

Central Regional Meeting
of
The Society of Christian Philosophers

“Engaging Eastern Thought”

Union University
Jackson, Tennessee
May 8-10, 2008

Abstracts of Papers
(Alphabetized by presenter's last name)

Ghazali and Duns Scotus on Omnipotence: Revisiting the Paradox of the Stone

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The classical paradox of the stone that whether an omnipotent being can create a stone that the being itself cannot lift is traditionally circumvented by a response propounded by Thomas Aquinas that even omnipotent beings cannot accomplish the logically impossible. However, in their paper ‘The New Paradox of the Stone’, Alfred R. Mele and M.P. Smith attempt to reinstate the paradox without falling foul of the Thomistic logical constraint. According to Mele and Smith, instead of interpreting the paradox as posing a competition between a pair of omnipotent beings – represented by God at two different times – the paradox can be reformulated as posing a question about simultaneous competition between a pair of omnipotent beings. Mele and Smith are thus able to reinstate the paradox by arguing that there is no logical impossibility in the simultaneous existence of two omnipotent beings. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to probe the possibility of the simultaneous existence of two omnipotent beings in view of the theological arguments for the “unicity of the omnipotent”. In particular, the discussion focuses on Ghazali and Duns Scotus in their attempts to prove that there can be only one omnipotent being. The last part of the paper is concerned with the question that even if, *à la* Ghazali and Duns Scotus, there is no possible world in which two omnipotent beings can coexist, does that indemnify the concept of omnipotence against the indictment of incoherence as intended by the original version of the paradox of the stone?

**Extending Habermas and Ratzinger’s *Dialectics of Secularization*:
Eastern and Western Voices in the Postsecular Pursuit of Truth**

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In the unlikely confluence of two colossal intellectual heritages, neo-Kantian Jurgen Habermas and Catholic prelate Joseph Ratzinger agree that we have entered a postsecular age. For both, the inauguration of such an age entails skepticism towards absolutist science and a growing recognition of the contributions of spiritual worldviews to social solidarity. Although they admit that Christianity and Enlightenment reason have sought at different stages to imperialize one

another for universal sway over the public sphere, their mutual self-limitation translates into an epistemic virtue that reflexively insulates each from pathologies of ideological near-sightedness. Following their call for a multi-faceted purification whereby secular and religious commitments are subjected to mutual critique, I will explore potential Eastern contributions to this process providing a micro-analysis of the interaction of discursive subjects in three traditions: for Confucianism, the rectification of names; Taoism, truth disclosure; and Buddhism, right speech. After comparing how these Eastern philosophies of language have historically approached questions of spiritual truth in public contexts that have always already contained members of competing faith traditions, I will conclude by offering insights Christian philosophers might gain from the pursuit of truth in an increasingly plural postsecular public sphere.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's Hindu Apologetic Response to Christianity: An Assessment

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Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the first Indian scholar of note to employ Hindu categories in an effort to challenge Christianity, claimed that Christianity took a wrong course in following the influence of Hebrew particularism and its view of a personal God. In Radhakrishnan's estimation, ideas of a personal God and particular incarnations are inherently inferior to the Brahmanic Hindu belief in the impersonal and universal reality of God. Certainly Western Christians should heed Radhakrishnan's criticisms of Western culture in an effort to become aware of the "log" in the eye of their culture. However, I shall argue Christianity's focus upon particularity, which Radhakrishnan considers its weakness, in fact can be considered its strength. Only a proper emphasis on particularity, in which physical and social (and not merely personal and psychological) causes of human suffering are addressed, can effect positive transformations of the world in ways that Hinduism fails to achieve.

Was Socrates a Christian before Christ? Kierkegaard and the Problem of Christian Uniqueness

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The second century Christian apologist Justin Martyr once claimed that those among the ancient Greeks who lived in accordance with reason were, in fact, Christians. Justin points to Socrates by name, going so far as to say that Socrates actually had a partial knowledge of Christ. As it happens, Justin Martyr is not the only Christian thinker to have made such extraordinary claims about Socrates. In this paper, I shall consider those claims made by the nineteenth century Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard. Before turning in that direction, however, it is necessary to come to terms with other claims that Kierkegaard made which seem to indicate his belief in Christianity's uniqueness and exceptionalism. As we shall see, a close analysis of Kierkegaard's remarks on this latter issue leads naturally into a consideration of his views on Socrates.

