

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

# Center for Philosophy of Religion

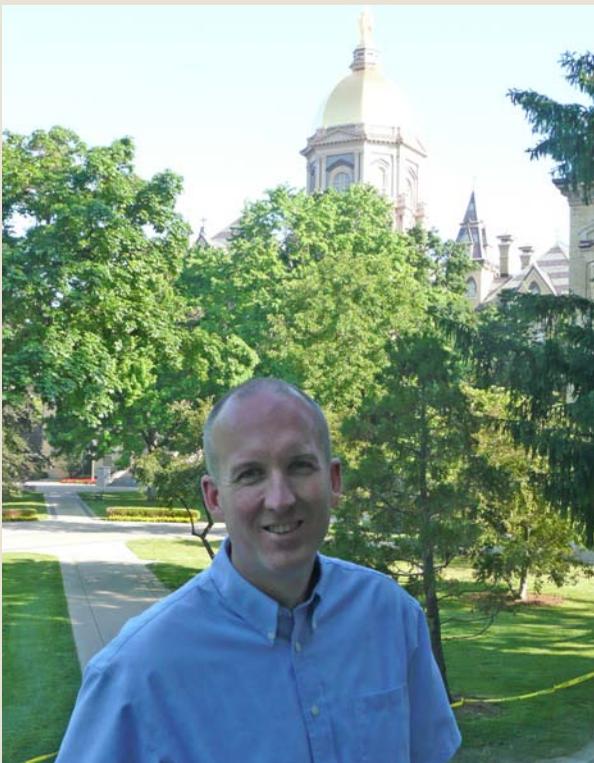
Spring 2010 Newsletter

## Notes from the Director

**D**ear Colleagues and Friends of the Center: Fall of 2009 marked the most substantial expansion of the Center for Philosophy of Religion's activities and staff since it was founded in 1976. With generous support from the John Templeton Foundation, the Center has taken on a four-year project entitled "The Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought" that

will include several international conferences, additional residential fellowships, and a variety of other activities. (For details, see [www.evilandtheodicy.org](http://www.evilandtheodicy.org)). This funding, along with other grants from the College of Arts and Letters and the Office of Research have enabled us to begin several other initiatives as well. We are now hosting an annual interdisciplinary workshop in philosophical theology that aims to foster conversation between scholars in philosophy and theology with common research interests.

We are sponsoring several activities for undergraduates, including the *Food for Thought* series and what will hopefully become a large-scale popular lecture series (beginning with this year's debate between Christopher Hitchens and Dinesh D'Souza). We are also in the beginning stages of developing a variety of resources on our website ([www.nd.edu/~cpirelig](http://www.nd.edu/~cpirelig)) for ministers and others outside the academy who have interests but little formal training in philosophy of religion. All of this is going on in addition to our regular weekly discussion



Center Director, Michael Rea

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## Plantinga's History of the Center

The Center for philosophy of religion was established in 1976 at the urging and under the able leadership of the late Fred Crosson.

After five years or so, Fred's time and energy were demanded elsewhere; he resigned as director of the Center, and I succeeded him. Tom Flint became the assistant/associate director (the distinction depending on the excellence of his performance).

The Center's aim, then as now, was to promote first-rate work in philosophy of religion. This is an important and worthwhile aim, and an aim shared by other similar organizations. But the Center also adopted another aim, one more nearly unique: to explore and develop specifically theistic and Christian philosophy. Here the idea is to support work at the great problems of philosophy from a point of view that is explicitly Christian or theistic. Some have thought that to do



Former Center Director, Alvin Plantinga

this is really to fall into theology (but what's bad about falling into theology?); surely they are mistaken. Philosophers do this sort of thing all the time, and do it quite properly. Naturalistic philosophers, for example, very often work at the great questions of philosophy from a naturalistic perspective, and indeed take as their project 'naturalizing' this or that—knowledge, or morality, or proper function. They are rightly unapologetic about doing so; but then in the same way a theist, an anti-naturalist philosopher, is rightly unapologetic about working at the great questions of philosophy from a theistic point of view.

During the years I was director the Center mostly pursued two kinds of projects. On the one hand, we held biannual conferences on topics like theology and philosophy, religion and science, the nature of Christian scholarship, and the like. On the other, we awarded fellowships—junior and senior fellowships—to philosophers who would come to the Center and spend a year or a semester there.

These were both genuinely useful activities. As for the second, fellows benefited greatly from contact with each other; one of the best things we did was to hold weekly meetings devoted to discussing and commenting on the work in progress by the fellows. But the fellows also had the opportunity to go to graduate seminars and in other ways work with Notre Dame philosophers interested in these topics—and

the Notre Dame philosophers of religion were (and are) as good a group as could be found anywhere in the world. We received many glowing letters from past fellows attesting to the great value of their time at the Center.

Our conferences were also unusually useful. They weren't always wholly irenic, and indeed one of them, the 1992 conference (see *Hermes and Athena*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Thomas Flint) bringing together philosophers and theologians, will never be forgotten by anyone who was present; but on the whole they made important contributions to philosophy of religion and Christian philosophy. All in all, things went well.

In 2002 I retired as director, and was succeeded by Tom, with Mike Rea as Associate Director. Tom was the Director for six years, and retired not long after he became the editor of *Faith and Philosophy*, a strategic but exceedingly large and demanding job.

In 2008 Mike Rea succeeded Tom as Director, with Sam Newlands as Associate/Assistant Director. Mike and Sam have taken the Center in new directions, while nevertheless maintaining its historic emphases on philosophy of religion and Christian or theistic philosophy. They have also emphasized trying to bring about a rapprochement between Christian philosophy and theology. This isn't as easy as it sounds—theologians and philosophers, even theistic or Christian philosophers, have traditionally tended to be suspicious of each other. Some theologians think of philosophers as ahistorical logic choppers (sometimes with good reason),

### Notes from the Director cont'd

groups wherein local faculty and graduate students meet with Center Fellows to discuss the results of the research that it is the Center's primary mission to support. It is an exciting time to be involved with the Center for Philosophy of Religion, and we encourage you to check out our web pages to see if any of what we are doing might benefit you.

