

Center for Philosophy of Religion

Spring 2013 Newsletter

Notes from the Directors

Dear Colleagues and Friends of the Center, This year has been an extraordinarily active one at the Center. There were exciting changes to the Center’s staff, as Samuel Newlands joined Michael Rea as co-director and Joshua Seachris joined the staff to help run our expanding research projects. We are drawing our first major research project, “The Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought” to a close this year, and we look forward to sharing with you more about the outcomes of that project in future updates. This was also the second year of our “Analytic Theology” project (www.analytictheology.org), and we welcomed our first crop of

analytic theology fellows to the Center. We organized an international conference in Lisbon, Portugal on the reception and ongoing relevance of Leibniz’s *Theodicy*, an interdisciplinary workshop on hope and optimism, our annual Logos workshop, the annual Plantinga fellow lecture, the Second Annual Analytic Theology Lecture at the AAR (Alan Torrance was the lecturer), and two dinner-and-philosophy events for undergraduates. We have started producing a series of videos involving serious but accessible discussions of important topics in philosophy of religion; the first are already available on our website (philreligion.nd.edu). We also sponsored research in the UK on the relations among pain, perception and emotion as part of the “Problem of Evil” project (www.davidbain.org/pain). Of course, we also continued the Center’s tradition of a weekly discussion group of works in progress with our large group of residential fellows. With our growing staff, leadership, and vision, we are also pursuing new funding for several additional research projects, and we think the future of the Center looks especially bright. In the meantime, be sure to check out our active Facebook page and frequently updated website for the latest news and for opportunities to become involved.



Center Director, Michael Rea, and Center Director of Research, Samuel Newlands

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Independence and Unity: A Theory of Fundamentality for Substances

Kathrin Koslicki

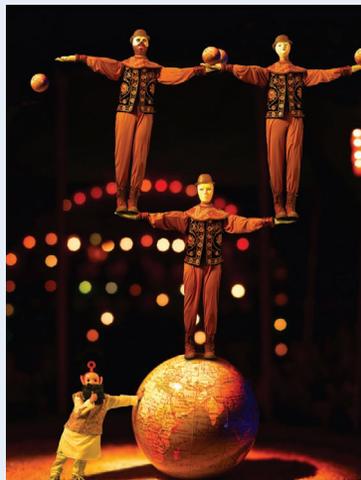
A significant reorientation is currently under way in analytic metaphysics. For most of the second half of the twentieth century, ontology (the study of being) was construed as concerned primarily with questions of *existence*, i.e., questions of the form, “What is there?”. More recently, though, a number of writers have urged that many of the most central questions in ontology and perhaps philosophy in general are more profitably understood not as asking primarily about the existence of certain apparently problematic sorts of entities, but rather as asking whether one type of phenomenon is in some important sense *dependent* on another type of phenomenon. The variety of dependence that is at issue here is neither causal nor logical, but rather ontological: Caesar’s death for example causally depends on Brutus’ stabbing; the truth of the conclusion of a valid argument logically depends on the truth of its premises; but the redness of a rose ontologically depends on the rose in which it inheres.

The concept of ontological dependence has also played an important role in the philosophy of religion. Theists have traditionally thought of God as a being that is completely “*a se*” (from himself), i.e., absolutely independent from anything numerically distinct from himself. But unless we have a

firm understanding of what exactly is being attributed to God when he is described as a being that is absolutely independent, the doctrine of divine aseity and its implications threaten to remain obscure. In particular, it is unclear whether traditional theists, by accepting the doctrine of divine aseity, are thereby also required to take on board the much more controversial doctrine of divine simplicity, according to which God lacks any kind of

nominalist ontology consisting only of concrete particulars, since it is difficult to see how necessarily existing abstracta could meaningfully depend on God. Finally, theists who accept the thesis that moral truths in some way depend on God also face the vexed question of whether this commits them to the unpopular divine command theory, according to which something is morally good or bad for no other reason than that God commands it to be so.

Theists have traditionally thought of God as a being that is completely “a se” (from himself) . . . But unless we have a firm understanding of what exactly is being attributed to God when he is described as a being that is absolutely independent, the doctrine of divine aseity and its implications threaten to remain obscure.



New World Circus, by John Goto

metaphysical complexity. Furthermore, we may wonder whether the doctrine of divine aseity has the effect of pushing traditional theists towards a

Surprisingly, despite the central role ontological dependence has played in philosophy since its very inception (cf. Aristotle’s *Categories*), this notion has only recently begun to receive the kind of systematic attention it deserves from contemporary metaphysicians. My main focus this

year at the Center for Philosophy of Religion is a book-length study with the provisional title, *Independence and Unity: A Theory of Fundamentality for Substances*. This new book project provides a continuation of the larger-scale neo-Aristotelian research program with which much of my work during the past fifteen years or so has been concerned. In particular, in my 2008 monograph, *The Structure of Objects* (Oxford University Press), I defend a structure-based theory of parts and wholes for ordinary material objects, according to which objects are structured wholes: it is integral to the existence and identity of an object, on

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Year In Review

It's been another great year at the Center. The Friday morning discussion group continues to work carefully through papers by faculty, fellows, and a few graduate students on topics like skeptical theism, necessary beings, and relationship between divine love and wrath. We've also been continuing our conversations over a pint at our weekly pub night.

