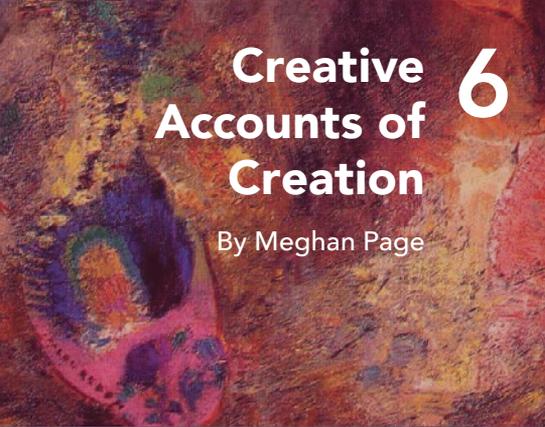




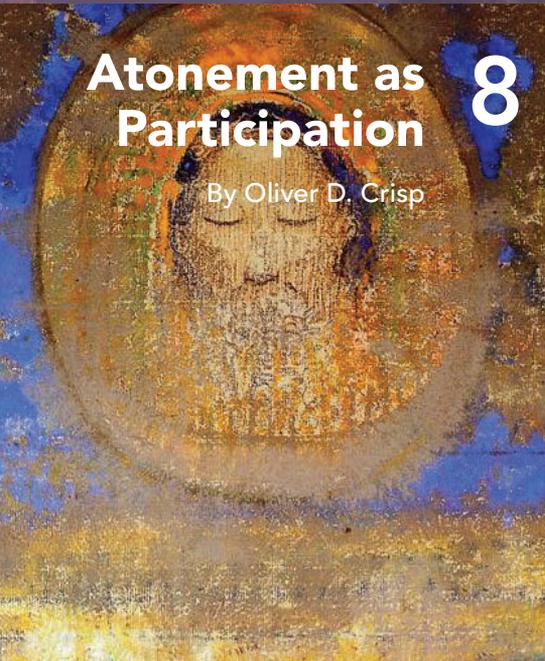
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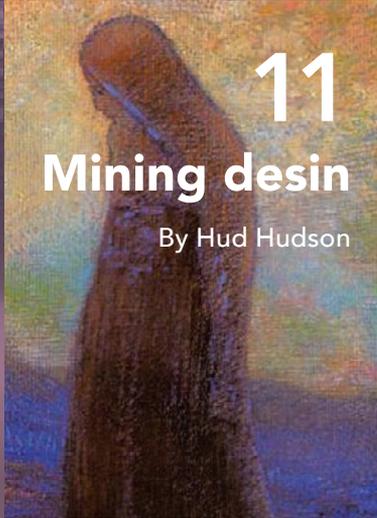
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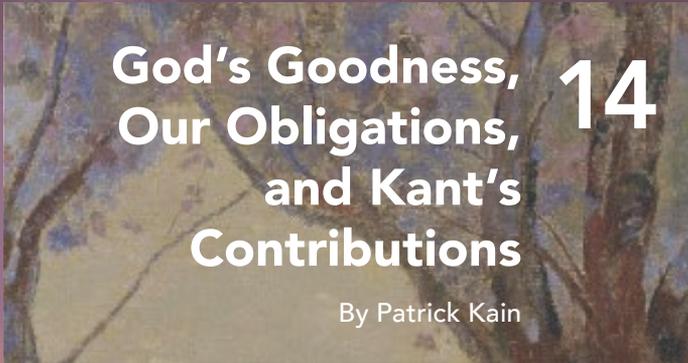
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About *logoi*:

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



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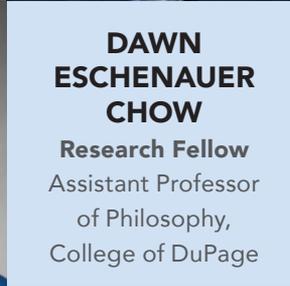
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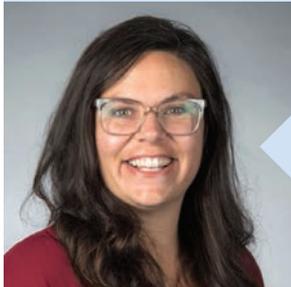
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YEAR IN REVIEW

MAY 24-26, 2018

LOGOS CONFERENCE

“Race, Gender, Ability, and Class: Expanding Conversations in Analytic Theology”

MAY

SEPTEMBER 1, 2018

LAUNCHED NEW CPR WEBSITE

SEPTEMBER 7, 2018

“How Can Christians Make Sense of Decent Sensible Skeptics?”
by Michael Bergmann

SEPTEMBER 21, 2018

“Why Tolerate Religion? A (Surprising) Nietzschean Answer”
by David Dudrick

SEPTEMBER 28, 2018

Molinism: Explaining Our Freedom Away” by Nevin Climenhaga and Daniel Rubio

PLANTINGA FELLOW LECTURE

“Divinity, Humanity, and the Ground of Morality”
by Patrick Kain

SEPTEMBER

AUGUST



AUGUST 30, 2018

WELCOME PARTY FOR THE NEW CPR FELLOWS

AUGUST 31, 2018

“Divine Freedom”
by Patrick Kain

OCTOBER

OCTOBER 5, 2018

“Problems with the World Actualization Model”
by Meghan Page

OCTOBER 26, 2018

“Analogy without Evisceration: Irreducibly Analogical Models of God”
by Dawn Eschenauer Chow



FALL 2018

VIDEO SERIES RELEASE

Launch of the CPR Video Series on Race, Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Religious Trauma

JANUARY

JANUARY 25, 2019

"On Contradictory Christology: A Reply to Pawl's 'Explosive Theology'" by Jc Beall



FEBRUARY 6, 2019

"Satisfaction Guaranteed: How Christ Atones for Human Sin" (Food for Thought Undergraduate Event)

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 8, 2019

"A Reply to Thomas McCall's 'Theological Reflections on Contradictory Christology'" by Jc Beall

FEBRUARY 15, 2019

"A Reply to A. J. Cotnoir's 'On the role of Logic' and Sara Uckelman's 'Contradictions, Impossibility, and Triviality'" by Jc Beall

APRIL

APRIL 5, 2019

"Material Problems for Immaterialism" by Kristin Seemuth Whaley

APRIL 12, 2019

"The Problem of Evil and the Suffering of Creeping Things" by Dustin Crummett

APRIL 26, 2019

"Moral Exemplarism and Atonement" by Oliver D. Crisp



NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER 2, 2018

"Intersectional #metoo Movements and the Muslim American Case" by Saba Fatima

NOVEMBER 9, 2018

"The Metaphor of the Vine: Grafting, Transformation, and the Indwelling Relation of the Holy Spirit" by Kimberley Kroll

NOVEMBER 18, 2018

"The Eucharist, Perfection, and Damage" (8th Annual Analytic Theology Lecture) by Lauren F. Winner

NOVEMBER 30, 2018

"God Always Creates Out of Creation, Everlasting in Love: Creatio ex Creatione Sempiternaliter en Amore" by Thomas Jay Oord

