



Thoughts from the Chair

"Why study philosophy?" A perennial question for first year students, but also one that is increasingly asked in the broader culture: What good is philosophy these days in a world that demands more "practical" skills? Though it might seem a bit strange, I would like to reflect a bit on an amazing interaction between Peter and Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 16:13ff). The first thing for me is the fact that it is not enough that Peter love Jesus and follow him. He is called to "name" Jesus, that is, to understand or comprehend the meaning of who Jesus is and what he represents (Mt 16:13). In the same way, we are called to state what is, what is true, in language (*logos*). "We desire to understand," as Aristotle so famously said.



James Tissot, *Rétire-toi, Satan* (Brooklyn Museum)



Pietro Perugino, *Christ Handing the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter* (Sistine Chapel)

But what of the hubris of trying to comprehend God and the cosmos as sinful and finite human beings? Isn't philosophy better understood as a critical practice? Didn't Socrates call himself a "gadfly" and rebuke the wise of Athens? In other words, isn't philosophy "de-constructive" and critical of attempts to comprehend the world in human systems and theories? Certainly, this critical, anti-systematic character of philosophy must be part of the story. So philosophy *both* desires to know the world systematically, *while at the same time* criticizing ("rebuking") system builders for their hubris in trying to "name" or fully understand the cosmos (Mt 16:23—"You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.").

I would like to focus in conclusion on the refusal of the biblical narrative to solve this puzzle. Peter is called to name and understand who Jesus is *and* suffer the failure of such naming. The key here for me is that our desire to understand goes hand in hand with the fact that our understanding must be open to critical voices that challenge the adequacies of our human, all too human, constructions. The Christian philosopher, if I might be bold here, recognizes this without fear because the Truth they are seeking is a God who forgives our failings and calls us to constantly think more and think better.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Philosophy Department at Gordon College is to cultivate, in ourselves and in our students, an intellectually rigorous wondering not only as an expression of our natural desire to understand, but also as an inherent consequence of our Christian commitment. The Christian emphasis is by no means "added on" as a pious afterthought, for in every age and culture Christian thinkers have engaged in philosophical reflection as they have sought to bring faith and learning into a harmonious relationship. Faith seeks understanding, and understanding—even that which is rigorous and critical—ultimately supports faith.

Department News:



Commencement:

Graduating seniors and faculty celebrating at Commencement.

From left: Dr. Aiken, Scott Anderson, Dr. Barthold, Dr. DeWeese-Boyd, Dr. Gedney, Si-Hua Chang, Bernardo Miranda and Javier Salcido Negrete (Darrien Perreault also graduated but missed the photo).

Senior Theses

Scott Anderson: *Computer science as modern science*

Scott examined how Thomas Kuhn's notion of revolutionary science might be applied to the field of computer science. Given the new and rapid evolution of the field of computer science, it can be argued that computer science offers a unique confirmation of Kuhn's anti-realist stance.

Si-Hua Chang: *Harming animals for gustatory pleasure: Meat eating as a form of entertainment*

Assuming that one could develop a diet that satisfied all nutritional needs, Si-Hua's thesis examined the nature and value of the gustatory pleasure we derive from food. He argued that in most cases this value was not sufficient to defend the suffering of animals, especially in factory farms, that arises from food production.

Bernardo Miranda: *Universals, particulars, tropes: The main problems with the medieval nominalist and contemporary trope theorist views*

Bernardo's thesis, which he began while studying at Oxford, examined the classic problem of universals, namely what does it mean for two individual things to be the "same" in some way. He argued that Scotus' theory raised important questions concerning the adequacy of modern trope theory.

Darrien Perreault: *Mind–Body separation: Metaphysical, spiritual, and physical possibilities*

Darrien's thesis examined how a certain biblical humility might provide a better orientation for resolving the classical problems of mind/body dualism.

Philosophy at Oxford

The Philosophy Department at Gordon has had a long tradition of sending students to the Scholars Semester at Oxford, which "offers students the opportunity to spend a year working with tutors in a university known for academic excellence and some of the best libraries in the world. With its emphasis upon tutorials, honors-level students have the opportunity to engage in focused research and writing that both challenges and prepares students for graduate studies." This year we had a significant number of students attend: Grace Carhart, Rachel Lehmann, Shalom Maleachi, Bernardo Miranda, Ezra Tandela and Elisabeth Watson.