Michael Rea

and some philosophers think similarly unflattering thoughts about theologians. Mike and Sam believe it is time to get beyond this unwholesome state of affairs.

Mike and Sam have also been innovators in a different way. In the past, at least when I was Director, the Center was content to do its important but relatively modest thing, satisfied that it was doing that thing well. Mike and Sam, however applied for a hefty grant from the Templeton Foundation; better yet, their application was successful! The name of their project:

“The Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought.” They plan a whole range of activities: for example, a new translation of Leibniz’s *Theodicy* (by Robert Sleigh, an outstanding Leibniz scholar), new faculty research fellowships for work on the problem of evil, similar fellow-



Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 1604

ships for work on “skeptical theism” as a response to the atheological argument from evil, conferences in the US and abroad, workshops on topics connected with the problem of evil, graduate seminars on evil, dissertation fellowships, prize essay contests, and even a large scale public event in New

York City. And all this in addition to the usual and normal operation of the Center! This wonderful blossoming deserves to be celebrated!

So the Center has had a fine past; its future, however, looks splendid!

*Alvin Plantinga*

## Recent Events

The past months have been very active and full of news for the Center. Director Michael Rea and Associate Director Samuel Newlands recently were awarded more than **\$1.7 million from the John Templeton Foundation** for their project **“The Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought.”** The project includes a wide range of research initiatives, including includ-

ing fellowships, conferences, seminars, workshops, publications, translations, contests, and public events.

The Center has also hosted some exciting events over the last several months. Turnout at all of them has been excellent, sometimes far surpassing our expectations. The flagship event for the Center this fall was a pioneering conference on the actions of the God of the Old Testament. The

conference, which was entitled ‘**My Ways Are Not Your Ways: The Character of the God of the Hebrew Bible,**’ took place from September 10-12 in McKenna Hall at Notre Dame. It sent a resounding call to people of faith everywhere to think more deeply about controversial events in their traditions. Philosophers from around the world journeyed to the conference to break ground in this exciting new field

of study. Among them were leading lights like Eleonore Stump, John Hare, Richard Swinburne, and Nicholas



*Nicholas Wolterstorff discusses the fate of the Canaanites with Louis Anthony at the My Ways Conference*

Center, delivered the **eighth annual Alvin Plantinga lecture** to a packed auditorium in Notre Dame's Eck Center. Mark used the lecture to unpack some of the most important and controversial topics in contemporary moral philosophy. In a rigorous manner he compared divine command ethics and natural law ethics, ultimately concluding that a successful moral theory might need



*Eleonore Stump lectured on *The Problem of Evil at the My Ways are Not Your Ways Conference**

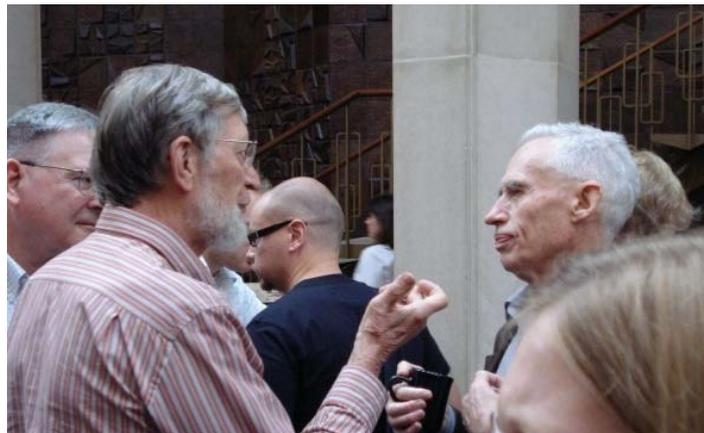
to combine elements of both. Afterwards the questions from the audience (including one from Professor Plantinga himself) were insightful and enthusiastic. Mark is a gifted lecturer, but the audience really seemed to give him a run for his money!



*Theologian Bruce Marshall lectures on *Christ the End of Analogy at the Logos Conference**

Wolterstorff. The questions that were asked included why the God of the Old Testament acted in the way that he did and what the implications of his actions are for our contemporary religious commitments. Especially encouraging to the organizers were the many undergraduates who attended the conference. They were joined, of course, by graduate students and faculty from many departments at Notre Dame and at other universities.

In early October Mark Murphy, the Durkin Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University and the 2009-2010 Alvin Plantinga Fellow in the



*Dialectic over pastries between Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga at the My Ways Conference*

An ongoing event in the Center that has taken place every Friday is the **Center Discussion Group**. Scholars working on the cutting edge of their disciplines, including Oxford's Brian Leftow and Notre Dame's Alvin Plantinga, have used this group to explore

new ideas and also to return to timeless older ones. The lively and sometimes raucous conversation that has taken place in this group has been a source of great encouragement to the



*The Weekly Center Pub Night at Fiddlers Hearth*



## Interview with Mark Murphy

Mark Murphy returned to Notre Dame this year as the Plantinga

Fellow for the Center for Philosophy of Religion. A professor at Georgetown University, Mark's interests are in the areas of Ethics, Political Philosophy, and Philosophy of Law. In his time at Notre Dame, Mark is working on a book project on the question of the relationship between God and the moral law.

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### Why did you choose philosophy as a vocation?

"I knew that I wanted to pursue philosophy as a vocation when I took my first philosophy course in college. I remember having an intrinsic interest in the questions and enjoyed solving hard problems with a limited set of tools."

• • • •

### Why did you choose Notre Dame for graduate studies?

"I came to Notre Dame in order to study with Alasdair MacIntyre, who taught me many important lessons—including that philosophy requires

patience and discipline, in addition to cleverness. In those days, I remember spending late nights studying at Denny's and eating pancakes (back in the day before Starbucks—yes, there was such a day)."

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### What do you enjoy about teaching?

"I enjoy teaching both graduate and undergraduate courses. Graduate courses provide me with a sheer joy of enquiry. In introductory courses, I try to show the students my excitement about philosophy. I put an argument up and say, "look, it's beautiful." My goal is to draw the students in through my excitement and I think it's a shame when students are turned off to philosophy in an intro class."