MARCH

MARCH 1, 2019

"Human Dignity and the Ground of Morality" by Patrick Kain

MARCH 22, 2019

"Analogical Theology Is Not Revisionary Theology: The Importance of Irreducibility" by Dawn Eschenauer Chow

MARCH 29, 2019

"Divine Creativity and the World Actualization Model" by Meghan Page

MAY

MAY 10, 2019

CPR END-OF-YEAR EVENT: SOUTH BEND CUBS GAME

KEY

BLUE = FRIDAY DISCUSSION GROUP
GREEN = SPECIAL EVENT

CREATIVE ACCOUNTS OF CREATION

by Meghan Page

Models matter; they mediate our understanding of the world. My two-year-old son has never seen an elephant, but he has a “model” of an elephant in the form of a soft and fluffy stuffed-animal. Interacting with this stuffed animal helps shape his concept of what an elephant is; he can identify real elephants in pictures, and he knows that part of what makes elephants distinct from other animals is the possession of a trunk. Of course, the scope of what my son can learn about real elephants from this stuffed animal is limited. If he were to believe that elephants are exactly like the one in his crib, he would form many false beliefs: e.g. elephants are cuddly, I can throw an elephant across the room, elephants don’t need to eat anything, etc. While models can help us learn about objects and systems beyond our ordinary experience, they can also

corrupt the way we think about the world if we rely on them too heavily or mistake features of the model for features of the things they represent.

Philosophers also use models to think about the world, although these models are more difficult to cuddle than a stuffed elephant. Philosophical models are generally abstract representations of systems or objects that take a logical or mathematical form. One such model that I’m especially interested in is the “world actualization model” or WAM. WAM is often used as a model of creation. On this model, our world is one of infinitely many possible worlds. Because God is omniscient, he has knowledge of all the worlds that he could potentially create. When he creates, he surveys all of these worlds and then selects one to actualize.

While models can help us learn about objects and systems beyond our ordinary experience, they can also corrupt the way we think about the world.

Some philosophers argue that he always picks the best world, while others claim he need only pick one that is “good enough.” In any event, the world that God chooses to actualize or create then becomes the world we inhabit: the actual world.

Philosophers use this model to think about issues in philosophy of religion that relate to God’s creative choices. For example, this model is often invoked in discussions of the problem of evil. Numerous events have occurred in this world that seem contrary to the sort of events a loving God would allow in a world that he created. The question then emerges: why did God choose to actualize this world where so many terrible things happen rather than some other world in which they do not? Attempts to answer this question often appeal to WAM. For example, Alvin Plantinga argued that it may well be that any world which has free agents will also have a fair amount of evil. If that’s right, then when God surveyed all of the possible worlds, he limited his choice to worlds where there are free agents because freedom is important. However, once the scope of worlds is restricted to those with free agents, all of the worlds end up having a number of troublesome events. The evil we see was unavoidable, presuming that God chose to create free agents.

But while WAM can be a helpful way of thinking about the reasons that God has, it is quite divorced from our lived experience of the creative process. When we admire a painting by Picasso, we don’t imagine that he considered all the possible paintings he might create and then chose one to actualize. Enjoying an artistic piece more often consists in wondering about things like “Why did the artist choose this particular color combination? What might Picasso want to express? How is this painting similar to or different from other works of Picasso?” This is because we recognize that artists engage in creative choices when they create. They do not select from a determinate set of possibilities but work to construct new and concrete actualities.

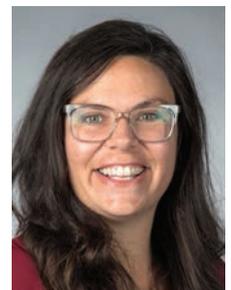
In my current project, I use artists’ descriptions of

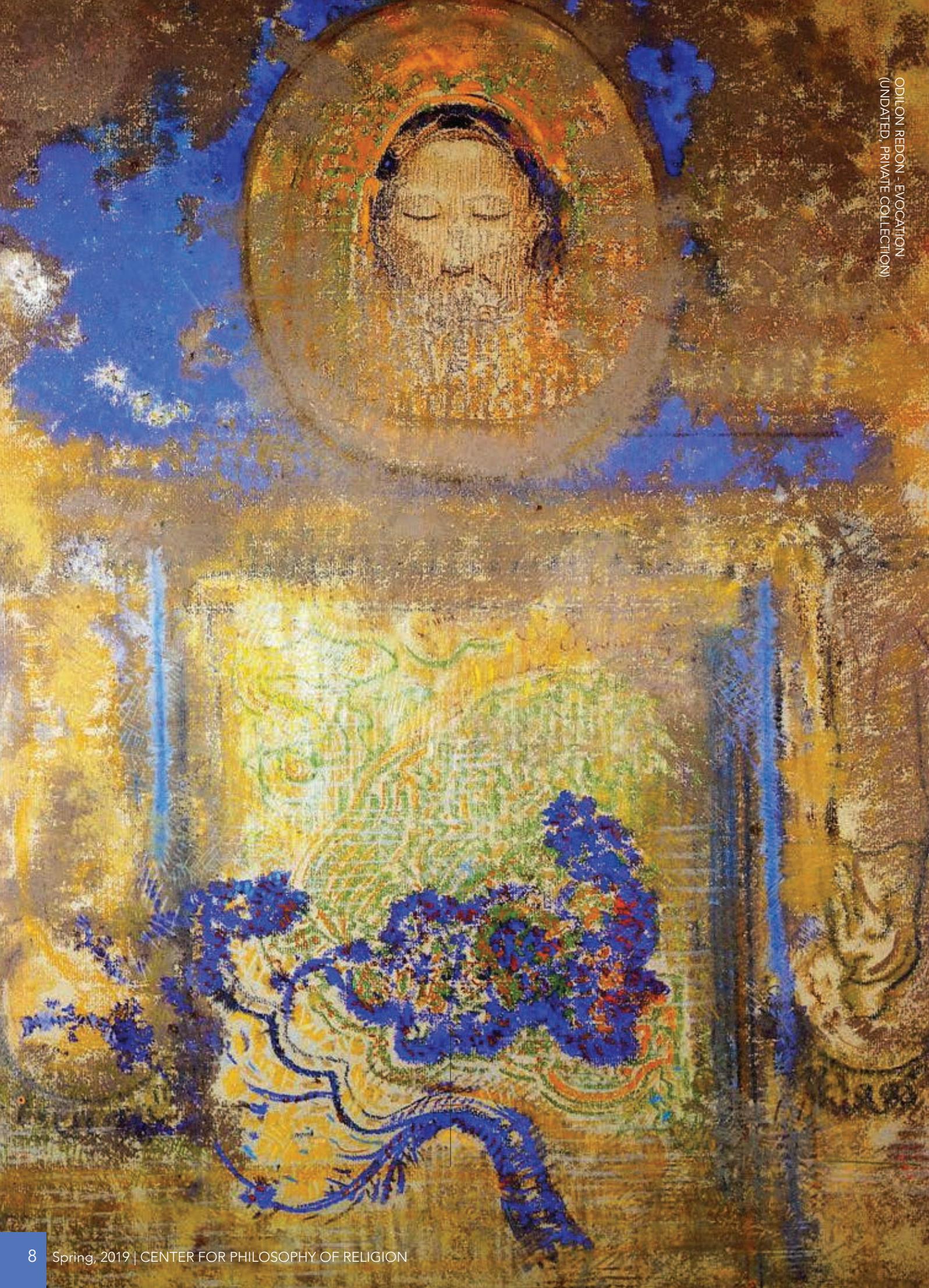
their own creative process to illuminate ways in which the WAM model limits the reasons that are available to God. For example, the twentieth century artist Katherine Anne Porter claims that when she creates, “The question is, how to convey a sense of whatever is there, as feeling, within you, to the reader.” For Porter, the work of creativity comes in the translation of what is to be expressed into a concrete expression. So, if we were to analyze a particular work of Porter’s in order to understand why the protagonist acts in a particular way, the answer might be it was a way of translating a particular feeling that Porter wanted to express. But imagine trying to “uncover” Porter’s reason within the confines of WAM. We would have to assume that Porter selected the novel she wrote from a whole series of possible novels. But as soon as we enter the model, we exclude the possibility that Porter’s reasons emerge from the work of translating her ideas into words, because we assume that all of the possible novels are already words. In other words, WAM just isn’t capable of modeling Porter’s reasons. But if WAM can’t sufficiently include all of the reasons available to humans, how could it possibly include all of the reasons available to God?

