional epistemological approaches. In this context, many have argued that traditional epistemology must be radically amended to properly accommodate the role of testimony in our epistemic lives. In sum, the “social turn” in general epistemology has produced an explosion of interesting work, including new ideas about the nature of knowledge in general, as well as the role of testimony in the transmission of knowledge within epistemic communities. That there should be fruitful applications to religious belief seems obvious. Here I will focus on two.

First, a prominent issue in the epistemology of testimony concerns whether testimonial knowledge can be understood in terms of traditional epistemic categories. “Reductionists” think that the answer is yes, and the most common version of reductionism is that testimonial knowledge is just a kind of inductive knowledge. That is, we know from testimony because we know from

past observations and appropriate generalizations that some speaker can be trusted, at least in such-and-such circumstances, at least on such-and-such topic. “Anti-reductionists” argue that this way of thinking about testimonial knowledge is wrong-headed. Rather, the epistemic significance of testimony is special, requiring its own kind of epistemological treatment. To “reduce” testimonial evidence and knowledge to inductive evidence and knowledge is to miss the special role that testimony plays in our epistemic lives.

A second prominent issue in the epistemology of testimony concerns whether testimony “generates” knowledge or “transmits” it. The idea behind the generation thesis is that testimony is another source of knowledge, much in the way that perception and reason are sources. The idea behind the transmission thesis is that testimony serves a different role in our “knowledge economy.” Rather than generating or producing knowledge, the role of testimony is to transmit or distribute it. The issues here are potentially related to the debate between reductionism and anti-reductionism. Thus it might be that testimonial knowledge is special and irreducible precisely because of its special role in transmission: one gets testimonial knowledge not by generating it for oneself, but by having it transmitted to one by someone who already knows.




“...In many ways religious belief cries out for a social approach. This is especially so in the Abrahamic traditions, where the importance of community, testimony, authority, and other social phenomena are clearly central to the life of faith.”

It is fair to say, I believe, that traditional religious epistemology has largely assumed a reductionist understanding of testimony, and has largely thought of testimony as a source of knowledge generation. Those assumptions are on display, for example, in Hume’s discussion of miracles, and his claim that our testimonial evidence for a miracle’s having occurred is always weaker than our non-testimonial evidence that it has not. Hume’s argument for that claim assumes that he is comparing apples to apples. That is, it assumes that testimonial evidence is just a species of inductive evidence, and therefore can be evaluated as such. Critics of Hume’s argument seem to share these assumptions, and responses to Hume are framed accordingly. Similar assumptions are on display in many discussions regarding the sig-

nificance of religious diversity. Such discussions proceed from the perspective of a neutral observer, and ask what one should make of the many and conflicting claims made by various religious traditions. For example, what should we make of the fact that different traditions have different prophets, different scriptures, and different teachings? Note that, from this perspective, these competing testimonies from different traditions are treated as evidentially on a par. Each constitutes a bit of data, which should be accommodated by a neutral observer in a best explanation of religious diversity.

But suppose that anti-reductionism is right, and that therefore testimonial evidence cannot be evaluated according to the same criteria as inductive evidence. In that case, Hume’s argument does not get off the ground. Or suppose that the function of testimony is to transmit knowledge within an epistemic community, rather than to generate it as an external source. In that case, the perspective of our neutral observer misses the epistemological significance of testimony given within a tradition.

Of course, I have done nothing here to argue in favor of anti-reductionism or a transmission view. The point, rather, is that these are issues of central relevance to religious epistemology. And once these issues are put on the table, religious epistemology cannot go on in the same way. 

A Year of Research at the Center

Leigh Vicens

I have been working on a number of projects at the Center for Philosophy of Religion related to the issues of human freedom and moral respon-

sibility. I first got interested in these issues when writing a dissertation on theological determinism, in which I examined reasons offered by theo-

logical determinists for preferring their view of divine providence, as well as ways in which they dealt with objections to their view. In the end,

I became concerned that theological determinism diminished human freedom and responsibility for sin, thereby aggravating the problem of evil. I concluded that we should prefer views of divine providence that allowed for libertarian human freedom. Since completing my Ph.D., I have become more interested in empirical questions about the nature and scope of human freedom. While still convinced that freedom and moral responsibility are incompatible with both theological and natural determinism, I have begun to wonder what other factors, besides the absence of determinism, are necessary for such freedom, and what evidence we have that these factors obtain.