• • • •

### How has your religious affiliation affected your work?

"I view my religious beliefs as a check to my philosophy. If I come to a conclusion that strikes me as not fitting with the Christian worldview, I know I need to re-think the conclusion. At the same time, my religious beliefs provide me with a fertile source of questions, a

confidence that the problems are solvable, and the freedom to approach my work with a sort of confident playfulness."

• • • •

### If you were to recommend one book or author to non-philosophers, who/what would that be?

"Peter van Inwagen. His writing is clear and accessible and he writes on a wonderful combination of ideas."

### Interesting tid-bits:

Mark met his wife, Jeanette, at Notre Dame as a graduate student. They met at Waddick's coffee shop on campus—his wife was making faces at a mutual friend through the glass.

**Children:** Ryan (14), Flannery (10) Cormac Alasdair (7) and Finnian (3)

**Hometown:** Dallas

**Hobby:** Cycling

**Currently Reading:** Cormac McCarthy novels

participants. Although the group distributes its papers via email beforehand, discussion in the group is accessible to non-specialists. Presenters and participants alike have found it immensely enlightening and productive.

In late March the Center hosted the **Food for Thought** event in which an undergraduate audi-



Photo by: Adrian Lopez Medina

Christopher Hitchens (left), while Dinesh D'Souza (right) and Mike Rea (center), at the Hitchens-D'Souza Debate

ence received a free dinner and a lecture on Purgatory by Center Fellow Jerry Walls, and on April 7 co-hosted the singularly hard-hitting **The God Debate: "Is Religion the Problem?"** between atheist provocateur **Christopher Hitchens** and Catholic apologist **Dinesh D'Souza**.

Jeremy Neill

## An Ecumenical Purgatory *By Jerry Walls*

“Purgatory” has traditionally been a fighting word between Roman Catholics and Protestants, going all the way back to the Reformation. Indeed, the doctrine is closely connected with some of the deepest differences between the two branches of the Church, in particular, the source of doctrinal authority and the nature of salvation. Not only is the case that purgatory lacks biblical support, Protestants contend, but it is incompatible with the most crucial of all Reformation doctrines, salvation by faith alone. To make matters worse, purgatory was deeply linked with some of the most notorious corruption in the Roman Church, most notably the highly organized sale of indulgences as a means of fund raising. One of the most infamous couplets in western history is from Tetzl, the monk who so aroused Luther’s ire for his shameless hawking of indulgences. Tetzl’s colorful sales pitch sermon promised that:

As soon as coin in coffer springs  
A soul from purgatory springs.

Both the passion with which Protestants have often rejected purgatory, as well as some of their central reasons for doing so are reflected in the Calvin’s words when he wrote that “purgatory is a deadly fiction of Satan, which nullifies the cross of Christ, inflicts unbearable contempt upon God’s mercy, and overturns and destroys our faith. For what means this purgatory of theirs but that satisfaction for sins is paid by the souls of the dead after their death?”

While purgatory has an undeniably controversial pedigree, especially since the Reformation, it is important to recognize that the doctrine originally began to take shape in a pastoral context. One of the most significant figures in the history of the doctrine in this



*Michelino Dante, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence, 1465*

regard is Cyprian of Carthage, who died in 258. His particular concern was the very pressing issue of persecution, and especially how to deal with believers who had denied Christ in the face of martyrdom. The issue was whether such well-intentioned but weak believers could still remain in the Church and hope to be saved. Cyprian found a possible solution in the following words of Christ: “...you will be thrown in prison. I tell you solemnly, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny” (Matthew 5:26). To Cyprian, this suggested that weak believers could still be admitted to communion and finally saved, though they would have to pay the appropriate penance for their sins. This penance could continue in the “prison” of the afterlife if necessary, a notion that

is obviously very much in accord with the doctrine of purgatory as it would later take shape. As Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, observes: “With this interpretation, that there is purification in the future life, the root concept of the Western doctrine of Purgatory is already formulated clearly enough.”

A second important pastoral issue that shaped the doctrine of purgatory is the early practice of praying for the dead. A highly influential instance of this comes from Augustine in a famous passage in the *Confessions* where he describes praying for his recently deceased mother Monica. While he was confident of her devotion and piety, he was also mindful that she had not lived in perfect obedience to God. He returned to this issue in *The City of God*, and again affirms that prayers for the dead may be effective for certain kinds of sinners, in particular, those who have already shown evidence of God’s grace in their lives.

Starting in the year 413, Augustine gave increasing attention to the question of the fate of souls after death in response to a group of adversaries who, following Origen, held the view that eventually all, or at least most, would be saved. In articulating his convictions on this matter, he further developed his views not only on eternal hell, but also on purgatorial punishment. In the process of doing so, Augustine distinguished between four kinds of persons. On one end of the spectrum are the saints, martyrs and other righteous persons who go quickly if not immediately to heaven.

On the other end are the godless who are consigned to hell with no hope of any further chance of being saved.

For our purposes, the more interesting types are the two intermediate groups, those who are neither altogether good nor altogether wicked. The latter, according to Augustine, go to hell but have hope that their suffering may at least be mitigated somewhat by the prayers or suffrages of the righteous, though they cannot be saved. It is the former group composed of those who are not altogether good who are most relevant to the doctrine of purgatory. These persons may eventually reach heaven after the appropriate time in the purgatorial fire. Augustine's fourfold distinction of postmortem fates was highly influential in subsequent discussions, though it would require revision before purgatory could emerge as a distinct third (albeit temporal) destination. Eventually, the two intermediate groups were collapsed into one, and the three remaining groups mapped easily to heaven, hell and purgatory.