Artists engage in creative choices when they create. They do not select from a determinate set of possibilities but work to construct new and concrete actualities.

The major objection to my view is that many of the reasons humans use in the creative process are the results of imperfection. Porter struggles to translate her feelings into words because she is a mere mortal, while a perfect God can create simply by willing things to be. A large part of my project is arguing this is not the case; our lived experience of creativity reflects the glory of God’s creative process and is not a consequence of our finite nature.

Although it gives us a simple, helpful way of thinking about creation, WAM is extremely limited in its ability to illuminate God’s creative reasons or model God’s creative process. Ultimately, WAM turns out to be a bit like a stuffed elephant.





ODILON REDON - EVOCATION
(UNDATED, PRIVATE COLLECTION)

ATONEMENT AS PARTICIPATION

by Oliver D. Crisp

It wasn't all that long ago that there were very few things being written about the Christian doctrine of atonement. Now there is a thicket of books on the topic, and more pouring from the presses every year. It used to be the case that when talking about the atonement, one could guarantee that a certain cluster of views would feature in the discussion. A standard typology existed, bequeathed to theologians by the work of the twentieth century Scandinavian Lutheran bishop, Gustaf Aulén. These days that can't be counted on either. The renewed interest in the topic has led to a re-evaluation of the standard typology, and in many cases its revision if not total rejection. My own work is a contribution to this debate.

The *standard typology* (as I shall call it) said that there are basically three sorts of ways of thinking about the atonement. These are the idea of Christ as moral example (a view often, I think mistakenly, attributed to Peter Abelard), the idea of Christ as a kind of substitute, taking the place of guilty humanity (understood either as a satisfaction, as per Anselm of Canterbury, or as a penal substitute, as per Reformation theology), and what Aulén called the "classic" view of atonement. This is the notion that Christ's atonement is a kind of ransom paid to the devil to "buy back" fallen humanity. Aulén and many who followed his lead thought that this sort of view was synonymous with the patristic doctrine that had been overlaid by later theological accretions. This standard typology has been challenged in recent

work on the doctrine. It is not just that there are many variant views being touted, though this is true. Rather, there are new ways of thinking about the atonement being explored in the literature that simply don't fit the standard typology. My own work is an attempt to contribute to this shift away from the standard typology to ways of thinking about the atonement that better fit with patristic theology, as well as Pauline theology.

The standard typology relied on a fairly stable view of what the atonement actually consisted in. It was thought to be whatever it was that Christ did on the cross. Whatever that action amounted to in terms of the reconciliation of human beings with God—that was what we meant by the atonement. But the recent interest in the doctrine has overturned this assumption as well. It is now common to find scholars working on the atonement who argue that the reconciling work of Christ is not just what happens at the cross, important though this undoubtedly is in Christian doctrine. Instead, the atonement is thought to include the incarnation as well as the resurrection of Christ. It is one work that has several distinct phases or aspects. This is an old idea that can be found as far back as the work of Athanasius or Irenaeus among the church fathers. But there are contemporary theologians who say something similar, such as Thomas Torrance or Kathryn Tanner. I think there is something to this claim. A more expansive understanding of what is meant by Christ's atoning action will surely yield a theologically

richer conception of the reconciliation of human beings to Godself, and that (I think) is to be welcomed.

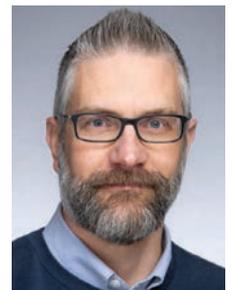
A third issue has to do with how we think about our theologizing about the atonement. Is the atonement a doctrine? Do we construct *doctrines* of atonement? In works on the subject from a previous generation there is often discussion of “theories” of atonement. (This is largely a hangover from the nineteenth century.) These days those working on this topic are rather leery of such language. It sounds a bit overblown. Perhaps what we are after is something more modest, such as a model of the atonement. That is: a partial, limited, approximation to the truth of the matter that may be too rich or polyvalent or complex for any one doctrine to fully encompass. There are certainly treatments of the doctrine in the recent literature that have “gone meta” and focused on issues of methodology, with particular reference to the question of what it is that we are trying to get at when we talk about the atonement in a theologically constructive manner. My work is in this vein as well. I seek to give an account of the nature of the atonement that takes seriously the Christian tradition, including the biblical witness, as well as the range of different conceptions of the atonement in Christian history. No single account can, like the One Ring in Tolkein’s epic, “rule them all.” But perhaps some ways of thinking about the reconciling work of Christ are more helpful, and more comprehensive, than others. I try to give a comprehensive account of the nature of atonement, recognizing that it may not necessarily capture all that we want to say about the doctrine, though it provides what I hope is a helpful and useful model for thinking about this vital matter.

In recent music and literature there is much talk of “mash-up” works, such as the modern classic, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. (Infinitely more bloodthirsty than the rather jejune original by Ms. Austen.) In keeping with several other recent works in theology, my own research is an attempt to do what I call a kind of “mash-up” account of the atonement. Taking aspects of different existing models, I am trying to craft a way of thinking about the reconciling work of Christ that reflects Pauline and patristic notions of participation in Christ and union with Christ. Others have done something similar, of course. In systematic theology this includes the work of Jonathan Edwards, and more recently the aforementioned Torrance and Tanner. But

the philosophers have also made a contribution too. Work by Robin Collins (influenced by René Girard) and a paper by Tim Bayne and Greg Restall, which draws on the work of the biblical scholar Douglas Campbell, try to weave together into one account of the atonement notions of participating in the work of Christ and union with Christ that can be found in particular in Paul’s Adam Christology (e.g. Rom. 5: 12-19, 1 Cor. 15), and in the Orthodox notion of theosis or divinization. I too am interested in this cluster of theological concepts.