One paper I am currently working on argues that a particular conception of probabilistic laws of nature that some libertarians hold rules out free will in the same way that determinism does. According to the conception I have in mind, the laws are both universal, in the sense that they fix the conditional probabilities of every event, and also causal, in the sense that they are true in virtue of the causal powers of the fundamental microphysical constituents of reality. My reason for thinking that such laws would rule out free will has to do with another factor that I think is required for freedom: agent-causation, or the power of an agent, *qua* substance, to bring about certain effects. While a number of libertarians have argued that such a power is essential to free agency, I think that some of them have ignored the following consequence of this line of reasoning: in order for agent-causation to be a real, irreducible feature of reality, the agent herself must be able to affect the probability that certain events occur. But if the probability of every event occurring is already fixed by the microphysical constituents of reality,


then agent-causes cannot be irreducible in this way.

But do we have reason for thinking that such a conception of laws is correct? Some philosophers think that we are at least *prima facie* justified in believing that we have free will, on the basis of either our moral attitudes and practices, or the “sense” of freedom we sometimes have when we deliberate, decide, or act. If they are right, and if our freedom is incompatible with a particular way the world might be, then we have at least *prima facie* justification for believing that the world is not that way. In another project, I consider the claim that we have some kind of introspective evidence of our free will. I argue that, while we may have a “sense” of our own freedom, this sense is not phenomenological, but doxastic; in other words, it is not something “given” to us in our experience, but either a judgment we make or a belief we presuppose when we act. Here is one reason for thinking this: it seems that we cannot *experience* ourselves as free unless we simultaneously *presuppose* or *judge* that we are. Contrast this with agency. As Tim Bayne has pointed out, the experience of acting can come apart from, and indeed be at odds with, judgments about whether one is acting. However, it seems to me that there cannot be such a discrepancy between one’s experiences of acting *freely* and one’s judgments about one’s free agency. This suggests that there may not be, distinct from one’s presuppositions or judgments, an experience of one’s own freedom, akin to the experience of one’s agency. So, if there is support for the claim that we have free will, it must come from somewhere other than introspection.

As I continue to study the evidence we have for the existence of human freedom and responsibility, one



JANKOWSKI, MORNING STAR 3 - DETAIL

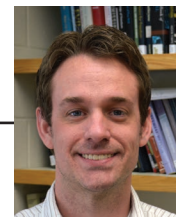
question that is raised for me regards the consonance or dissonance between difference *kinds* of considerations on this issue. Suppose, for instance, that we lack empirical grounds for concluding that we have free will, but that we have theological grounds for concluding that we are free. Where does that leave us? Since I am no advocate of a theology that affirms seemingly contradictory statements, such dissonance between my tentative theological and empirical conclusions will lead me to reconsider both. So, on the one hand, I have recently returned to my work on theological determinism, which has allowed me to think again about responses that determinists might make to the problem of evil, and how they measure up against those that libertarians employ. On the other hand, I have begun to reconsider what I take to be near philosophical orthodoxy on the subject of the character and scope of laws of nature, which I think rules out libertarian freedom. Obviously, I have my work cut out for me this year, and my research at the Center may well turn into a life-long project of sorting these issues out. 

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Center Announcements

- *Logos 2015: Religious Experience will be streamed live May 7-9. Registration to stream the event is now open. Visit our website for more details.*
- *The Center's two large grant projects Hope & Optimism and Transformative Experience are underway, you can find more information on our website*
- *New video content online at: philreligion.nd.edu/videos*
- *Access our continually updated Global Philosophy of Religion Calendar at our website*
- *Deadline to Apply for Center Fellowships will be February of 2016*

For more information on these and other Center announcements visit us online at: philreligion.nd.edu

Self-Knowledge in Medieval Mysticism

Christina van Dyke, Calvin College

RENEDEZER, SHATTERED SPACE

Self-knowledge was a persistent theme in medieval mysticism. The Christian Latin mystics of the 13th to 15th centuries saw union with the divine as our ultimate goal; in this context, the oracle at Delphi's injunction to 'know thyself' captured the need for both personal knowledge prior to such union and (since mystic union is fleeting in this life) continued introspection afterwards.