Now this intermediate group poses urgent theological and pastoral questions for any theological system. This group arguably makes up the large majority of humanity, and includes many of the persons who inhabit pews, more or less regularly, on Sunday morning. These are persons who have some degree of faith, but for various reasons have made little headway in serious Christian discipleship and moral and spiritual transformation. And even many believers who are serious about their faith are keenly aware that they fall considerably short of that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

It is not enough merely to be forgiven of these various sins and imperfections. In order to enjoy the presence

of God in heaven, we must actually be made holy. Every orthodox Christian tradition recognizes that sin remains in the lives of persons who have been forgiven and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Again, the issue is what is to become of persons who die in a state of imperfection. Unless one wants to assign persons in this intermediate group to hell, or wants to say they go to heaven with their sins and impurities intact, some account must be given of how they are purified and made ready for heaven. Any Christian system of thought must answer this question, so the issue is not so much whether one believes in purgatory if one is a Christian, but rather, which account of purgatory one believes.

The typical Protestant account of purgatory is that it occurs immediately after death through an instantaneous, unilateral act of God which purges the believer of any remaining sin. As Charles Hodge, the great 19<sup>th</sup> Century Princeton theologian concisely put it: "The Protestant doctrine is that the souls of believers are at death made perfect in holiness."

Recently, however, a minority report has been emerging within Protestantism that is calling for a reconsideration of the doctrine of purgatory. This is especially so within those branches of the Church that emphasize sanctification and transformation in their accounts of salvation. Moral and spiritual transformation is typically understood to require our free cooperation, so it cannot be unilaterally imposed or instilled in an instant. Rather, since we are temporal beings, our transformation requires time in which to respond to grace, to appropriate truth, and to overcome our sinful dispositions and replace them with godly ones.

A couple of fascinating articles reflecting current discussion and reassessment of the doctrine of purga-

tory recently appeared in the pages of *Faith and Philosophy*. The first, by Protestant philosopher Justin Bernard defended an account of purgatory that he contended was fully compatible with the doctrine of justification by faith. Bernard sharply distinguished between what he called a "satisfaction" model of purgatory, which he ascribed to Roman Catholic theology, and a "sanctification" model, which he argued Protestants could affirm. The satisfaction model, he said, holds that the main reason for purgatory is to pay the remaining debt of punishment for our sins to satisfy God's justice, a view Protestants can never accept because of their view that Christ fully paid the debt for our sins in his death on the cross. Recall the quote from Calvin above, especially the last line, in which he says that the doctrine of purgatory means that the satisfaction for sins is paid by the souls of believers after their death, a view he regards with horror. By contrast, Bernard argues that the sole purpose of purgatory is to complete the sanctification process, as he puts it, "on the basis of its own internal momentum."

Roman Catholic philosopher Neal Judisch has replied to Bernard, arguing that the contrast he draws is a misguided one, and that the contemporary Catholic view of purgatory is in fact equivalent to what Bernard calls the sanctification model. If so, the prospect for an ecumenical account of purgatory that appeals not only to Catholics, but also to many Protestants is promising and the doctrine, along with heaven and hell, may be in line to receive more attention from philosophers than it has in recent decades.

Jerry Walls is the Senior Speaking Fellow at the Morris Institute for Human Values.

*Jerry Walls*

## 2009 – 2010 Center Fellows



### Mark C. Murphy, *Alvin Plantinga Fellow*

**Fr. Joseph T. Durkin, S.J. Professor of Philosophy - Georgetown University**

Mark Murphy is working on a book about the way that facts about God explain facts about morality, the big question being whether theism as such commits one to a certain view of what God's role in explaining morality should be. He is married to Jeanette Ryan Murphy, whom he met when he was a graduate student at Notre Dame and she was an undergraduate. (No, he wasn't her T.A.) They have four children: two girls, Ryan (14) and Flannery (10), and two boys, Cormac (7) and Finnian (4). Aside from doing philosophy and raising children, Mark tries to spend his time riding his road bike in the hills of rural northern Virginia.



### Jeffrey Schloss, *Frederick J. Crosson Fellow (Fall 2009 Semester)*

**Distinguished Professor and T. B. Walker Chair of Biology - Westmont College**

While at the Center, Jeffrey Schloss is writing - with former Plantinga Fellow Michael Murray - a book on evolutionary theories of religious belief, and the implications of such theories for justified belief. Jeff and his wife Melody live in Santa Barbara and have three sons. Not being a philosopher, Jeff does not climb mountains, but his favorite activity is surfing.



### Chris Tucker, *Postdoctoral Fellow*

**Lecturer of Philosophy - University of Auckland**

Chris Tucker specializes in the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of religion. His wife, Jenny, opted for a more practical profession and became an ER nurse. In their free time, they enjoy playing with their Westie, Bear, and watching movies. In May, they will be moving to New Zealand, where Chris will become a Lecturer of Philosophy at the University of Auckland.



### Jerry Walls, *Postdoctoral Fellow*

**Senior Speaking Fellow - Morris Institute for Human Values**

Jerry Walls is currently working on a book to be entitled *Purgatory: The Logic of Full Transformation*, as well as co-authoring another to be entitled *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Ethics*. Jerry grew up in Knockemstiff, Ohio, a little hamlet that has recently achieved literary fame from a collection of short stories of the same name, by his high school classmate. Jerry has two adult children, Angela Rose and Jonathan Levi, and a 1973 Triumph TR6 named Trevor.



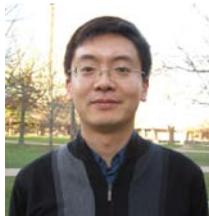
### **Erik Baldwin, *Visiting Graduate Fellow***

Erik Baldwin is a visiting Graduate Student from Purdue University. His areas of specialty are Epistemology, Philosophy of Religion (including Asian and Islamic), and Comparative Philosophy. At the Center, he has been sitting on classes and completing his dissertation, in which he argues that it is possible for people in the same evidential situation to antithetically disagree about the truth-value of a statement and yet be equally reasonable in doing so. In his off time, Erik enjoys playing guitar, listening to music, and searching used CD and book stores for good deals on cool stuff.



### **Adam Green, *Visiting Graduate Fellow***

Graduate research fellow Adam Green is on loan from Saint Louis University. Adam's dissertation concerns the ways in which we come to know other persons. Adam's research at the Center applies the work on social interaction from his dissertation to questions of religious testimony and religious experience. When not doing philosophy, Adam likes to play volleyball, write stories, or hang out with his wife Monica.