There are several exciting developments on the CPR website (<http://philreligion.nd.edu/>). We've already uploaded videotaped roundtable discussions on the problem of evil and plan to upload more philosophical video content by which philosophers and non-philosophers can benefit.

We continue to engage our undergraduate philosophical community. On November 1, Biola University's Gregg Ten Elshof gave a talk titled "I Told Me So: Self-Deception and Morality in Everyday Life," while our undergraduates enjoyed a meal.

The Baylor-Georgetown-Notre Dame Philosophy of Religion conference was held in San Antonio, TX on November 8-10. The conference continues to line up excellent philosophers of religion and be a cutting edge venue for philosophical reflection of religious issues. **The 2013 BGND Conference will be held October 3 – 5 at the University of Notre Dame. Visit our website for further details.**

On November 30, Kathrin Koslicki, Associate Professor of Philosophy at



Participants discuss Jordan Wessling's paper during one of the Center's weekly Friday morning discussion groups.

the University of Colorado, Boulder, delivered the Eleventh Annual Plantinga Lecture on "The Death of Socrates." In her lecture, Professor Koslicki considered a number of questions surrounding the circumstances of Socrates' trial and execution; she suggested an interpretation that best fits the facts about Socrates' life and his philosophical views.

Our *Analytic Theology* and *The Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought* grants continue to yield excellent results, and this year we've begun research for a new joint research venture with Cornell University on hope and optimism, including organizing an interdisciplinary workshop in January.

The *Analytic Theology Project* (September 2010 – July 2014, www.analytictheology.org) is funding a lot of exciting research and activities through the residential fellowship program, summer stipends, cluster initiative, and course grants (see p. 15 for the

winners), which includes individual writing projects, reading groups, and new courses in analytic theology. Soon we will be launching the new online open access *Journal of Analytic Theology*.

On November 18, Alan Torrance, Professor of Systematic Theology at St. Mary's College, delivered the Second Annual Analytic Theology Lecture titled: "The Reconciled Mind and Analytic Theology." He plans to publish a revised version of the lecture in the *Journal of Analytic Theology (JAT)*. Subsequent Analytic Theology Lectures will also be published there. The first issue of *JAT* will appear in Fall 2013. **The Third Annual Analytic Theology Lecture will be given by Marilyn McCord Adams at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Baltimore, November 23 – 26, 2013.**

The Fifth Annual Logos Workshop in Philosophical Theology will be held May 9-11 at Notre Dame. The theme

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Independence and Unity: A Theory of Fundamentality for Substances

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this conception, that its parts exhibit a certain manner of arrangement. For example, in order for there to be an H₂O-molecule, the two hydrogen-atoms and one oxygen-atom that compose it must be arranged in the particular manner of chemical bonding, which requires the atoms in question to share electrons.

In my 2008 book, I identify the question of how a structured whole depends on its parts or (if applicable) how the parts of a whole depend on the whole they compose as a promising area for future research. My subsequent and current work delves into precisely this territory. It turns out that even the most promising accounts of ontological dependence have difficulty preserving the desired substance status of hylomorphic compounds, i.e., compounds of matter (*hylē*) and form (*morphē*), which presumably include objects which are natural and alive (e.g., organisms), objects which are natural and not alive (e.g., H₂O-molecules) and perhaps

artifacts as well. Since neo-Aristotelians consider hylomorphic compounds to be paradigmatic examples of entities which deserve substance status, the threatened exclusion of hylomorphic compounds from the category of substances is highly problematic for those working within this framework. In my recent and ongoing research, I attempt to remedy this situation by proposing a *unity* criterion for substancehood, which allows some composite entities (i.e., entities which have parts, constituents or are complex in some other way) to be classified as substances. According to this account, a composite entity qualifies as a substance when it is appropriately unified; and this can be true even when this entity ontologically depends on some of its parts or constituents. In addition, I propose an account of unity in terms of dependence, inspired by the work of Edmund Husserl and Roman Ingarden, according to which a composite entity counts as unified when the whole, its parts and its properties are suitably tied together by

a network of dependence relations.

I could not imagine a better place at which to carry out this research project than the Center for Philosophy of Religion. The Center provides us with so many enjoyable opportunities at which to interact with the other fellows and the regular members of the Notre Dame community: the Friday morning discussion group, the Pub nights, the Metaphysics and Philosophy of Religion reading group, the visiting speakers, the conferences and a whole range of other formal and informal events that are happening throughout the year. At these occasions, we are able to bounce ideas off each other, learn about the research projects in which other members of the community are engaged and, most of all, enjoy each other's company. Thanks are due especially to Mike Rea and Sam Newlands, the co-directors, but also to all the others whose work contributes to making the Center such a wonderful, lively and supportive intellectual environment at which to spend a year.