Faculty News

Departure

Last summer due to budget re-allocations, Dr. Brian Glenney's position at Gordon was eliminated, and he accepted a terminal sabbatical for the year. Dr. Glenney came to Gordon in the fall of 2007 and was instrumental in creating new courses and programs; including a special lab focusing on issues in philosophy and psychology and new courses in the philosophy of science. He was a dynamic teacher and mentor as well as a wonderful colleague. He will be sorely missed at Gordon, but we are pleased that he has accepted a position at Norwich University. He will surely be a boon to his new students at Norwich as he was to so many students at Gordon.

Prestigious Fellowship

Dr. Barthold will be working as a Research Specialist for the *Intellectual Humility in Public Discourse Project* during the 2016 fall semester. The fellowship is funded in part by the John Templeton Foundation. As part of her work, Dr. Barthold will be writing a new book entitled, *Critical, Fallible Dialogue*, which will develop an interdisciplinary approach to defending dialogue as the best way to resolve conflict in the public sphere.

New Book

Dr. Barthold's second book, *A Hermeneutic Approach to Gender and Other Social Identities*, was published this June by Palgrave Macmillan. This book brings together hermeneutics and feminist theory to develop an account of social identities as meaningful for creating community. In addition, she also had a chapter, "If Enhancement is the Answer, What is the Question? A Hermeneutic Approach to Bio-Enhancement," in *Inheriting Gadamer*, edited by Georgia Warnke and published by Edinburgh Press.

God's Hiddenness and Theodicy

Dr. DeWeese Boyd's work under the auspices of the Analytic Theology Discussion Group grant from the University of Notre Dame resulted in the publication of a chapter in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief* (edited by Adam Green and Eleanore Stump and published by Cambridge University Press) entitled, "Lyric Theodicy: Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Problem of Hiddenness."

Core Curriculum at Gordon

Dr. Gedney worked on the Core Curriculum Ad Hoc Committee, while Dr. DeWeese-Boyd continued his work with the task force on The Great Conversation course. All students will continue to take four credits in philosophy, including our current Core course, The Examined Life, but there will be upper level options available now for upper level students (including courses in the history of philosophy, philosophy and the arts and the philosophy of religion).

Pre-Law and Mock Trial:

Dr. Gedney continued to advise both pre-law majors and the Mock Trial Club. The pre-law students had the opportunity to meet with Shapri LoMaglio in the fall, a graduate of Gordon College who is now vice president for government and external relations at the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. The Mock Trial Club participated in regional tournaments, while also presenting the case they prepared for the Gordon community in the spring. Attorney Michael Tucker (Healey, Deshaies, Gagliardi & Woelfel) continued to guide the students in their preparation.

Alumni News

Erin Kidd successfully defended her dissertation in Religious Studies, Marquette University: "The Mystical and Political Body: Christian Identity in the Theology of Karl Rahner." She is now an assistant professor at St. John's University.

James Oldfield successfully defended his dissertation in Philosophy at Boston College: "On Guilt and Recognition."

James Taylor successfully defended his dissertation at Boston College: "The Ethics of Subjectivity: Activity and Passivity Through Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Askesis." James (and his wife, Petra) co-direct the Balkans Semester for the Study of War and Peace. James also is the new program director of the Academy of Catholic Thought and Imagination at Loyola Marymount University.

Peter Heath has been accepted into the PhD program in English at the University of Miami of Ohio.

Matthew Clemmer has been accepted into the PhD program in English at Southern Methodist University.

Brenda Sanya is completing her PhD in Education Policy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Zachary Auwerda has been accepted in the master's program at the University of Missouri—St. Louis.

We would love to hear updates from folks!

Send a quick email to mark.gedney@gordon.edu when you have a chance.

The Balkans Semester



James, Petra, & Mila

From James and Petra (directors):

On the Balkans Semester for the Study of War and Peace, we seek together to find answers to a set of fundamental questions: What is the essence of peace? What events and attitudes lead to war? Why are we constantly engaging in violence? What is a Christian response to war? Each year the conversation is framed differently because of changing social and geopolitical circumstances. Throughout this last year of the Balkans Semester, our philosophical and theological questions were shaped by the refugee crisis in Croatia and the groundswell of suspicion and resentment in Europe and the United States toward other religions, races, and cultures. We talked more than usual about how scapegoating works to reinforce a sense of cultural belonging, and how we might enact instead a risky and salutary welcoming of others into our lives. These challenges are both perennial and timely, and we are grateful that we get to collaborate about them in a context like the Balkans that intensifies the questioning and emphasizes that our answers have real and visceral consequences.



Final Conference (Fall 2015)



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