### **Liu Zhe, *Templeton Postdoctoral Fellow***

Liu Zhe is an associate professor at Peking University in Beijing, China. He and his wife have one child. Liu Zhe is currently working on early Merleau-Ponty's transcendental phenomenology. This research deals with a problem of subjectivity. It tends to refresh our understanding of human cognitive relation to world on the basis of the early Merleau-Ponty's new concept of subjectivity. One of his favorite philosophical books is Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. His hobby is swimming.



### **Li Weizheng, *Templeton Research Fellow***

Li Weizheng is a visiting graduate student from Peking University in Beijing, China. He has not decided on his dissertation topic; however, his favorite fields in philosophy are normative ethics and political philosophy. Li Weizheng decided to concentrate his attention on philosophy of religion and epistemology during his time in the Center for the hard-won opportunity to be here. He is a big sports fan, especially basketball and soccer. Li Weizheng also enjoys literature, movies and free style travelling.



### **Xie Benyuan, *Templeton Research Fellow***

Xie Benyuan is a visiting graduate student from Peking University in Beijing, China. He and his wife have been married for six years, and they have a five-year-old son. Xie Benyuan expresses his research through a simple question: If an agent has ten dollars, he can use it to buy a ticket and he can also donate it to a charity, what should he do? Xie Benyuan has many hobbies, including listening to songs, reading books, and swimming.

## Saving God: Religion After Idolatry, Mark Johnston

The central thesis of *Saving God* is that traditional monotheisms are idolatrous while panentheism is not. This review first provides Johnston's view of idolatry and then presents and replies to some of his arguments for that main thesis.

### Idolatry

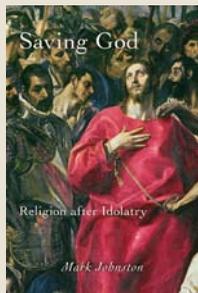
Johnston characterizes idolatry as follows:

"Where it is not simple worship of lifeless idols, idolatry is an attempt to domesticate the experience of Divinity, to put it to some advantage in a still unredeemed life....Idolatry is, then, invariably the attempt to evade or ignore the demanding core of true religion: radical self-abandonment to the Divine as manifested in the turn toward others and toward objective reality (20, 24)". Idolatry is an attempt to both (i) harness and steer one's experience of God toward exclusively self-serving ends and (ii) avoid giving control over one's life to God, which would be expressed by turning towards others and objective reality.

This is an excellent characterization of idolatry. It is deeper than the paradigm of idolatry - statue worship - which the minority of idolatrous people today can relate to. It perspicuously identifies a root cause of separation from God that all idolaters share: demanding *control* over religious experience for selfish ends and refusing to relinquish control to God.

Traditional monotheism is idolatrous.

According to Johnston, the traditional monotheisms are idolatrous because, as their Scriptures demonstrate, the gods they portray as God are really idols. We can tell when a god is really an idol by examining a religion's revelation, inferring the character of the religion's god from its revealed behavior, and then using our 'antecedent religious sense of things' to tell whether God could have that character. The god portrayed is not an idol only if God could have its character.



By our antecedent religious sense of things, we know that God 'could not have evil intent nor a contempt for the truth' (36). The Bible and Qu'ran revealed gods who either have evil intent or a contempt for the truth. Thus, the gods of the traditional monotheisms –

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – are really idols.

Is traditional monotheism idolatrous?

In reply, the supposition that we know that God 'could not have evil intent nor a contempt for the truth' (36) is ambiguous. For, 'evil intent' is either (a) intent to cause *justified* evil (evil that overall brings about or is necessary for a greater good), or (b) intent to cause *unjustified* evil (evil that overall neither brings about nor is necessary for a greater good). If it is intent to cause *justified* evil, then God could have 'evil intent' because having intent to cause

*justified* evil is consistent with being omnibenevolent. So on the first reading of 'evil intent', we do *not* know that God 'could not have evil intent', and hence our antecedent religious sense of things does not enable us to distinguish idolatrous from non-idolatrous portrayals of God. If instead it is intent to cause *unjustified* evil, then although we know that God 'could not have evil intent', no passage from any of the traditional monotheisms suggests God intends to cause *unjustified* evil or has a contempt for the truth. So once again our antecedent religious sense of things does not enable us to distinguish idolatrous from non-idolatrous portrayals of God. Johnston's argument that traditional monotheisms are idolatrous fails.

Panentheism is not idolatrous?

Unlike the traditional monotheisms, panentheism is, according to Johnston, not idolatrous. Panentheism is the view that God, though distinct from the natural realm, 'is partly *constituted* by the natural realm, in the sense that his activity is manifest in and through natural processes *alone*' even though 'his reality goes beyond what is captured by the purely scientific description of all the events that make up the natural realm' (120). The following identity expresses a type of panentheism:

The Highest One = the outpouring of Existence Itself by way of its exemplification in ordinary existents for the purpose of the self-disclosure of Existence Itself.

Johnston argues that pantheism avoids the idolatry of the traditional monotheisms in three ways. I respond to each.

First, pantheism ‘overcomes the dualism between being and becoming’ that traditional monotheism retains in its idolatrous view of God as immutable being and the creation as mutable becoming (121). In reply, it is not clear why retaining this dualism makes a portrayal of God idolatrous. Presumably the dualism between existence/non-existence, which pantheism retains in its definition of the Highest One, is a non-idolatrous dualism. Why is the being/becoming dualism idolatrous if the existence/nonexistence dualism is not?

Second, traditional monotheism is idolatrous because it ‘is just the limiting case of polytheism. Its one god is just the last remaining god of a

polytheistic pantheon’. In contrast, pantheism is ‘a return to the God before the gods, namely, Being continually making itself present’ (124). In reply, pantheism also posits exactly one God - ‘The Highest One’ – so it is no less the limiting case of polytheism, and so no less idolatrous than the traditional monotheisms. Further, it is not clear why being a limiting case of polytheism in this brutally numerical sense makes traditional monotheism idolatrous.