Perhaps what we are after is something more modest, such as a model of the atonement. That is: a partial, limited, approximation to the truth of the matter that may be too rich or polyvalent or complex for any one doctrine to fully encompass.

But how do we participate in the work of Christ? And how are we united to him in his atonement in such a way that he is able to act on our behalf and bring about our reconciliation with Godself? That is the issue to which I am addressing myself in my research project. I’ve offered several previous attempts at outlining what this might look like, including a previous book called *The Word Enfleshed*. But there is more work to do, and much of it involves the hard graft of taking these biblical and theological notions and developing them using recent work in metaphysics in order to generate a model of atonement that can provide some explanation of this central and defining Christian mystery.



MINING DESIN

by Hud Hudson

A bit of fun in which the reader is asked to sit in judgment on a grievance that mirrors a rather well-known case concerning the metaphysics of intelligent design theory

You sit on a review board that investigates illegal mining activities. It is the year 129822, and the descendants of human beings have colonized several planets and are actively engaged in interstellar travel and mining

operations. You have agreed to uphold the principles of *The Constitution of the United Planets*, a document that contains a series of perfectly clear rules about these mining operations. In brief, mining is permitted only after a scouting party has thoroughly determined that a given planet is suitable for resource-extraction, a feature that is fixed by its having in sufficient quantities the right natural materials and its lacking any sentient life. By long-standing demand, the government serving

the United Planets has enforced a strict rule against mining any planets that host indigenous sentient species.

As you read a transcript of the latest case to come before the board you learn that a fleet of mining ships recently made its way to the planet Desin. The planet Desin was scouted just three dozen centuries earlier in the 126200s, and after extensive investigation the report came in that Desin was a prime choice for mining—rich in natural resources and devoid of any sentient life. Curiously, however, within a few weeks of the landing and the initial efforts to set up the main site from which the mining would be monitored, an odd thing happened on Desin.

It turns out several workers had climbed a small peak to set up communications equipment and while relaxing on their lunch break had gazed down on the clear surface of the sapphire-blue lake below. And there—on the surface of that mirror-like lake—they read in beautifully scripted letters the following words:

We, the inhabitants of Desin, are both delighted and proud to welcome you once again as our guests, and we wish you every health and happiness.

This occasioned, understandably, something of a surprised reaction among the members of the crew, and within a few days every member of the expedition had been up the side of the peak to take a look. One thing became immediately clear. The letters on the surface of the water were simply the collective images of a number of rocks that were distributed in a certain precise pattern on the hillside that rose almost directly up from the lake. But one mystery solved was hardly a comfort, and something like panic began to set in as the most obvious explanation—namely, that Desin was in fact inhabited by sentient and intelligent creatures—began to press itself upon the members of the expedition and as they began to fear that their operations would have to be scrapped. For some of them, this would spell personal disaster and for many of them this would mean significant hardship, for the majority of the members of the expedition had their own varied investments in the success of the mining operation and no one would escape difficulty if it suffered some drastic alteration.

We, the inhabitants of Desin,
are both delighted and proud to welcome
you once again as our guests, and we wish
you every health and happiness.

One of the senior members of the mining party, however, brought the members of the expedition together and asked them to calm themselves. "I know what you're all thinking," he began, "but I ask you to bear with me long enough to hear me out. There is no question that the water-message is purposive. That is, it has the unmistakable look of having been designed. But let us remind ourselves that appearances can be deceiving—even the appearance of design. Consequently, we should be asking ourselves whether this phenomenon is really or only apparently purposive, and fortunately, I am happy to be able to inform you that the purposiveness is only apparent, after all. It turns out that the appearance of design behind the water-message is quite simply the product of two perfectly natural processes, neither of which has the least thing to do with any intentions or intelligence. Their joint consequence is quite beautiful and wondrous, I'll be the first to admit, but quite completely subject to a perfectly sane and naturalistic explanation. For a start, we are clearly in a region of this planet that has seen the formation and dissolution of glaciers over the millennia, and as we all are well aware a glacier can carry even a massive boulder to a new location as it recedes. Accordingly, it seems rather clear that these rocks that once were high in the mountains and that now adorn the hillside above the lake owe their present positions to the receding of a recent glacier. And as for the images in the water—well, there's nothing too mysterious about that—that's explicable in terms of straightforward facts about mirror images. In short, descent with glaciation and natural reflection are all we need to appeal to in order to give a thoroughly-satisfying, non-intentional, naturalistic account of the apparent purposiveness of the water-message."

One of the members of the original communications crew protested, "But there are at least three difficulties with your explanation. First, glaciers form and recede over great stretches of time, and our predecessors scouted precisely this area a mere three dozen centuries ago. 3600 years is an awfully brief period of time for the

naturalistic processes you have put such weight on to do the work you have assigned them. Second, as we can see from the pictures of this region left to us by our ancestors who conducted the scouting mission, only some of the boulders have been removed from their original locations, but the vast majority of them seem to be right where they were before. Glaciers aren't so selective. If one recently came through this region, it would have altered the positions of many more of the rocks in our environment as well, but as we can see, several don't seem to have been so much as bumped or jostled one way or another. The record of transition and movement just doesn't have the features we would expect if mere glaciation and natural reflection were really the correct account of the purposiveness of the water-message. Third, the individual letters that are reflected in the lake water are each composed of several tightly-nestled, all-black boulders, an exceedingly-precise and magnificently-complex arrangement that could hardly have been produced by the coarse-grained mechanism of crawling ice."

An unprofessional discussion followed. It seems that the senior member of the mining party explained to the protesting member of the crew that he was illegitimately speaking as if there were two hypotheses to choose between: the blind-process-of-nature hypothesis of descent with glaciation and natural reflection, and the intentional-activity hypothesis that some inhabitants of Desin had selectively rolled some rocks down a hillside in order to convey a welcoming message to the mining party. But, he further explained, there are not in fact two hypotheses on the table, for (as firmly established by the original scouting party) there is simply no good evidence for the existence of any inhabitants of Desin. The complaints about the time frame for the process of glaciation and the puzzles of the jostle record and the admittedly fabulous complexity of the black blocks are all interesting, to be sure, but they must have perfectly good rejoinders, for quite clearly (given the absence of any local well-wishers) there simply is no superior explanation in the offing. Consequently, the original naturalistic, non-design hypothesis stands unopposed. Moreover, continued the senior member of the mining party, the evidence against inhabitants of Desin was—if anything—only strengthened by recognizing the role of glaciation and natural reflection. That is, once the very best case for real purposiveness—the water-message—had been shown to be the unintentional

consequence of mere random forces of nature, it was all the more clear that there were not any Desiners to contend with.

A minority of the members of the expedition remained unconvinced and their representatives have now brought formal charges against the mining activities in an attempt to stop them before they are irrevocably underway.