“What is Truth?”

The Question of Religious Knowledge in Kierkegaard’s *Practice in Christianity*

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As idealized Christianity, *Practice in Christianity* is written to make the reader contemporaneous with Christ, thus realizing and confessing her lack of faith. I wish to examine what I take to be one of the most important passages in the work and use it as a lens for understanding a major theme, namely, how becoming contemporaneous with Christ yields knowledge of Christ that cannot be realized in any other way. This in turn will bring to light a number of related issues and objections, and by drawing on a number of other passages in the work I intend to show that Anti-Climacus is making a distinction between two kinds of knowledge, and that only by making this distinction can we understand the work in a coherent way. Finally, this analysis will yield insight into Kierkegaard’s view of the acquisition of religious knowledge.

The Religious Dimensions of Ethical Selfhood in Kierkegaard and Confucius

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The issue of the religious dimensions of Confucius' thought has long been and continues to be an area of hot dispute. Rather than approach the issue directly, I will come at it via a comparison of Confucius and Kierkegaard on the nature ethical selfhood. Kierkegaard is an especially useful partner in dialogue with Confucius because 1) they have (surprisingly) similar notions of ethical existence and 2) Kierkegaard is intensely conscious of the religious dimensions of ethical selfhood. C. Stephen Evans has identified four distinctive Kierkegaardian uses of the term, "ethical." These four senses have progressively more decisive religious dimensions. Accordingly, if we can locate Confucius along this continuum of Kierkegaardian senses of the term, "ethical," we will have some indication of how central religious conviction is to Confucius' overall vision.

West Meets East: *Sati* and Universal Morality

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Suttee, the Indian practice of widow burning, has long historical precedent. The armies of Alexander the Great first encountered *suttee* in the late fourth century BC; however, most description of *suttee* originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And, though the British outlawed the practice in Bengal (1829), *suttee* has continued sporadically into the late twentieth century, which has provoked intense moral argument.

Since Westerners began interacting with Indians in the modern period, a plurality of voices has opposed *suttee*. British imperial officials, Christian missionaries, and various native Indians considered *suttee* immoral. In many cases, these voices opposed *suttee* on commonly held moral

grounds. Despite that apparent agreement, some Indians and westerners maintain the validity of *suttee* as an expression of cultural morality.

Analytical distinctions reveal inherent moral problems regarding *suttee*. Cross-cultural interaction raises the problems of custom, law, value, and the issue of a possible universal morality. In particular, the individual woman--a *sati*--who engages in the practice presents justification for different religions and diverse political interest groups (i.e., Hindus, Moslems, Christians, post-colonialists, post-modernists, and feminists) to agree that *suttee* is immoral regardless of culture.

Augustine, Modernity, and the Recovery of True Education

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This essay suggests that a recovery of true education is ultimately a return to a life grounded in Christ and the cross. The essay turns to Augustine in order to recover key Augustinian insights that can help contemporary Christians recover the true meaning of education. In particular, the essay explores the following Augustinian themes: (1) the centrality of the cross: Augustine sees the atoning work of Christ as essential to truly knowing God; (2) the centrality of love: Augustine construes knowing in a particularly love-drenched, and love-focused way, offering a different understanding of learning and knowledge found in our contemporary context; (3) the eschatological vision: Augustine construes learning as having its proper terminus in the vision of God, in that all learning—ultimately—is to prepare persons for one day seeing God face to face.

Hermann Hesse's Asiatic Cosmology and Soteriology Viewed from an Evangelical Perspective

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Hermann Hesse (1877-1962) was one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. The German author strove to create an ideology to cope with chaos and brokenness caused by World War I and personal troubles. Diverse doctrines of East Asian religions -- Hinduism, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism in general, and Asian teachings such as pantheistic-monistic worldview and salvation by one's efforts in particular -- immensely affected Hesse in shaping and refining his cosmology and soteriology. This paper describes and analyzes Hesse's monistic worldview and his understanding of salvation, with a special examination of his Indic novel *Siddhartha*, while comparing and contrasting his cosmological and soteriological views with biblical and theological views from an evangelical position.