Third, traditional monotheism (or at least Christianity and Islam) is idolatrous because it promises transformation in an imagined next life while pantheism encourages ‘its adherents to attend to the self-disclosure of Being’ rather than worry about an afterlife. The assumption here seems to be that if something (like the idea of a supernatural afterlife) serves the

self-interests of human beings, then it is idolatrous. But this is false. If a loving, personal God created us with the idea of a loving, personal, God, and that idea serves our self-interests, it surely does not follow that the idea is thereby *idolatrous*. God gave it to us, after all! Likewise with the idea of a supernatural afterlife; being an idea that serves the self-interests of the believer does not automatically make an idea idolatrous. In his characterization of idolatry, Johnston tacitly recognizes this - a religious idea is idolatrous only if it serves one’s own self-interests *to the detriment of others*. So a further claim here seems to be that the afterlife somehow serves our own self-interests to the exclusion of the interests of others. This claim, however, requires argument.

This brief discussion provides only a tiny sample of the ideas from *Saving God*. In addition to idolatry and the relative merits of traditional monotheisms versus pantheism, Johnston discusses the use of ‘God’ in English, proposes a number of other criteria for true religion, and argues that pantheism is both consistent with robust naturalism and avoids the penchant for violence found in the traditional monotheisms.

Jeff Snapper

### Ask the Theologian

Q: “My pet dog died when I was young. Is he in Heaven? What about my pet cat?”

A: There was a rather lively debate over this question in the Middle Ages. Aquinas and the Dominican school said no animals have an afterlife because, lacking a rational soul, they lack that principle which transcends matter, and so aren’t immortal. On the other side, the Franciscan school pointed to texts like “the lion laying down with the lamb” in Heaven. More recently, C.S. Lewis (in *The Problem of Pain*) argued that those animals may achieve immortality which, as pets, are beneficently shaped by their master’s personality. The idea is that the master can be to the pet (roughly) as Christ is to man: as Christ, through his humanity, allows man to partake in something of his divinity; so the master, from his animality, allows the

pet to partake in something of his rationality. Either way, St. Mael was wrong to baptize *wild* penguins!

David Elliot



## ***Intractable Disputes about the Natural Law: Alasdair MacIntyre and Critics*, ed. Lawrence Cunningham**

**W**hile he was still Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI wrote a letter in 2004 to Rev. John Jenkins, the President of Notre Dame, requesting that an academic symposium be held on whether and how one might find a “common denominator” for human morality. The results were to be sent back to the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by way of the findings of a think tank reporting to a patron.



Shortly thereafter Pope John Paul II passed away, and Ratzinger was elevated as pope. The fruit of the current pope’s request is this symposium in book form. In it, the world’s pre-eminent Catholic moral philosopher engages the question of “natural law” and “natural rights” with a prestigious group of theologians, canon and civil lawyers, and religiously-informed

political scientists and philosophers, who are mostly, but not exclusively, academics at Notre Dame. (132).

The question driving the book is the search for a “natural law” or universal morality that might serve as a regulative principle in pluralistic societies. The boons would be obvious. A natural law could serve as a point of common moral ground between the world’s religions. It would mean that people wouldn’t have to puzzle over whether and how - short of quoting Scripture - human beings can know that something like slavery or the Holocaust is

wrong (213). And it could serve as a moral compass on questions like abortion, sexual ethics, torture, and euthanasia for societies whose leeriness of theocracy makes public religious arguments a non-starter. The possible benefits are therefore quite high.

The volume begins with an essay by Alasdair MacIntyre in which he remarks that the quest for a universal morality is reeling given the radical moral disagreements between cultures and religions. He therefore begins with the claim that if a universal morality is to be defended as a theory, it will have to account for the endless moral disagreements that seem to

disprove it in practice. As it happens, MacIntyre thinks that natural law as interpreted by St. Thomas Aquinas can yield a universally valid set of moral rules in such a way as to also explain why there seems to be irresolvable moral conflict, and what to do about it. A claim that might otherwise seem like utopian bluster is given surprising credibility when MacIntyre makes a robust case that: 1) those who disagree about the good only know that they disagree about it because they have deliberated to some extent together, 2) this deliberation itself gives performative evidence that both parties presuppose prior to deliberating a commitment to the basic moral norms which shared deliberation requires, and 3) it is precisely these basic moral norms concerning non-maleficence, honesty, integrity and trust which correspond to Aquinas’ precepts of the natural law. The upshot is that to deny the basic moral norms of natural law is to show oneself to be the sort of person with whom no one can speak. Just as denying the laws of logic leads to an intellectual *reductio ad absurdum*; so to deny the precepts of the natural law leads to a social and behavioral *reductio ad absurdum*. The rest of the paper takes up utilitarianism as a test case of a moral theory that does just that.

Fully half of the responses to MacIntyre are given by the Notre Dame Theology faculty. As MacIntyre himself says in his concluding response, the

two most “searching criticisms” of his view are given by theologians Jean Porter and Gerald McKenny, and it is on their papers that his response focuses. Porter – who like MacIntyre is a Thomist – argues that no “ready made” universally valid morality is to be had. The reason is that the precepts of the natural law, in and of themselves, are too general and vague to be applied across all cultures in the same way, and that the form they will take in a given culture will to a large extent have to be specified by a lawgiver, whether human or divine. For morality to exist in a community, natural law is not substantive enough: between it and the ethical life of a given community an array of traditions and practices must interpose to make the natural law precepts take specific form in that culture. To this MacIntyre responds that whether they are sufficient of themselves or not, and however much they may be colored by a culture’s particulars,

the primary precepts of the natural law forbidding things like murder and theft are presupposed by all cultures and communities that we know of, and that to embark upon shared deliberation necessitates adherence to them, so that even if a monstrous group that denied them were to be found, that denial would just lead back to his original *reductio*.