How do you rule? Or, if not yet prepared to rule, what information do you now request?

As a member of the board, it is your job to rule on the legality of the mining operation, or else to request further information that will help you arrive at a verdict. How do you rule? Or, if not yet prepared to rule, what information do you now request?

Hud Hudson teaches philosophy at Western Washington University. In addition to writing technical works in metaphysics and philosophy of religion, he also believes that fiction can be a powerful medium for communicating philosophical ideas. For more on Hud and his work, visit his website at <https://sites.google.com/view/hud-hudson/home>.

GOD'S GOODNESS, OUR OBLIGATIONS, AND KANT'S CONTRIBUTIONS

by Patrick Kain

I have duties to care for my children, to keep my promises, to care for my body, to develop my talents, to help others in need. Obligation is a familiar part of human life. And a central measure of my character is whether I fulfill my obligations, and whether I do so willingly. Yet obligation is also puzzling. A duty seems to be something that we're *required* to do (or prohibited from doing), but it isn't always clear how this works. Duty isn't just something I happen to want to do, nor am I relieved of my duty simply because I do not feel like fulfilling it. When you remind me of my duties, you are not simply correcting my judgments about what will help me achieve my aims, as if you are my counselor or advisor. And, while I am sometimes required to promote others' well-being, this does not capture all of my duties to them, nor do my duties disappear just because I judge that fulfilling them may not increase others' well-being, or my own. Moreover, in genuine obligation, the requirement seems to be something other than coercion: while it may be legitimate to coerce me to fulfill some of my obligations, this is not true of all of them; and even if there is no one able to coerce me to fulfill them, I may remain obligated all the same. But where could this sort of requirement come from?

Alvin Plantinga once advised Christian philosophers (and other theistic philosophers) to think about how God is the premier person, and to reflect on God's goodness in order to think well about how we should live. I think that's sage advice in general, and it may help us to think about obligation, in particular. So why and how does God do the good things he does? How does this bear

on our questions about *obligation*? Does God have obligations? And how is God related to my obligations? Does God *create* obligations?

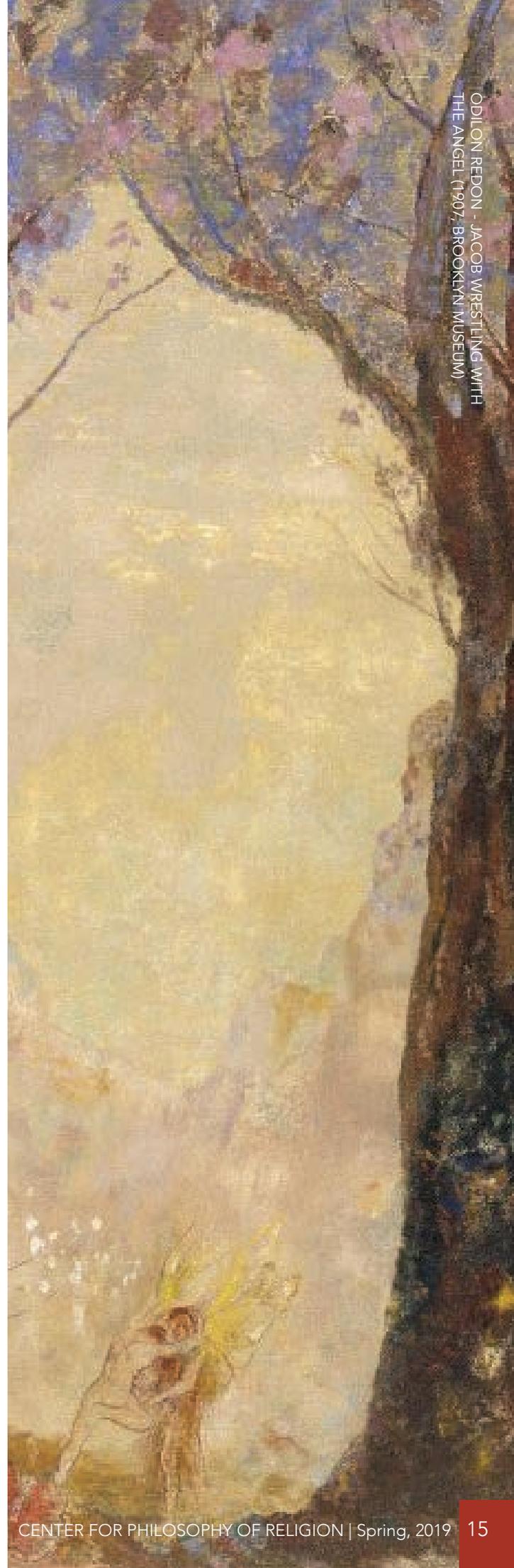
Few philosophers have thought about obligation as deeply, or as influentially, as Immanuel Kant. Might Kant help us to answer some of these questions about obligation? Kant famously argued that the supreme principle of moral obligation is a "categorical imperative" that tells me that I should always treat people as ends-in-themselves, never as a mere means. Kant also offered answers to some of our theological questions about obligation. He claimed that if God exists, then God *necessarily* acts well—and therefore God does not have obligations requiring him to act well. Further, he said that even though we should recognize all of our obligations as God's commands, God only commands things that are already obligatory. Our obligations, he insisted, must be grounded in *our* existence or *our* rational activity (though what exactly this might mean has been much debated). The lesson from Kant, then, seems to be a largely negative one: even if there is a God, Kant seems to say, the notion of obligation has little to do with God or his goodness. This negative lesson is part of the received interpretation of Kant and, due at least in part to Kant's enormous influence, it has become a widely held philosophical assumption. But is this the *right* lesson for us to learn, and is it in fact the actual lesson that Kant taught? The answer here may turn on what Kant thinks about divine agency, about how and why God acts well.

Others who have considered Kant's account of divine agency have supposed that he endorsed an incoherent model, or a simplistic model of arbitrary divine choice. I have discovered that Kant developed a much richer account of divine agency, especially of God's willing to create the world, than previously recognized. Kant argues that God necessarily creates, but that God does not *need* to create. Rather, God's reason to create is his own goodness and self-sufficiency, since, before he creates, nothing other than God exists. God creates as an *expression* of his own goodness and what he creates manifests his goodness, and so God creates freely and willingly. My study of Kant's published works, lecture notes, and drafts reveals this interesting variation on classic models of divine agency from the theological and philosophical tradition.