Year In Review

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is "Theorizing about God—Realism in Theology." Theological realism is a hot topic nowadays, and is interestingly related to issues about religious pluralism. These debates bear obvious connections to debates about realism and anti-realism in science, as well as to issues in metaphysics and the philosophy of language about ontological commitment and related topics, and with the theological

literature on the nature of doctrine. **The Logos Workshop is now open registration—anyone can attend. Please visit our website to register or to find further details.**

The Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought Project (2010 – 2013) hosted its second international conference on Leibniz's *Theodicy*. The conference was entitled *Leibniz's*

Theodicy: Legacy and Relevance, and was held in Lisbon, Portugal. Videos from the conference are now available online at the Center for Philosophy of Religion website. The project is also nearing completion of a new translation of Leibniz's *Theodicy* by Robert Sleigh and Sean Greenberg.

Interview with the New Program Director at the Center



Joshua Seachris
Program Director

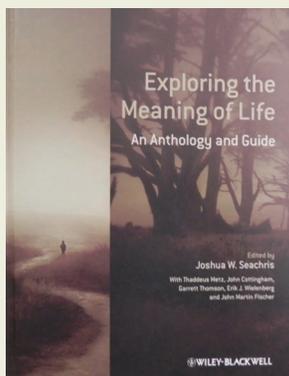
What should we know about you?

I am blessed with a wonderful wife, Sarah, and three little boys (William-5, Owen-2, and Evan-3 months). I grew up in rural, south central Kansas and have lived in a number of states since, including Oklahoma, North Carolina, and now Indiana. My educational background includes a community college, seminary, and two public research universities. I enjoy gardening and manual labor in general. After a long day of grant writing, grant administration, teaching, or researching, it is quite therapeutic. Craft beer, good scotch, and beautiful sunsets bring additional joy to my life.

What are your philosophical interests?

Those outside the walls of academic philosophy are often surprised to find out that, by and large, philosophers (at least within the analytic tradition) spend very little time discussing the meaning of life. I'm something of an anomaly—the meaning of life is my primary interest as a philosopher. I actually *do* what non-philosophers think philosophers do! As an analytic philosopher, I am, in part, interested in clarifying the question, "What is the meaning of life?" It is one that

encompasses broad explanatory and normative territory, all of which is of profound existential importance. My edited volume on the topic (*Exploring the Meaning of Life: An Anthology and Guide*) was published with Wiley-Blackwell in September 2012. It includes important new work within analytic philosophy along with classic canonical pieces. Other areas of philosophical interest include the problem of evil and topics at the intersection of epistemology, religious authority, and biblical exegesis.



How did you get involved in grant writing and administration?

My career trajectory over the past several years has been a bit of a surprise. While finishing my Ph.D. at the University of Oklahoma, I worked with Dr. Linda Zagzebski on a Templeton-funded grant. As a result of having this position, unique vocational doors began to open. Largely because of the experience I gained while working with Dr. Zagzebski, I secured a position working with Dr. Christian Miller on The Character Project at Wake Forest University. This proved to be a wonderful experience. Along with the responsibilities of day-to-day grant administration were ample

opportunities to teach and pursue my own research and writing. My work for The Character Project, in turn, opened the door to Notre Dame. My position at the Center for Philosophy of Religion brings with it the exciting opportunity to be involved in the creative process of grant proposal writing. I am thankful that each of these positions has allowed time for some teaching along with enough flexibility to continue my own research programs.

What is it like being the Program Director at the Center?

I am humbled to be a part of the Center. It is a thriving place, both intellectually and relationally, and the collegiality amongst the staff, fellows, and other CPR friends is wonderful. The Center's current programs, fellowship research, and grants are cutting edge and represent the very highest levels of academic work. The future is as exciting as the present. Upcoming projects will solidify the Center's reputation as being an international leader in groundbreaking research in the philosophy of religion, along with interdisciplinary research on topics at the intersection of philosophy, theology, and psychology, among others. These lines of research made possible through the Center have great potential to influence discussions and trajectories in a number of academic disciplines, and, as importantly, to impact the culture at large. So, all that to say, it is very easy to get excited about what the Center is doing now and hopes to do in the future. It is a great time to be here and I am very thankful to have the opportunity to be a part of it all!

Origen, Plato and the Hellenization of Christianity

Peter W. Martens

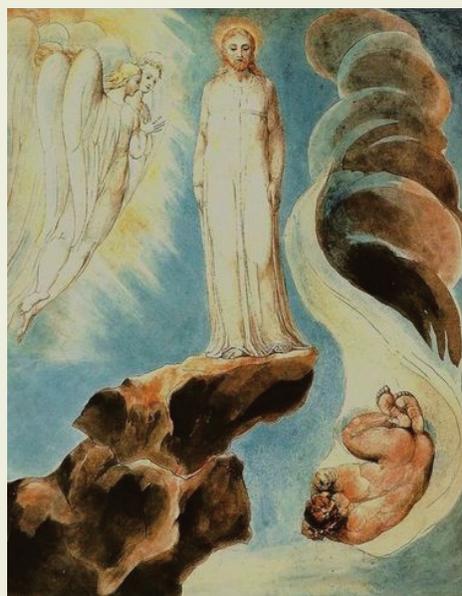
The well-known “Hellenization of Christianity” thesis is usually associated with the German Protestant theologian and patristics scholar, Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930). For him, the most profound transformation of the early Christian movement was its “Hellenization” as it spread beyond its original Palestinian milieu into the wider Greco-Roman world. This transformation was, however, a lamentable affair. It marked the disfigurement of the original “essence of Christianity” which Harnack identified with the core precepts of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: the fatherhood of God, the endless value of the human soul, and the importance of love. In his magisterial *History of Doctrine*, Harnack identified one of the main catalysts for this corruption of the gospel message: the influx of Greek philosophy which would become so integral to the construction of what Christians in Harnack’s day (and ours) still consider important, if not authoritative, doctrines. While many iterations of the “Hellenization of Christianity” thesis have since come and gone, Harnack’s version continues to cast a powerful spell on how we narrate early Christian theology and its relationship to Greco-Roman philosophy. One of my projects at the Center this year is to scrutinize this thesis more closely.