Gerald McKenny argues that even if MacIntyre’s arguments against moral relativism are sound, they would result in relativism at the political level. Since knowledge of the precepts of natural law coincides with a great deal of moral disagreement in culture, it follows that natural law doesn’t give us enough to overcome that disagreement. In practice, therefore, we will need something like a liberal State stepping in as a neutral referee between moralities so as to prevent complete civil unrest. The great irony of this is that it would make MacIntyre

a liberal after all, despite his reputation as purported slayer of the Enlightenment. To this MacIntyre replies that his natural law arguments are quite opposed to the value neutrality of the liberal State. As to whether his arguments will script the liberal State in as referee between groups morally at odds with each other, MacIntyre replies that this depends on whether people accept arguments – like his – which claim to show that the liberal State is really a sham. And of course, *whether* people accept his arguments is ultimately outside his control. The book also has excellent essays by David Clairmont, Cathleen Kaveny, Daniel Philpott, Thomas Hibbs, and others; on the topics of penitential self-understanding, the public use of prophetic rhetoric, cross-cultural reconciliation, and self-deceiving rationalization, respectively.

In my opinion, this book represents the cutting-edge in debates about whether morality might be universal, and handily debunks innumerable relativist nit-picks along the way. It does a good job of showing how natural law functions as a presupposition of divine revelation rather than its rival or ouster, and draws together the life work of this generation’s greatest Christian moral philosopher at the twilight of his career in such a way as to provide useful material to all theistic philosophers. Anyone at all interested in the “moral argument” in philosophy of religion would do well to buy this book.

David Elliot

### Ask the Philosopher

Q: “I just built a time machine. Can I go back in time and give myself stock tips?”

A: Congratulations on the time machine; some would say you’ve done the impossible! On behalf of the others, let me answer your question with a question: did you meet an older version of yourself at some point in your past? If you did, then it’s guaranteed that you’ll go back.



But if you didn’t, then I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but riches are not in your future. There’s only one timeline, and all events (those that happened, are happening, and will happen) are spread out on it; you can’t change them. So, if you haven’t already met an older version of yourself, you won’t be able to make it the case that you did. Sorry!

Bradley Rettler

## *In Memoriam: A Few Words on Fred Crosson*

*Filled with moral virtue was his speech; And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.*

Prof. Frederick Crosson died on December 9, 2009, at the age of 83. Among the many hats that Fred wore during his more than fifty years at Notre Dame, one is of special interest to the readers of this newsletter: Fred was the first director of the Center for Philosophy of Religion — a fact sometimes now forgotten even by eminent university administrators.



*Fred Crosson, the Centers founding director*

Indeed, Fred (along with Neil Delaney and others in the philosophy department) was instrumental in founding the Center when he was completing his term as Dean of the College of Arts and Letters. He began his service as director in 1976 and led the Center for eight years, until Al Plantinga succeeded him in 1984.

As director, Fred initiated many of the Center activities that continue to this day. He organized our first conference (held in the fall of 1976) and oversaw several more, hosted various visiting speakers, and initiated the Center's discussion group. Like his two successors as director (to whom he often lent a sympathetic ear), Fred was severely limited by the Center's inadequate budget, yet still managed to get us off to a successful start.

Though Fred published and edited a good deal, he was by no means a narrow specialist. Off the top of my

head, I can recall reading pieces by him on Hume, on Augustine, on cybernetics, and on academic freedom. Others with more capacious heads would no doubt immediately remember many more, on these and on many other topics. It's not surprising, then, that his last academic home at Notre Dame was in the Program of Liberal Studies (our equivalent of a Great Books program) rather than in philosophy. Fred was a true Renaissance man in many ways. When I was teaching in the College of Arts and Letters Core Course (a general interdisciplinary course once required of all sophomores), we had weekly faculty meetings to discuss the texts for the following week and to suggest promising pedagogical approaches. Fred led our discussions frequently, and could (I think) have profitably spoken on virtually any of the works or subjects on the syllabus. From Euripides and Aristotle to Darwin and Freud, he was a constant source of insight and ideas.

Fred was more than just a valuable colleague, though; he was also invariably a very kind and thoughtful one. He regularly attended the Center's discussion group, even well into retirement, and whenever he missed (which was rare), he virtually always called in advance to explain and to apologize. His generosity was evident in other areas as well. I once asked him if he could fill in for me for a couple of lectures in my Political and Constitutional Theory course, and in exchange I offered to take a couple of his courses whenever he wanted. He agreed, but never asked for the repayment. I've always feared that this was because he

Prologue, Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

placed a high value on quality undergraduate education. More likely, though, it was just because he was a good guy, one who was willing to help without fuss, often without notice, and without any expectation of reward.

Fred was the kind of good guy — the kind of talented, unselfish, non-careerist colleague — that every university needs but whose contributions are often not widely known or quickly forgotten. We at the Center have not forgotten, though, and years ago gave his name to one of our fellowships as a sign of our gratitude. All of us connected with the Center, even those newer members who barely knew Fred, are the beneficiaries of his work, work based in the Christian commitment that was clearly so central to his life. I think he'd be pleased to see that his labor is continuing to bear good fruit.

*Thomas P. Flint*

For further remembrances of Prof. Crosson, see the article by his PLS colleague Walter Nicgorski in *Notre Dame Magazine*. The article is available online at <http://magazine.nd.edu/news/14588rememberingprofessorcrosson/>

## Upcoming in the Center

In the coming months, the Center for Philosophy of Religion will continue and intensify its long-standing tradition of sponsoring high-quality scholarship, both at Notre Dame and around the world.

The **Logos Workshop**, which is co-sponsored by the Center and by the Rutgers University Department of Philosophy, will meet at Rutgers from May 13-15, 2010. Logos gathers an international group of leading philosophers and theologians to discuss some of the most fascinating and perplexing questions of philosophical theology. Attendance is restricted to invited participants.

Just a few days after the Logos Workshop, from May 20-22, 2010, the Center will be hosting the **Alvin Plantinga Retirement Celebration** at Notre Dame. Plantinga is a past director of the Center, and was described by *Time* magazine as "America's leading orthodox Protestant philosopher

of God." Before coming to Notre Dame, he taught for twenty years at Calvin College, and was one of the co-founders of the Society of Christian Philosophers in April 1978. The society has since grown to over 1,100 members and is the largest single-interest group among American philosophers. In 1984 the society initiated its own scholarly journal, *Faith and Philosophy*. Plantinga has also lectured around the world and has devoted himself to furthering philosophical research in developing countries, such as China, Russia, Romania, and Poland. This conference will celebrate his long career dedicated to philosophy and to the rational defense of Christian belief, and look to the future of the debates that he started and influenced.