Abraham and Arjuna: Resignation and Faithfulness in the Bhagavad Gita and Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling

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There is a striking parallel between a figure that appears in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* - the knight of infinite resignation - and one that appears in the greatest work of Indian spirituality, the *Bhagavad Gita* - the spiritually enlightened yogi. What is more striking is the difference in how the figures are regarded. The *Bhagavad Gita* sees resignation as the highest spiritual ideal, while Kierkegaard sees faith as going beyond resignation. Why this disagreement over the highest spiritual ideal for a human being? It is my thesis that this disagreement over spiritual ideals reflects a metaphysical disagreement over the fundamental nature of the world, and that in his opposition of infinite resignation and faith Kierkegaard has uncovered a universal pattern that distinguishes the sort of theism that Christianity presupposes from all competing worldviews. This revelation is useful both for interpreting Kierkegaard and, more broadly, for informing the engagement of Christianity and Asian thought generally.

The Role of Logic in Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Some Philosophical Reflections

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In this paper I discuss the question as to what role classical logic can play in dialogues between Christians and Zen Buddhists. My first task consists in seeking to determine whether Zen Buddhism is opposed to classical two-valued logic. Drawing on past and present Zen scholarship, I seek to show that the traditional characterization of Zen Buddhism as opposed to classical logic is, in spite of recent criticism, on the whole an adequate characterization.

My second task consists in seeking to determine whether Christian-Western thought can accommodate the non-logicality of Zen Buddhism. My conclusion is that due to the fact that Zen Buddhist opposition to classical logic derives from a world-view which differs radically from the Christian world-view, this is not the case.

My third task consists in suggesting some guidelines for fruitful Christian-Zen Buddhist dialogue which takes into consideration the fundamental ontological and logical differences between these two belief-systems.

Religious Disagreement, Externalism, and the Epistemology of Disagreement: Listening to Our Grandmothers

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A new emphasis in epistemology is burgeoning, known by the phrase 'the epistemology of disagreement'. The object of investigation is the situation where the two combatants of a disagreement are equally well situated epistemologically. Central questions include whether peer epistemic conflict reduces the support one has for one's belief, whether the reduction should be

understood on internalist or externalist lines, and how often such peer conflict happens. The main objective in the first two sections will be to provide background by bringing key points of contention to the surface in the recent epistemologies of disagreement both in mainstream epistemology and in religious epistemology. A final section asserts that epistemic externalism in religious epistemology doesn't easily escape the challenge of epistemic, peer, religious disagreement.

Is There a Heavy Cost for the Theist in Denying the Noseum Assumption?

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Daniel Howard-Snyder and Michael Bergmann respond to William Rowe's argument that the existence of certain horrific evils is evidence against the existence of God by articulating an indispensable assumption of Rowe's argument and arguing that it is not the case that this assumption is more reasonable for us to affirm than to refrain from affirming. I point out a putative problem for the theist who adopts Howard-Snyder's and Bergmann's argument, the problem of theological skepticism. I argue that the theist can avoid theological skepticism, even if the theist adopts Howard-Snyder's and Bergmann's response to Rowe's argument. This requires acceptance of a plausible principle of rationality, what I call the Principle of Critical Trust (PCT). I argue that Rowe can not justify his belief "Probably there is no outweighing good for the sake of which God must permit E1 and E2" by appeal to PCT.

Pluralism, Parity Problems and Character

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Many, perhaps most, religious beliefs, are grounded in testimony. This may be particularly so for the "historical" religions of the western (middle eastern) world. The positive epistemic value of testimony and the natural credulity dispositions that it depends upon are assumed in this essay. However, to the extent that testimony is basic, to that extent conflicts among prima facie reliable witnesses (parity problems) from the same tradition constitute a "must solve" problem (the problem of "pluralism" within a religion). A solution that dislodges natural credulity dispositions can be avoided even though in a particular case we may use criteria for sorting witnesses drawn from cases where a witness is *not* trusted. In such cases we may look to the character of the witness. I explore some of the issues by reference to the case of Adler, a Danish pastor who claimed a special revelation, and provoked Kierkegaard to a book length discussion of the bearing of Adler's character on the status of his testimony.