We might be tempted to dismiss Harnack’s theory as the expression of his individual blend of Baltic Pietism and liberal Protestantism were there

not already strong traces of his theory in late antiquity. In the spring of 553, the Byzantine emperor Justinian wrote the following about Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-254) and his teaching about pre-existent souls:

So Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus and their followers, who agreed that souls are immortal, declared that they exist prior to bodies and that there is a great company

The “Hellenization of Christianity” thesis often presents early Christian figures as dolts who unwittingly confused Jesus with Plato.



The Third Temptation,
by William Blake

of souls, of which those that transgress descend into bodies But the church, following the divine scriptures, affirms that the soul is created together with the body, not first one and the other later, according to the insanity of Origen.

For Justinian, as for many today, Origen’s doctrine of pre-existent souls was the quintessential expression of the Hellenization of Christianity. Rather than follow clear Biblical (read “Hebraic”) teaching about simultaneous creation of soul and body, Origen was lured to the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophies which taught him that souls existed before their bodies, only to suffer

embodiment as the result of some prior transgression. That such a Hellenized doctrine is regrettable is only confirmed by Origen’s condemnation. Justinian wrote the aforementioned lines in the weeks immediately preceding the convo-

cation of the fifth ecumenical council at which Origen was posthumously pronounced a heretic of the Christian church (canon 11).

This condemnation has indelibly shaped our portrait of Origen. The modern renaissance in Origenian studies has sought to resist the agendas that the Harnacks and Justinians have set for our reading of Origen. One of my tasks this year is to re-think Origen’s doctrine of pre-existent souls, and thereby also the Hellenization of Christianity thesis. Of course, that Origen taught pre-existence and developed this position in dialogue with contemporary philosophy is not in doubt: he tells us so (*Comm. John 2.182*). However, there is a good deal up for grabs. Why was this doctrine considered heretical when two earlier doctors of the Latin church, Jerome and the young Augustine, also held this view, yet neither had been censured for it? The contention that

pre-existence is not in the Bible is also not as straightforward as Justinian suggested. What, for example, does it mean when the Lord says of Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you (Jer 1:5)”? A number of Jewish traditions in antiquity believed in pre-existence. There are other issues as well. If we “know” pre-existence is a heresy, then it is easy to overlook how it functioned salubriously as a theodicy for Origen. He felt the urgent need to absolve God of culpability for why some people started their lives auspiciously and others did not – whether through physical defect or mental deficiency, whether in bad homes or worse cities, etc. (*Princ.* 2.9.2-2.9.6). How to explain the diverging fortunes of Jacob and Esau when they were still in their mother’s womb and not implicate God in injustice? If we “know” pre-existence is a heresy, then it is also

easy to overlook that Origen directed this teaching against the Gnostics who attributed bleak beginnings to an inferior deity. It is ironic that Justinian regarded Origen’s doctrine of pre-existence as heresy, while in Origen’s hands this doctrine was crucial to the majority church’s censuring of the Gnostic heretics.

And where does philosophy fit in all this? The “Hellenization of Christianity” thesis often presents early Christian figures as dolts who unwittingly confused Jesus with Plato. Origen was many things, but a dupe who spewed the regnant philosophy he was not. He tells us that his version of pre-existence was “superior” to the Platonic teaching (*Cels.* 4.40). In other words, he wasn’t simply *repeating* what he read. But Origen does not tell us how he modified the Platonic

doctrine, and so one of my tasks this year is to figure this out. What is valuable about this sort of inquiry is that it takes us beyond the usual, facile description of how early Christians interacted with philosophy: they “used” it. Indeed, but how? Wholesale adoption? Redeployment for some other purpose? Critique and modification? My work on the doctrine of pre-existence seeks a textured description of how early Christian intellectuals like Origen interacted with philosophy, and whether Hellenized Christian inquiry was as corrosive to the gospel as Justinian, Harnack and others have asserted.

Laboring for Love

Jordan Wessling

I have long seen the Center for Philosophy of Religion and the University of Notre Dame as the capital of Christian thought. I am therefore extremely grateful to be spending a year here, and I have found that everything is as wonderful as I had anticipated. Those affiliated with the Center are as kind and helpful as they are bright -- and there is simply no beating the snappy fashion sense of Mike Rea and Sam Newlands. I fear only that the year is moving by much too quickly.