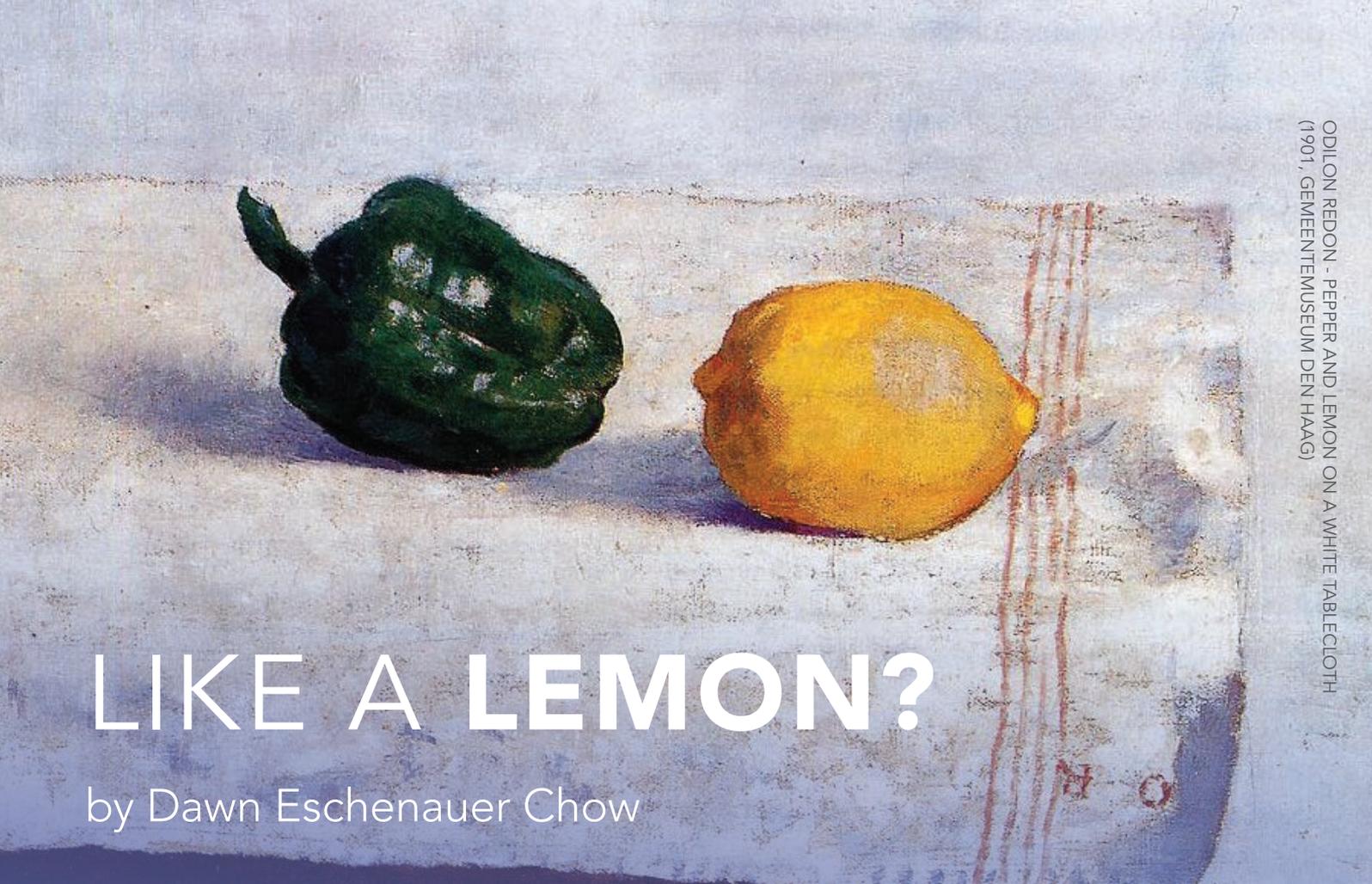
What does any of this have to do with our obligations? I contend that Kant's account of human obligation, and of human moral motivation, develops a significant analogy to this model of divine agency. My obligatory actions are an expression and realization of my dignity, somewhat like God's action is an expression of his goodness. While I'm not perfect like God is (not even close!), Kant claims that I can commit myself to *realizing* and *expressing* a good will by fulfilling my obligations. My own essential dignity is properly expressed in recognizing and fulfilling my obligations to myself; and since you, too, have this dignity, I also have a similar expressive reason to recognize and fulfill my obligations to you.

My obligatory actions are an expression and realization of my dignity, somewhat like God's action is an expression of his goodness.

This analogy with divine agency can help to make sense of how obligation can be a requirement rooted in our own nature, as Kant suggested. It may also allow us to say that, if God creates beings like us and commands us to fulfill our obligations, God thereby expresses his own goodness and enables our moral agency, our expression of a good will that resembles God's. The upshot isn't just a better understanding of Kant's account of obligation, but also a positive, philosophically interesting proposal about how my familiar obligations may be a reflection of God's goodness, after all.



ODILON REDON - JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL (1907, BROOKLYN MUSEUM)



LIKE A LEMON?

by Dawn Eschenauer Chow

Suppose I tell you that I have an object—let’s call it “O”—in my desk drawer. And suppose I tell you, “O is similar to a lemon.” Assuming I’m not lying, what do you now know about O? The natural guess is that O is a citrus fruit—maybe an orange. But that’s far from the only way something could be “similar to a lemon.” Maybe O is similar to a lemon because it’s bright yellow. Or sour. Or oblong. Maybe O is similar to a lemon only in that both are made of atoms.

The point is that if my telling you that O is “similar to a lemon” is to be informative—if it’s actually going to tell you something about what O *is*—you need to know *how* O is similar to a lemon. Otherwise, the assertion “O is similar to a lemon” doesn’t really tell you anything in particular about O. I might as well not have bothered saying anything at all.

This point about claims of similarity like “O is similar to a lemon” has seemed to some philosophers to cause a major problem for a certain traditional theological position. Traditional Judeo-Christian theology is pervaded with claims that God is beyond our comprehension, and that as a result, God can only be

spoken of by analogy. Fr. Thomas Keating speaks out of this tradition when he says,

The living God, the God Who is God and not a philosopher’s abstraction, lies infinitely beyond the reach of anything our eyes can see or our minds can understand. No matter what perfection you predicate of Him, you have to add that your concept is only a pale analogy of the perfection that is in God, and that He is not literally what you conceive by that term.

On this view, we can only describe God’s nature by analogy. We can correctly say things like, “God has something similar to what we know as wisdom,” but if someone asks me *how* God’s “wisdom” is similar to human wisdom, I won’t be able to answer, except with more analogies.

But this seems to put us in the same problematic position we were in with “O is similar to a lemon.” If we only know that God has something *similar* to wisdom, but don’t know *how* it is similar to wisdom, that seems to empty the claim “God is wise” of all content. This approach leaves us knowing essentially nothing about God.

Of course, the idea that we don't quite know what we're saying when we talk about God was part of the whole *point* of the doctrine of analogy. We wanted to affirm that God is so utterly transcendent that he is beyond our comprehension. But if we really have no idea what is entailed by our analogical claims about God, then we might as well not have bothered saying anything at all.

In attempting to grapple with this problem, I think it helps to notice that our human dependence on analogies in thinking about God is rather similar to the way a non-scientist might be dependent on analogies in thinking about atoms.

Imagine, for example, that Jack has never been taught anything about atoms. One day his neighbor Jane, a physics professor, explains to him:

Every object in the world is made up of atoms, which are sort of like tiny rubber balls. In solid objects, the atoms are packed close together. In a liquid, they're a little further apart, so they can slide around each other easily, and in the air they're really far apart.