Hick, Humility, and the Transcendent

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Recently, a rich discussion of John Hick's religious pluralism has arisen in the context of interfaith dialogue. In this paper, I focus on contributions to the discussion by W.T. Dickens and Brad Seeman. Dickens argues that Hick's use of the Kantian noumenal/phenomenal distinction undercuts the possibility of the "veridical" and "exclusivist" religious truth-claims that might be profitable for interfaith dialogue. Seeman argues that Hick's use of the distinction makes it impossible to "cross over" from the Real to concrete religious moral commitments. I respond by allowing that both critiques are on target given Hick's actual work, but that a more Kantian formulation of the distinction would enable Hick to withstand both challenges. Against Dickens, it would allow veridical and even exclusivist truth-claims so long as they are matters of belief and not knowledge. And against Seeman, it would allow the possibility of a revelatory basis for religious moral commitments, again so long as it is done with appropriate humility.

A True Perception: Being and No Being in the *Diamond Sutra*

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The *Diamond Sutra* is one of a class of Mahayana Buddhist literature known as the *prajna-paramita* or 'virtue of wisdom' sutras, written in Sanskrit several hundred years after the death of the Buddha. Today this sutra or 'discourse' remains perhaps the single most influential work in Mahayana Buddhism, which is one of the three primary branches of Buddhism. In this paper, I will propose that, when compared to the philosophy of Aristotle, the *Diamond Sutra* contains a two-fold understanding of *prajna* or wisdom. First, it is a theoretical wisdom, or *sophia*, a systematic philosophy of being that aims for what the sutra refers to as a 'true perception' of being. Here we shall be most interested to determine to what degree this *prajna* may be considered a realist philosophy of being, like that of Aristotle. Secondly, however, this *prajna* is also a practical wisdom, a *phronesis* founded on the practice of the moral virtues. Here we shall discover what may be of particular interest to the Christian philosopher. For, contrary to Aristotle, who asserts the primacy of *sophia* over *phronesis*, I will propose that, in the *Diamond Sutra*, practical wisdom is to be understood as a necessary precondition for theoretical wisdom.

The Temptations and Desires of Christ

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In response to the paradox of traditional Christian belief in the temptation and moral perfection of Christ I offer an analysis of temptation whereby moral freedom, though perhaps a necessary condition, is not a sufficient condition for the genuine experience of temptation. To experience genuine temptation one must also have a desire for the object(s) of temptation. Such temptation actualizing desire is not necessarily sinful. Hence, it was possible for Christ to satisfy the

desire condition for the genuine experience of temptation without possessing sinful desires. Moreover, the absence in Christ of sinful desires does not compromise his ability to "sympathize with our weaknesses."

Divine deliberation (or lack thereof)

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When considering truths which do not seem knowable by God, we are urged to go one of two ways: limit the concept of omniscience and so preserve one of God's traditional attributes; or maintain a robust concept of omniscience, deny that anyone fulfills the criteria, and maintain that God is nevertheless praiseworthy in virtue of possessing knowledge in some maximal sense. I will examine one particular restriction that has been posed by those who favor the former approach. More specifically, I will argue that those who restrict the concept of omniscience out of a concern for maintaining God's deliberative powers do so unnecessarily. In so arguing, I will show that there are two plausible ways to conceive of divine deliberation (or lack thereof), neither of which requires a limitation on the concept of omniscience or on the application of that concept to God.

Hanging from Edwards' Infinite Chain: Is an Infinite Regress of Causes Possible?

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Causal forms of the cosmological argument for God's existence argue that the universe must be caused, that there cannot be an infinite regress of causes, and that therefore there must be a first cause, which is generally assumed to be God. Paul Edwards has presented a strong objection to this argument. According to Edwards, an infinite regress of causes is possible, and the denial of this reflects a misunderstanding of infinite causal regresses. In this paper I argue that while many denials of infinite causal regresses do seem to rest on such a misunderstanding, there still exist strong reasons to believe that an infinite causal regress is impossible, and that therefore there must be a first cause. Through a series of thought experiments, I argue that if one does not accept the traditional conclusion of the cosmological argument, one is at least forced to accept that the material universe was caused by an immaterial, libertarian free agent who was in turn caused by an infinite regress of other immaterial, libertarian free agents. This in itself is not a trivial conclusion for a cosmological argument.

A Double-Movement Model of Forgiveness in Buddhist and Christian Rituals

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From the perspective of ethical analysis, we offer a double-movement model of forgiveness. In brief, the model defends an analysis of forgiveness which requires both the one seeking

forgiveness and the one offering forgiveness to perform a double-movement in terms of each person's (respective) self-identification.