My work at the Center concerns a fundamental Christian doctrine: God’s love. The associated theological

territory is, of course, potentially endless. But the plan is to build on my Ph.D. dissertation, which defends a unified account of what God’s love is and how it orients God towards creation. In brief, I argued that the God who is filled with love in himself created the world out of love, recognizes the value of all people, and loves them with an affective love that desires their best and wants union with them. As such, all God’s actions, even ‘the worst’ of divine punishment, are consonant with this love. (At first glance, many of these claims may seem theologically self-evident; but I assure you that controversies and difficulties abound.) My project at the Center is to develop this dissertation into a

book manuscript by strengthening the existing material and by incorporating additional chapters on the Trinity, the atonement, and eschatology.

So far my time at the Center has been productive. I have been able to publish two articles on God’s love, with another three hopefully soon to follow. I also presented a paper to the Center colloquium on the unification of God’s love and punitive justice. There I offered a broadly retributivist model of the justification of divine punishment that I believe is both biblically faithful and consonant with God’s almighty love. In short, I argued

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Laboring for Love

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that God punishes people to communicate to them the censure they deserve so that they might repent, reform, and be reconciled back to God and their victims. I am extremely grateful for the excellent feedback given by those at the colloquium, which helped refine my argument in significant ways. This paper was turned into a revised chapter (and a distinct article), which has been incorporated into the manuscript I am currently developing.

Most recently I have begun to turn my attention to God's intra-Trinitarian love. In particular, I have started examining two dominant traditions regarding the identity of the Holy Spirit and the mutual love between the Father and Son. In the first of these traditions, one that finds its source in Augustine, the mutual love between the Father and Son *just* is the Spirit. As Jonathan Edwards would later put it, "the Holy Ghost is only divine love, or the essence of God flowing out in love."¹ By contrast, in a tradition that traces back to at least Anselm, the mutual love between the Father and Son is said to somehow ground or generate the Spirit. Both of these understandings of the third divine person initially strike me as problematic, however. On the

one hand, seeing the Spirit as 'the fruit' of the mutual love of the Father and Son appears to downgrade his divinity. On the other hand, seeing the Spirit as identical to such love seems to be a category mistake – even if we are willing to countenance a fairly strong doctrine

of divine simplicity. Nevertheless, given the prominence of these two traditions it would be theologically beneficial if one could find a way in which one or both of these understandings of the Spirit can be maintained. My hope is that contemporary philo-

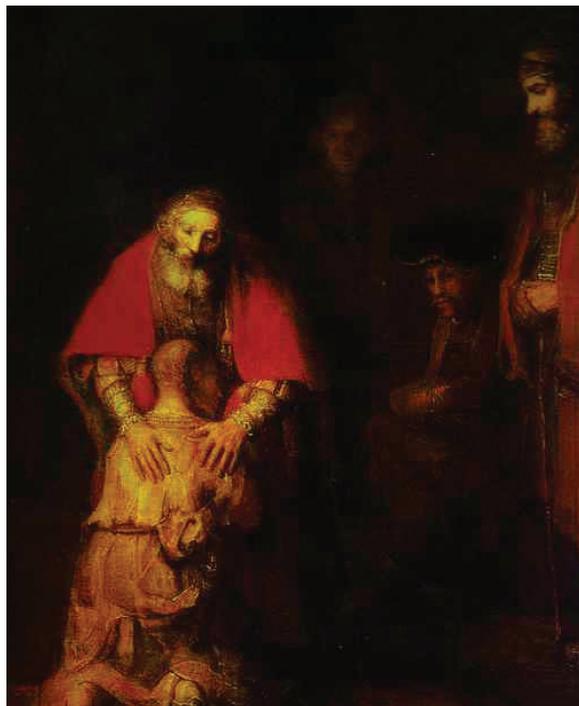
sophical work on the Trinity and in metaphysics will help in this regard.

My final focus for the book concerns both atonement theory and the implications of particularism (that is, the doctrine that one or more persons will never be reconciled to God) for the doctrine of divine providence. The goal is to have solid chapter drafts on these topics by

mid-spring so that my colleagues at the Center will have more than enough time to give me feedback on this work as well. With a bit of luck, I am confident I will have a respectable draft of the book in hand by summer.

My time at the Center has been rich in terms of my growth as a young academic, the respect I continue to have for the community of philosophers here at Notre Dame, and the friendships I have formed. So I cannot help but be exceedingly grateful to all of those who have made this year possible.

“... the God who is filled with love in himself created the world out of love, recognizes the value of all people, and loves them with an affective love that desires their best and wants union with them. As such, all God’s actions, even ‘the worst’ of divine punishment, are consonant with this love.”



Return of the Prodigal Son, by Rembrandt Van Rijn

¹ "Romans," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, gen. ed. Harry S. Stout, vol. 24, *The "Blank Bible,"* ed. Stephen . Stein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 997.



Kathrin Koslicki

Alvin Plantinga Fellow

Kathrin Koslicki is visiting from the University of Colorado-Boulder, where she is Associate Professor of Philosophy. Her interests in philosophy lie mainly in metaphysics, the philosophy of language, and Ancient Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle. She is currently working on a new monograph in metaphysics on ontological dependence, substancehood and fundamentality. One can occasionally spot Kathrin skiing or climbing in some of the world's most amazing mountain ranges, most recently in Peru, Europe, Tajikistan and Pakistan.