Mysticism in the Middle Ages was not a uniform movement, and its forms changed substantially from the 11th to the 15th centuries. Two main strains emerged: the 'apophatic' and 'affective' traditions. Both portray knowledge of the self (via experience and introspection) as important preparation for union with God, but they give self-knowledge different functions—they diverge regarding the ideal outcome of such knowledge. The apophatic tradition stresses moving past self-knowledge to *self-forgetting* (and even loss of self, or self-abnegation); for the affective tradition, union with the divine is a radical *self-fulfillment*.

Originally a minority view, the apophatic tradition became dominant in the early 20th century, when scholars argued that universal and absolute mystic experiences were the only 'genuine' ones. Accounts describing sensory or emotional phenomenology were discounted, and affective mysticism gradually disappeared; today, medieval mysticism is usually associated with eschewing attachment to self or body. It's an important corrective, then, to realize that affective mysticism was a robust, widespread tradition that emphasized the passion of the incarnate Christ and portrayed

physical and emotional mystic experiences as intrinsically valuable.


The apophatic tradition emerges in the Middle Ages through the neoplatonic works of pseudo-Dionysius and John Scottus Eriugena, culminating in the late 13th century with the work of the Dominican Meister Eckhart, and continuing into the early Renaissance with John of the Cross and Nicholas of Cusa.

Apophatic mysticism characterizes true union with the divine as anti-experiential; it understands the visions of light, smells of incense, etc., central in the lives of many mystics as distractions from the ultimate goal of self-abnegation. Although knowledge of self was seen as useful for both recognizing sinful self-orientation and seeing God's image in us, the ultimate goal is to move beyond experience of self as anything separate from God. The more Neoplatonic mystics stressed the intellect's role in both self-knowledge and self-abnegation. Others in the apophatic tradition, however—particularly in the 14th and 15th centuries—focus on the role of the will. Marguerite Porete, burnt at the stake in 1310, argued that our final goal is the annihilation of the conscious self through the surrender of our will to God's. Similar sentiments appear in 14th century English works. True union with God requires relinquishing attachment to self on every level: cognitive, volitional, emotional, and physical.

Affective mysticism, in contrast, became prominent in the later Middle Ages as a reaction to the (heretical gnostic) perception that materiality was inherently negative and a prison from which our souls strive to

become free. Emphasizing the Incarnation, the affective tradition relies on the belief that if the supremely good God took on flesh, then flesh cannot be inherently evil. Physical and emotional experiences (e.g., seeing visions, not needing food or drink for long periods, and ecstatic joy or sorrow) constitute an important part of mystic union in this tradition. Such phenomena are understood, not as distractions, but as valuable unitive experiences.

The Eucharist assumes central importance in mystic experiences within this tradition, demonstrating the belief that humans are most closely joined with Christ's divinity through his corporeity. Affective mystics sometimes saw flesh or tasted honey in the Eucharistic wafer, and priests might hold up an infant in place of the host at the moment of transubstantiation. In affective mysticism, these experiences were understood as a means of overcoming the self-alienation common to fallen humanity. Conceiving of oneself in purely spiritual or mental terms is alienating to creatures whose primary interaction with reality is physical; knowing oneself as a bodily subject is important for grasping one's identity as God's child.

The distinction between affective and apophatic mysticism was not recognized at the time; much medieval mystical literature combines apophatic and affective elements. It proves useful, though, for correcting the modern impression that mysticism involves transcending attachment to the self. Rather than merely a stage on the path towards self-less union, affective mystic experiences are also a radical fulfillment of the embodied self in communion with God. 



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