We explore the viability of this double-movement model of forgiveness by examining confession and forgiveness rituals in Buddhism and Christianity. Selected confession and forgiveness rituals in each religious context provide not only test cases for the analysis, but from the ritual side also suggest ways in which the forgiveness model needs to be altered.

We end with brief comments on analogies and dissimilarities with confession, repentance, and absolution in various Buddhist and Christian traditions and an assessment of the viability of the double-movement model of forgiveness.

I Don't Want to Go to Heaven (or Hell)

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Any state of being that lasts eternally and preserves a human agent's earthly or quasi-earthly personhood will be hellish and therefore not desirable to that human agent; and any state of being that lasts eternally and yet fails to preserve a human agent's earthly or quasi-earthly personhood thereby fails to be a state of being that it would be rational for *that human agent* to desire. Thus, if heaven is a state of being that lasts eternally then—whether or not it preserves the earthly or quasi-earthly personhood of human agents—it is not a state of being that any human agent could have a rationally compelling reason to desire.

On the Possibility of an Effective Ontological Argument

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In this paper I discuss Brian Leftow's (2005) version of Anselm's Ontological Argument, and Graham Oppy's (1995, 2006) general objection to such arguments. After commenting on Leftow's arguments, I discuss the premise concerning possibility that he does not discuss: "Possibly something is a being than which there is no greater." For the argument to work, I claim that this premise must refer to the *metaphysical* possibility of such a being's existence. But such a premise is difficult to support, and it is difficult for the theist to appeal to the Conceivability Principle in a way that does not also support the problem of evil, since unjustifiable evil is in some sense conceivable. Next, I consider Graham Oppy's (1995, 2006) general objection to ontological arguments that they are all either invalid, or valid with objectionable premises. I do not think that Oppy's objection is conclusive, but I do give some reasons to think that any evidence in favor of the ontological argument accidentally makes that argument obsolete.

Is Belief in the Soul a Properly Basic Belief?

G.T. Smith

This paper discusses recent arguments on substance dualism and Biblical anthropology. After locating a point at issue between substance dualism and its critics on the proposition that *I have a soul*, this paper responds to some recent Christian account of human persons critical to substance dualism and in different ways sympathetic to philosophical naturalism.

Against Negative Mysterianism

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I distinguish four broad strategies believers may adopt to deal with apparently inconsistent theological claims: Redirection, Resistance, Restraint, and Resolution. Here I focus on Resistance. Since the days of the church fathers, the most popular form of Resistance among Christian thinkers has been what I call Mysterianism, which comes in positive and negative versions. I briefly characterize these, and then offer objections to Negative Mysterianism, focusing on the case of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Bodies As Ecosystems

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The ecosystem concept as it has been used in ecology is broad enough that organisms qualify as small ecosystems. So if human bodies are taken to be organisms, human bodies are ecosystems. This way of thinking about bodies is especially useful for those who hold one of the two extreme views on material composition. Both of those views provide reason to doubt that any single material object is a human body, in which case it is helpful to think of bodies as relatively stable *systems* of objects.

The extreme views on composition also suggest an argument that human persons are not material objects at all but immaterial objects. Ecological immaterialism is the view that not only bodies themselves but also bodies and souls together form ecosystems, i.e., dynamic systems with a high degree of functional unity. Ecological immaterialism contrasts with a more Platonic view of the body in that it provides a way of thinking about the value of bodies that is consonant with a Christian point of view on their goodness and importance for us.

The Role of *Tian* in Xunzi's Ethics

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This paper explores the possibility of moral objectivity in Xunzi by looking specifically at one key aspect of the debate, namely, whether or not Xunzi attempts to ground his ethics in the natural order (*tian*) in particular. I argue that Xunzi does not make this move, and thus an “objectivist” reading must find its grounding elsewhere. I begin in Section II by looking at Xunzi’s most explicit teachings on *tian* with a view to establishing that *tian* is non-normative, which I argue in Section III. Here I take up a critical passage often used to support the claim that Xunzi’s core ethical concept, *li* (ritual), has a “cosmological dimension” and is thus intimately linked with *tian*. I raise detailed objections to this interpretation. My argument concludes in Section IV by focusing on

the tight connection Xunzi draws between *tian* and human nature (*xing*), the latter constituted by spontaneous desires that lead, not to moral and social harmony, but to widespread dysfunction.