Jordan Wessling

Frederick J. Crosson Fellow

Jordan Wessling recently completed his Ph.D. in theology from the University of Bristol (June 2012). The dissertation title is *The Christian God of Love: The Nature of Divine Love and Its Place in God's Psychology*. He is presently developing this dissertation into a book manuscript and editing a lengthy volume with William J. Abraham on the history and structure of Arminian theology. In his spare time, Jordan likes to hang out with his wife Amber, dine with friends, and spend an irresponsible number of hours watching movies.



Peter Martens

Research Fellow

Peter Martens is visiting from St. Louis University, where he is Assistant Professor of Theological Studies. He specializes in the history of early Christianity with wide-ranging interests in Christian intellectual practices and their location within the literary, rhetorical and philosophical traditions of late antiquity. His book *Origen and Scripture* was recently published with OUP, and he is beginning another monograph on Origen's doctrine of pre-existent souls. His hobbies include road cycling and pulling shots of espresso.



Noël Saenz

Visiting Graduate Fellow

Noël Saenz is a Ph.D. student at the University of Colorado-Boulder. His primary interests are in metaphysics, which include truthmaking, grounding, and composition. He is also interested in the intersection of those philosophical issues with religion. Currently, he is writing a dissertation tentatively titled *Truth and the World: Essays in Fundamental Ontology*. He also enjoys spending time with his family, playing basketball, and (when he gets the chance) playing chess.



Gloria Frost

Analytic Theology Research Fellow

Gloria Frost is visiting from the University of St. Thomas, where she is Assistant Professor of Philosophy. Her main research interests are medieval metaphysics and philosophical theology. She has published articles in a variety of journals, and her current research project explores later medieval theories of God and creatures' causal co-operation in the production of created effects. Gloria enjoys spending time with her three kids (ages 3, 2 and 6 months).



Carl Mosser

Analytic Theology Research Fellow

Carl Mosser is visiting from Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, where he is Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies. His research interests include the Second Temple Jewish context of the New Testament, the epistle to the Hebrews, Christian doctrines of deification, Mormonism and several issues in philosophy of religion and constructive Christian theology. He has edited three books and published more than a dozen articles. Carl's free time is mostly spent keeping up with his six children and one wife.



Timothy Pawl

Analytic Theology Research Fellow

Timothy Pawl is visiting from the University of St. Thomas, where he is Assistant Professor of Philosophy. His research focuses on metaphysics and philosophical theology, which includes the nature of possibility and necessity, the relation between truth and reality, and the consistency of traditional Christian theology. He is currently writing a monograph about the metaphysics one needs to understand in order to comprehend traditional theology. He also enjoys wrestling with his kids, slapping the bass, and playing racquetball.



Joshua Rasmussen

Analytic Theology Research Fellow

Joshua Rasmussen received his PhD from the University of Notre Dame in 2010. He begins as Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Asuza Pacific University in the Fall of 2013. His area of expertise is metaphysics, especially the nature of propositions, minds, objects, and other basic categories. He has published in several journals and is currently writing a monograph on "necessary things". Outside of academic work, he enjoys developing "gaming" software.



Wang Jue

Templeton Research Fellow

Wang Jue is visiting from Huazhong University of Science and Technology, where she is Assistant Professor of Philosophy. She specializes in contemporary continental philosophy. Most of her research is directed at exploring the human moral condition through the interpretation of multicultural classic texts as well as hermeneutics conducted in the light of phenomenology. She also likes to read, watch movies, and cook.



Xiaogang Ke

Templeton Research Fellow

Xiaogang Ke is visiting from Tongji University, where he is Professor and Dean of the Philosophy Department. His interests include German philosophy, phenomenology, hermeneutics, Chinese philosophy, and traditional Chinese medicine. He has published five books and dozens of articles. His project at the Center this year is on Heidegger's critical thinking of modern science. Beyond his academic interests, he enjoys Qigong meditation and exercising traditional Chinese calligraphy and landscape painting.



Haoxiang Li

Templeton Visiting Graduate Student

Haoxiang is a visiting graduate student in philosophy from Peking University. His main interests are in philosophy of logic and mathematics, but he also has growing interests in philosophy of religion and philosophy of time. Beyond his academic interests, Haoxiang is extremely fond of jazz music and Italian movies.



Jacob Xiaoman Li

Templeton Visiting Graduate Student

Jacob Xiaoman Li is a visiting graduate student from Berkeley, where he studied at both the University of California and the Graduate Theological Union. His areas of interest are in metaphysics, philosophy of mind and perception. He is currently working on a paper that examines the problem of temporal intrinsics. Besides doing philosophy, he enjoys hiking, swimming, and playing piano.



Cristian Mihut

Visiting Scholar

Cristian Mihut is visiting from Bethel College in Indiana, where he is Assistant Professor of Religion and Philosophy. His main research interests include moral psychology, metaethics, philosophy of religion, and analytic theology. As a result of a John Templeton research grant on behalf of the Character Project at Wake Forest University, Cristian is currently researching and writing on the theological underpinnings of virtue of forgiveness. In his spare time, Cristian likes to hike, bike, and play soccer.