If Jack spends a long enough time pondering over what he's been told, it might occur to him that part of this story doesn't really make sense. Jane has explained to him that what makes a table *solid* is that the atoms are packed close together. But atoms are supposed to be like rubber balls, which are solid objects. But if what it is to be *solid* is to be made of atoms packed close together, then atoms can't be solid objects, because atoms aren't made of atoms. So atoms aren't solid objects, but are somehow *like* solid objects. But how can something be like a solid object without being a solid object? And in what way are atoms like solid objects?

Our human dependence on analogies in thinking about God is rather similar to the way a non-scientist might be dependent on analogies in thinking about atoms.

The actual answer to that question would involve talking about electromagnetic forces—stuff most non-scientists don't think about at all, and certainly don't think of as being involved in the bouncing of a rubber

ball. But Jack doesn't know that, and unless he goes back to Jane, or finds a science textbook, Jack isn't going to be able to come up with that answer on his own. He believes that atoms are importantly similar to solid objects like rubber balls, because Jane said so, but he doesn't know how.

Nonetheless, if Jack trusts Jane as an authority, he knows that if he thinks of things as made up of little bouncing rubber balls, that will get him as close to the truth as possible. The fact that he has to use an imperfect analogy, and that he doesn't know which parts of the analogy apply and which parts don't, doesn't make the analogy totally useless. For example, Jack might be able to successfully come up with the right explanation of why gases expand when heated, just from what Jane has told him. It'll have to be a guess, rather than a confident inference, but the fact that he can even make plausible guesses shows that he has more information about the world now than he did before.

When it comes to God, I think we're in something like Jack's position. We have the word of a trustworthy authority—God himself!—that certain stories or models of God are good analogies for what he is like. It's beyond our limited cognitive abilities to figure out the reality the analogies are based on, or to answer the question of how exactly God's "wisdom" is similar to human wisdom. But we can trust that if we think of God in terms of these analogies, we'll be coming as close to the truth as possible for us, and this justifies us in relying on them to guide us in our relations to God.

Similarly, if my friend tells me O is similar to a lemon when I'm in the course of cooking dinner, and I know she is a trustworthy expert with helpful intentions, I will be in a position to make good guesses about how I could use O in my cooking. An unspecified similarity claim can be useful so long as it comes from a trustworthy authority. In this way, those who believe that God has revealed the truth about himself to human beings can have a robustly contentful religious faith and worldview even if they think those truths God has revealed to us are analogical in form.





ENGAGING PHILOSOPHY: AN INTERVIEW WITH MEGHAN SULLIVAN

Congratulations on being awarded a grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation for your “Philosophy as a Way of Life” project. Can you tell us something about that?

Thanks! The Andrew Mellon Foundation gave Notre Dame \$806,000 for a three-year project that has an inward facing component and an outward facing component. The inward facing component focuses on the “God and the Good Life” course that we’ve been working on since 2015 here at Notre Dame. Its aim is to be a first philosophy course for students that gives them time, space, and help for thinking about the really big questions that face us as human beings. The four questions that we focus on are:

1. How do you decide what to believe?
2. What does it take for your life to be meaningful?
3. What do you owe to other people (i.e., what are your moral obligations)?
4. Are you going to practice your religion as an adult?

The goal is to make philosophy feel really alive and relevant for first-time philosophy students. So we started a conversation with the Mellon Foundation about re-igniting philosophy education. They looked at our class—which has a lot of weird aspects to it—and they were very curious about what we were doing and whether it was successful. And that was the impetus for writing the proposal.

Is the grant changing things for the class?

Absolutely. It’s given us three years of funding to open up more sections of “God and the Good Life” and to support the peer dialogue leader program that we that we launched in the spring of 2017. “God and the Good Life” doesn’t have normal discussion sections: the small groups are led by students who have already taken the class and want to lead others on this journey of asking philosophical questions. Those dialogue leaders take a separate, more advanced philosophy seminar together. They also get paid small stipends for their work: they help the teaching team develop the curriculum and

they lead the hour-long classes each week. The grant gave us the money to partially fund that program—and now we've got about 30 dialogue leaders, which gives you a sense of how big the course is becoming.

Okay, so if "God and the Good Life" is the project's inward facing component, what's the outward facing part?

We want to build a network of college and university philosophy departments that are interested in general education classes meant to help students think seriously about what it is to have a good life, and in what pedagogical practices make those classes more or less effective. We're encouraging faculty to step outside their research comfort zone and learn about unfamiliar texts and traditions that are relevant to these questions. One thing we've noticed is that many philosophy professors know enough about Plato and Aristotle to teach an introductory class, but know nothing about Buddhism or Confucian virtue ethics. If you're teaching a general education class on the right way to live, and you have ten students from China in your class, you can't pretend like 2,400 years of hard thinking about this question hasn't occurred in their part of the world. So we need to build up the capacity of college professors to engage with texts and traditions that are really important for thinking about happiness, but that they probably didn't get training in if they're coming from the West.

We need to build up the capacity of college professors to engage with texts and traditions that are really important for thinking about happiness.

That's the second place where the Mellon Foundation has come in: they've given us money to run three one-week summer workshops and to build an online portal for faculty and administrators interested in developing and running these classes. One hundred and fifteen universities applied to be part of the first workshop here at Notre Dame this coming June. The core of it will be master classes on texts that people want to learn how to teach, but we'll also be discussing how to design appropriate assignments and having plenary

talks about things like what it is to pursue philosophy as a way of life, what challenges come with that, and how to engage with different cultures. We'll also be launching a "Good and the Good Life" website, which will have a huge open database of course materials, weekly blog posts from faculty who are teaching similar classes, and blog posts from students who are in these classes. The hope is to form a big, complicated family of philosophers who really think we can teach people how to live well!

That's great! But it's also not the only iron you've got in the fire, right? Can you say something about the other grant you've received—the one from the John Templeton Foundation?

This is a grant I got to run a research project called "Philosophy and Religion Engaged with the Public." The idea is to get together a dozen top-notch researchers—people working on epistemology, and in particular on questions of rationality and belief—and spend a week over the summer talking about big-picture questions of where philosophy could improve public debates. This summer we'll be focusing on collective deliberation, epistemic bubbles, and belief polarization. The first week will be entirely focused on research, while the second week we'll have someone from an elite news venue coach us on how to translate philosophical arguments and insights for public audiences—this summer it's going to be an editor from the New York Times.

You might think of it this way: where the Mellon project is focused on how philosophers can have an impact in the classroom, the Templeton project is focused on how philosophers can have an impact on public debate.

How much of an impact should we expect philosophy to have? The way you talk about it, it sounds like it really ought to be powerfully transformative.