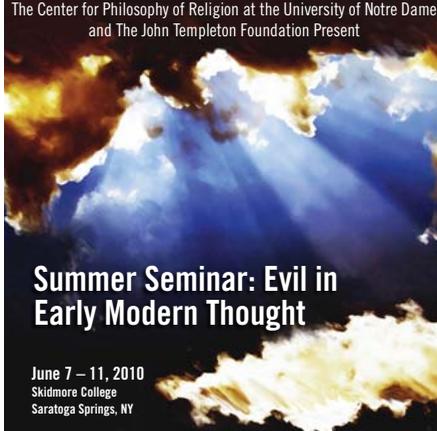
From June 7-11, 2010, 10 graduate students from across the country will gather at Skidmore College for the **Templeton Summer Seminar on Evil and Early Modern Philosophy of Religion and Theology**, sponsored by the Center with support from the John Templeton Foundation. The 5 day seminar, conducted by Robert Sleigh (UMass) and Sean Greenberg (UC-Irvine), with additional faculty support by Larry Jorgensen (Skidmore) and the Center's own Samuel Newlands, will explore the ways in which the nature and reality of evil were treated in the distinctive intellectual culture of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

With support from the John Templeton Foundation, the Center will host a conference on **Leibniz's Theodicy: Content and Context** from September 16-18, 2010. This conference will mark the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication

of the *Theodicy*, and will explore the book's contents, its fit within the Leibnizian corpus, its broader historical context, and its subsequent reception and impact as well as how the views expressed fit into the larger intellectual landscape of the period. The center will also sponsor a follow-up conference, **Leibniz's Theodicy: Legacy and Relevance**, in Lisbon, Portugal in 2011.

Ron Belgau

The Center for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame and The John Templeton Foundation Present



### Summer Seminar: Evil in Early Modern Thought

June 7 – 11, 2010  
Skidmore College  
Saratoga Springs, NY

**Conducted by:**  
Robert Sleigh  
(University of Massachusetts Amherst)  
Sean Greenberg  
(University of California, Irvine)  
Larry Jorgensen (Skidmore College)  
Samuel Newlands  
(University of Notre Dame)

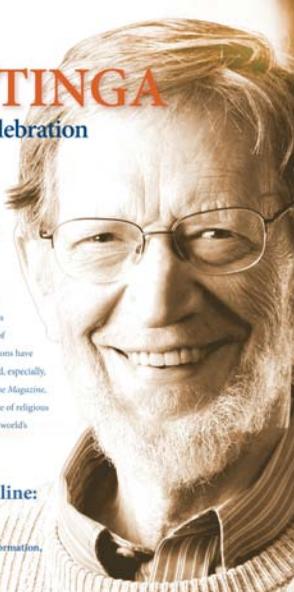
**Eligibility:**  
Graduate students (including first-year students) who have not yet committed to dissertation topics or who are in the very early stages of writing their dissertations.

**Deadlines:**  
All application materials must be received no later than January 15, 2010.

**Details:**  
For more information, including application instructions, visit [www.evilmindmeeting.com](http://www.evilmindmeeting.com) and follow the "Summer Seminar" link.

**Questions:**  
Email Michael Rea, director of the Center for Philosophy of Religion, at [crea1@nd.edu](mailto:crea1@nd.edu).

Held on an idyllic campus in upstate New York, this fully funded seminar will explore the ways in which the nature and reality of evil were treated in the distinctive intellectual culture of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

## ALVIN PLANTINGA

### Retirement Celebration

May 20–22, 2010  
McKenna Hall  
University of Notre Dame

Alvin Plantinga is one of the most important and influential philosophers of the 20th and early 21st centuries. His publications range over a wide variety of fields, but his most enduring contributions have been in metaphysics, epistemology, and, especially, the philosophy of religion. In 1980, *Time* Magazine, reporting on the remarkable resurgence of religious philosophy, identified Plantinga as the world's "leading philosopher of God."

**Registration deadline:**  
May 14

For program and registration information, go to [www.nd.edu/~cprelig/ret](http://www.nd.edu/~cprelig/ret) or email [cprelig@nd.edu](mailto:cprelig@nd.edu).

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Center for Philosophy of Religion  
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## Announcing the Center for Philosophy of Religion 2010-2011 Visiting Fellows

**Paul Draper**, Purdue University: *Alvin Plantinga Fellow*

**William J. Abraham**, Southern Methodist University: *Frederick Crosson Fellow*

**Andrew Chignell**, Cornell University: *Research Fellow*

**Patrick Todd**, University of California, Riverside: *Visiting Graduate Student Fellow*

Templeton  
Early Modern Fellows

**Todd Ryan**, Trinity College: *Research Fellow*

**Ryan Nichols**, California State, Fullerton: *Research Fellow*

**Michael Hickson**, Santa Clara University: *Research Fellow*

### Future Events

**The Alvin Plantinga Retirement Celebration**, May 20-22, 2010, University of Notre Dame. For more information, see: <http://www.nd.edu/~cprelig/events/Plantinga-Retirement.shtml>

**Templeton Summer Seminar on Evil and Early Modern Philosophy of Religion and Theology**, June 7-11, 2010, Skidmore College, sponsored by the Center with support from the John Templeton Foundation. For more information, see: <http://www.nd.edu/~cprelig/poe/seminar.html>

**Leibniz's Theodicy: Content and Context**, September 16-18, 2010, sponsored by the Center, with help from the John Templeton Foundation. For more information, see: <http://www.nd.edu/~cprelig/conferences/index.shtml>

### For more information

on the Center for Philosophy of Religion, see our website:  
<http://www.nd.edu/~cprelig/index.shtml>

For more information on the 4 years research initiative, "The Problem of Evil in Modern Contemporary Thought", see: [www.evilandtheodicy.com](http://www.evilandtheodicy.com)