Emine Gören

Visiting Graduate Student

Emine Gören is a PhD student from Istanbul University, Turkey, in the Department of Philosophy of Religion. Her research interests are in metaphysics and ethics. At the Center, she is working on her dissertation: "Human Freedom and God in the context of Open Theism." She also likes reading novels and poetry.



Faith Glavey Pawl

Visiting Graduate Student

Faith Glavey Pawl is a graduate student at Saint Louis University and has been an adjunct at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, for the last few years. She is currently working on a dissertation concerning animal suffering and the problem of evil. Her other interests include medieval philosophy, philosophical theology, and epistemology. She enjoys spending time with her husband and three children and experimenting in the kitchen.

Metaphysics for Understanding Theology

Tim Pawl

I am excited to be here at the Center for Philosophy of Religion. This is my second time visiting under the auspices of the Center (in 2007-2008 I was a dissertation fellow at the Center), and my third time visiting Notre Dame on an academic fellowship (in 2005-2006 I was Al Plantinga's research assistant, as a graduate student on a non-Center fellowship). This year I am visiting as an Analytic Theologian, on a generous fellowship provided by the Templeton Foundation.

Each visit has been a wonderful experience. During my first visit Mike Loux suggested my dissertation topic to me. I wrote that dissertation during my second visit. And now, during my third visit, I'm finally working full time on a project that has been of great interest to me since around the time of my first visit. That project is explaining the metaphysics one needs in order to understand traditional theology.

Very many Christian groups define their dogma in philosophical terms. This makes perfect sense, since philosophers take great care to make their terms clear and explicit, and to disambiguate different senses in which a single term might be used. Those terms, then, are useful in making the subtle theological distinctions required to distinguish (apparent) orthodoxy from (apparent) heresy.

One important source of theology is conciliar proclamation. The Ecumenical Councils of the Church (e.g., Nicaea in 325AD, Chalcedon in 451AD) present the teaching of the universal church (or, to be ecumenical

in a different sense, I could say that they intend to present the teaching of the universal church). For Catholics, these Ecumenical Councils carry on even to our own age, up to and including the Second Vatican Council.

In order to understand what the Catholic Church – and, indeed, any Christian group that views the conciliar texts as authoritative –



The Council of Nicaea Fresco in the Sistine Salon

teaches about very many important topics, one needs to understand what the Councils say about them. But the Councils are replete with philosophical terminology. For instance, consider the teaching on the justification of the sinner at the Council of Trent. Here is part of it:

The causes of this justification are: final cause, the glory of God and of Christ, and eternal life; efficient cause, the God of mercy who, of his own free will, washes and sanctifies, placing his seal and anointing with the promised holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance; meritorious cause, his most beloved and only-begotten Son, our lord Jesus Christ... instrumental cause, the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which justification comes to no one. Finally, the one formal cause is the justness of God: not that by which he

himself is just, but that by which he makes us just....

One cannot understand this quotation, and hence cannot understand the official presentation of the teaching of the Catholic Church on this topic, without understanding the Aristotelian analysis of causation, including formal, efficient, instrumental and final causes. So an understanding of the theological disagreements that were in part a cause of the split in Western Christendom requires an understanding of metaphysics. My goal is to write a book that presents this and other philosophical terms required to understand the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The decision to write this book came after a long and unsuccessful process of searching for a text with the goal I have in mind. Catholic seminarians, whom I am happy to teach in droves at the University of St. Thomas (MN), are required to learn metaphysics. But, for them, metaphysics isn't simply a speculative endeavor. Rather, it is practical knowledge for their vocation. In that respect, seminarians (and also theologians, for that matter) need to learn metaphysics for much the same reason that research psychologists need to know statistics. It is a useful and practical knowledge for them to have, given their vocation. It is part of the skill set required to be a good practitioner of their chosen practice. And as a consequence, many seminarians approach metaphysics with the same interest and excitement that a psychology graduate student might approach a Statistics for Research course—that is to say, none at all. There are notable exceptions

to this, and it is not uncommon for a seminarian to find metaphysics intrinsically interesting, more common, I imagine, than psychology students finding statistics intrinsically interesting.

So I searched—in vain—for a book that presents metaphysics for seminarians in the same way that common textbooks of statistics present statistics with an eye toward focusing on the parts of statistics relevant to psychologists, and continually tying statistics in to social scientific practices. In short, I searched for a metaphysics text that presented the metaphysics required for a seminarian to understand the doctrine of the church, and that presented metaphysics as such. I found no such book.

It is surprising that no book already does this. It is true that there are books that do something similar. There are excellent manuals of metaphysics written in the early to mid 1900s, many of which are available for free now online. These are great works, and I suggest that you – yes, you! – read them (Google books, for instance, has Coffey’s *Ontology* and Rickaby’s *General Metaphysics* available for free download). But these books do not do what I intend to do. For one thing, they are all written for those who are already steeped in scholasticism. Nowadays, though, I lament with deep sorrow and a heavy heart, hardly anyone is steeped in scholasticism.