Absolutely! Philosophy has this incredible potential to help people flourish and live well. When Aristotle says in chapter two of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that we engage in these investigations not so that we can know what virtue is, but so that we might live well—I totally believe him. These are not questions just for people with PhDs. They're questions that literally every living

person has to wrestle with. Philosophers ought to be stepping up to try to teach people skills that can help them come to terms with this aspect of their lives. And another part of that is participating in the debates that are happening in the public forum.

Philosophy has this incredible potential to help people flourish and live well.

But I also think it's a two-way street. So far, I've been talking about philosophers as agents of transformation. But there's another side to it. Socrates actually cared about the answers his students were giving to the questions he was asking. He thought he could learn from them. Likewise, if I ask an 18-year-old in "God and the Good Life" a question like "does it make sense for somebody your age, knowing what you know, to practice a religion?" sometimes I get surprising, and destabilizing, and philosophically interesting answers. Those answers are transformative for me. They pave the way for my future research. In fact, I just recently wrote a paper about how we network knowledge in questions of religious faith—and that paper came out of a discussion with students. The same is true with public debate: it's not our job as philosophers to dominate those discussions. But we do have a unique opportunity to serve them. And when we do, the transformation goes both ways.

But what about good old-fashioned, ivory-tower philosophy? Is there any place for that?

Some topics are going to be esoteric by their very nature—like what it is for time to pass. But other topics—like how much a rational person should save for retirement, aren't. Whatever your theory about that second one is, if it ends up requiring really complicated calculus, then it's probably the wrong theory. Because guess what? We're supposed to know the answer to that. So sometimes the content of the topic itself creates a demand for intelligibility, which means that some high-level research projects still need to be intelligible to a broader audience. But I admit that not everything needs to be that way. Sometimes somebody is part of a really tight-knit, specialized philosophical community, making incremental contributions to a literature that's accessible just to that community. And that's being

a good philosopher, too. So we shouldn't expect *all* good philosophy to make a public impact.

What I disagree with is the view that philosophical research has to closely identify with a certain caricature of scientific research, where it's so specialized that only a few people on earth can understand it. That's not the default in philosophy. And I don't think that's how a lot of scientists see themselves, either. If something is really cutting edge, and we think it's most likely true, we can bring that into the classroom. In fact, we're *obligated* to bring that into the classroom. If somebody is teaching climate science, but they're teaching the climate science of the 1990's, they're doing a bad job. The same is true in philosophy: we're obligated to bring the best kinds of arguments to our students.

Sometimes discovering the truth requires getting into the weeds and taking complicated arguments seriously. Students can do that.

And in that vein, one of the things that I try to convince my students of—and I feel motivated by this personally—is that even though it's great to have a simple, sage, sound-looking argument, sometimes discovering the truth requires getting into the weeds and taking complicated arguments seriously. Students can do that. In fact, a lot of them have already been doing philosophy in an amateur way for a long time. It's our job as philosophers and teachers to recognize that, receive it, and elevate it.

Meghan Sullivan is a Professor of Philosophy, the Rev. John A O'Brien Collegiate Chair, and the Director of the University Philosophy Requirement at the University of Notre Dame. To learn more about Meghan and her work, visit her faculty webpage at www.philosophy.nd.edu.

CENTER UPDATES

We recently launched our re-designed website!

Visit us at <https://philreligion.nd.edu>

The screenshot shows the website for the Center for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame. The header includes the university name and the college of arts and letters. The main navigation menu includes Home, About, Fellowships, Research Initiatives, Resources, and Events. A search bar and contact link are also visible. The main content area features a central text block and three featured articles with images and buttons for more details or watching.

UNIVERSITY of NOTRE DAME COLLEGE of ARTS and LETTERS

Center for Philosophy of Religion

Home About Fellowships Research Initiatives Resources Events

Notre Dame's Center for Philosophy of Religion promotes work in philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, and in related fields through fellowships, conferences, grants, and strategic public engagement initiatives.

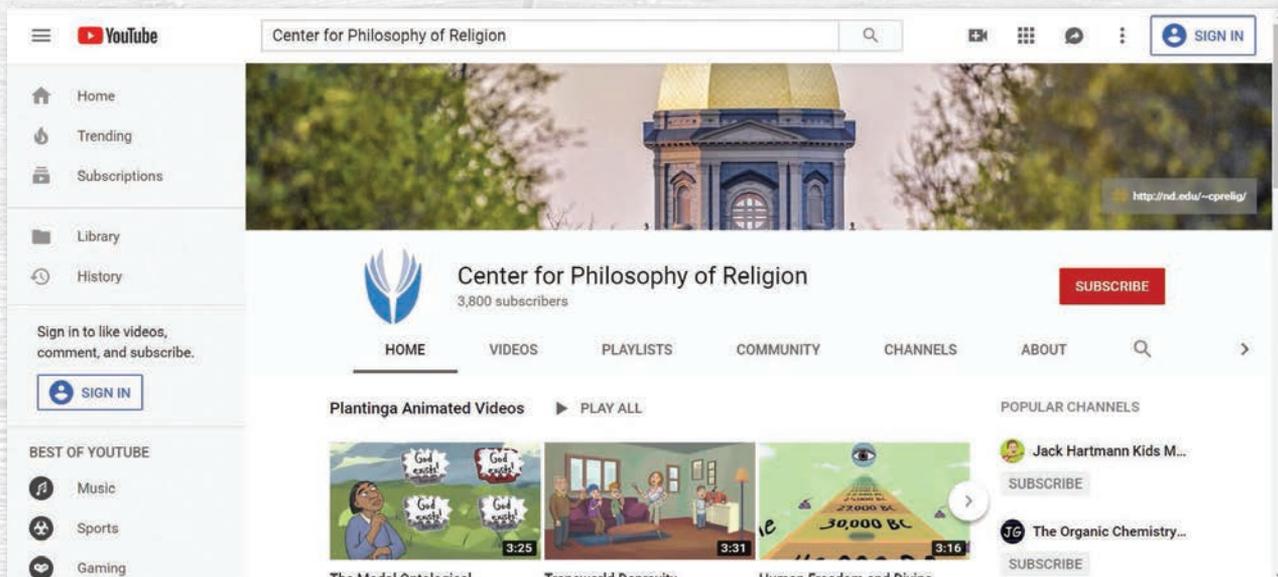
Logos 2019: Reconciliation, Divine and Human
This year's Logos Workshop will be held at the University of St Andrews in Scotland on June 6-8.

How has Religion Marginalized Women?
Amy Peeler, Associate Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, discusses how religion has marginalized women.

Diversifying Analytic Theology Prize Competition
Competition for the best paper in analytic theology of an underrepresented religious or theological tradition.

Plantinga Animated
To celebrate Alvin Plantinga's 2017 Templeton Prize and showcase his most influential ideas and arguments, we produced a series of ten short animated films that explore his philosophical contributions.

Don't forget to visit our YouTube channel for interviews, lectures, animated videos, and more!



We recently produced a new series of interviews exploring the topics of race, gender, sexual orientation, and religious trauma. Visit our website and YouTube channel for more videos in the series.





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ODILON REDON - STAINED GLASS WINDOW
(UNDATED, MUSÉE D'ORSAY)