There should be a book that presents traditional Aristotelian and scholastic

(primarily, Thomistic) metaphysics in a way understandable to today’s intelligent but not-philosophically trained audience. It should show clear theological reasons for taking up the topics it discusses. And it should provide the necessary knowledge for seminarians, or theologians, or generally interested readers, to understand the metaphysics employed or presupposed in these documents. There should be such a book, I say, but there isn’t.

So I will write one.

I am thankful to the Center for giving me the opportunity to do so.

Turtles All the Way Down

Joshua Rasmussen

“In tracing an eternal succession of objects, it seems absurd to inquire for a general cause or first author.” (David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*)

My projects at the Center focus on questions about the existence and nature of necessary things—things that *must* be. But rather than talk about what I’ve been doing here, let’s do some philosophy about a related topic.

You have heard it before. And maybe you believe it. “Everything that has existed has been caused to exist by something else.” This is the infinite

My projects at the Center focus on questions about the existence and nature of necessary things—things that must be.



Turtles All the Way Down, by Daniel Cook

regress view. So, I’ll call it ‘Infinite Regress’.

It is not hard to see why one should find Infinite Regress appealing. The

view presents us with the simplest possible answer to the question, “What sort of things have causes?” The answer: real things. Or to put it even more simply: *things*. (Let us put the prospect of uncaused, *abstract* things to the side.)

Moreover, Infinite Regress avoids altogether the puzzle of *how it all got started*. Consider the alternative to Infinite Regress: there is a thing (at

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least one)—call it ‘First Cause’—that has no cause whatsoever. Now ask yourself, “Why does (or did) First Cause exist”? Well, First Cause has no cause (by definition); so, there cannot be an explanation in terms of an external (or internal) cause. Shall we suppose, then, that First Cause simply sprang into being without a cause? If we do, then we face an even more perplexing question: what makes First Cause so special, that it, *unlike everything else in our experience*, should be able to come into being without being caused (whether deterministically or indeterministically)? And why doesn’t this happen all the time—duplicates of First Cause springing into existence out of thin air on my front porch or on the highway?

There is, of course, the idea that First Cause is “self-explanatory,” in the sense that it, by its very nature, exists of *necessity*. It’s an intriguing idea. But it doesn’t solve the puzzle of how it all started—for how does a thing that exists of necessity *bring into being* other non-necessary things? How could something produce *being* from non-being? The type of causation that would be required for First Cause to produce something from nothing is unlike anything we know in ordinary experience. (Or, if you imagine instead that First Cause causes *from eternity* a contingent thing or emanation, that too, requires an unusual exhibition of causation.) So, if First Cause exists of necessity, then we have unusual causation, not to mention unusual existence. Better, then, to be an infinite regresser—or so it may seem.

But is it? The usual response by skeptics of Infinite Regress is to try to

argue that Infinite Regress doesn’t earn its keep because it leads to problems of its own. Most saliently, there is the question of whether Infinite Regress can provide a satisfying *ultimate* explanation of existence. I will not explore that response here. I have a different response to suggest: I will argue that the above cited motivations for Infinite Regress actually contradict each other. The upshot will be that Infinite Regress isn’t as appealing as it may have seemed.

Since I don’t have many words to use (and I’m wasting words on this very sentence!), I’ll have to be brief. I present the infinite regresser with a choice: (i) suppose that causation from nothing has in fact occurred, or (ii) give up Infinite Regress; there are no other options. Why aren’t there other options? Let me explain.

We conceive of causation as involving either a *rearrangement* of what already exists or a *production* of something brand new. Now suppose there is an infinite causal regress that consists exclusively of rearrangements; imagine a thousand turtles endlessly changing formation. Then the most “fundamental” things being rearranged (elementary particles, say) are uncaused, since no new fundamental things are ever created. The rearrangements apply to what’s *already there*. And only the *form* of what’s there has ever been caused. It makes no difference if the world is composed of infinitely divisible gunk, or if there are smallest things. In either case, there is something (gunky or thingy) whose form is caused but whose *existence* is wholly uncaused. We may put the point this way: an infinite regress of

states is not sufficient for an infinite regress of *things*.

So, suppose instead that *everything* has a cause, including the very “fundamental” things being rearranged. In that case, brand *new* things, which aren’t mere rearrangements of pre-existing things, must have been caused to exist. In other words, there are things that have been brought into existence without the use of *any* materials. That’s causation from nothing—or as they say, creation *ex nihilo*. It isn’t that there was nothing and *then* something. It’s that something caused there to be something else without using pre-existing materials. In other words, something caused *being* from non-being. Sound familiar?

It seems, then, that we have either a mere regress of states (rearrangements) or a regress of both states and of the very things that undergo states. The first option leaves us with uncaused *things*, which contradicts Infinite Regress. The second leaves us with *causation from nothing*, which undermines a principle motivation for Infinite Regress. Those are the options. (Well, maybe there is the option that “arrangements” exist without arranged *things*—whatever that might mean; but then “rearrangements” are really just a series of effects produced “out of” nothing, which hardly improves the situation.)

So, we face a choice: either take on board uncaused things, or accept that there has been creation *ex nihilo*; or both. Infinite Regress doesn’t provide an alternative, despite popular opinion.

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