

Fall 2012

Philosophy & World Religions Department Newsletter, v5, Fall 2012

University of Northern Iowa. Department of Philosophy and World Religions.

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UNI DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY & WORLD RELIGIONS

DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER
FALL 2012

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THE SCALES OF JUSTICE: LIBERTY OR EQUALITY

by James Robinson

Every society is made up of trade-offs. You can't have it all! To bring about one social value will almost always mean retreating from some other social value. Freedom and equality are a prime example of two such contrasting social virtues. The full use of freedom may include the freedom to harm or oppress others. Striving for equality may mean a considerable reduction in freedom and lead to an over-zealous intervention into our private lives where exercise of freedom usually causes no harm.

Fortunately, freedom and equality are not mutually exclusive. They form a continuum, a spectrum, with many possible points in between their starkest forms. But the closer one is to one aspiration, the further one is from the other. Every society picks a particular point of balance, a fulcrum, between the extremes that seems to offer the greatest benefit to the society as a whole. Not all societies choose the same fulcrum. And a given society will also shift its fulcrum over time.

In olden days, there was neither freedom nor equality, so social idealists during the Enlightenment rather naively assumed that the two went naturally together. Thomas Jefferson proclaimed that all men are created equal with a God-given right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. The French Revolution made the trinity of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity the foundation of their new regime.

History since then has proven freedom and equality to be contentious bed-fellows. Since hierarchy is natural, equality does not seem to come naturally to human social interaction. And if social equality is valued, it must be constantly striven for against our natural inclinations to discriminate or to favor those who are like us ethnically, intellectually or with respect to any other criteria that defines insider and outsider.

Professor Clohesy advanced the discussion of this issue by making helpful distinctions. There are two distinct forms of freedom: (1) personal freedom—e.g. freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and the like; and (2) economic freedom to engage in free enterprise in a free market as long as one does not engage in violence, theft or fraud. Libertarians embrace both kinds of freedoms; authoritarians want to restrict both kinds of freedom. More typically in our country, conservatives would restrict personal freedoms that they believe harmful to society (e.g. abortions, smoking pot or readily available pornography) but give enthusiastic support to economic

freedom. Liberals, on the whole, usually favor a wider range of personal freedoms but would put some restrictions on the free reign of economic freedom.

In the 19th century, economic freedom had already shown its muscle in the Industrial Revolution. Then it was time to reaffirm the need for

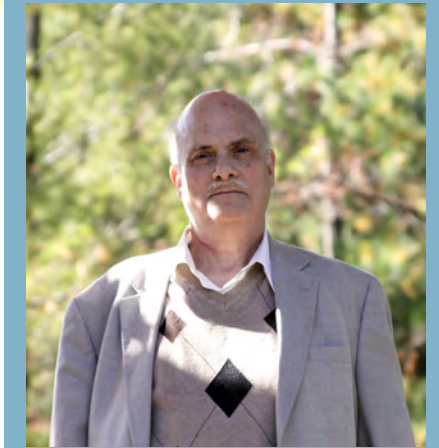
personal freedoms as well. J.S. Mill came along to redress the balance of these two forms of liberty. His proviso is that one cannot use one's freedom to harm others—in other words, that we all have an equal right to freedom. The classic example of this principle is "the freedom of your fist ends at my nose."

In the 20th century, President Franklin Roosevelt encapsulated a growing liberal consensus when he spoke of the Four Freedoms: (1) Freedom of Speech; (2) Freedom of Religion; (3) Freedom from Want; (4) Freedom from Fear. With the last two of these four, the concept of freedom was expanded into the area of social justice.

Freedom from want suggests that we provide a social "safety net" below which we do not permit our citizens to fall. Freedom from fear opens avenues to limit the ability to harass, intimidate or oppress. Even arguments for such controversial issues as gay civil unions can be pursued, not on the basis of Mr. Jefferson's equality but on his God-given right to pursue happiness—a pursuit in this case that harms no one else.

Equality is necessary in two crucial areas. The first is equal access to the protection of the law. The second is equal access to the ballot box. If hierarchy is natural, the best sort of hierarchy is one where those above are accountable to those below.

But the tension between freedom and equality continues. Our increasingly diverse and litigious society arises from our profound differences of opinions on what constitutes "equality" and what the limits of freedom are—personal or economic. Our society seems to have little consensus where to put the fulcrum between liberty and equality. And this is not a healthy situation.



James Robinson
Associate Professor of Religion



Many of you may remember Baker Hall, pictured on the front of our Newsletter. Unfortunately, this old workhorse has seen its better days. For many years, now, it has been deteriorating, and thus the decision has been made to demolish our one Art Deco building on campus. But before this happens, another dorm, Bartlett Hall, is being renovated, and so in several years our department will be moving there.

Whenever a new building or a renovation takes place on campus, the UNI Art and Architecture Committee, consisting of faculty, staff, and students, chooses a piece of art to be bought and displayed inside or outside of the building. I was selected to be on this committee to represent the Bartlett renovation. And this has been a learning experience. One issue, in particular, has come up repeatedly and is worthy of discussion – the role of art that is unsettling.

As the committee has been working over the past semester, one thing became clear to me, namely, that some on the committee were uncomfortable with pieces of art that were challenging to, or unsettling for, the viewer. Equally important, such persons did not want to waste money on foolish art, the example most referred to being “Stage Set for Film #1,” by Dennis Oppenheim, for which we paid over \$80,000.

Having studied and taught about the role of art culture, I have been taken aback by these concerns, and so I thought I’d take this occasion to make a few reflective comments on the role of art, especially at the university. In the Spring edition of the Newsletter, Professor Holland, who teaches the Philosophy of Art, will respond to my thoughts.

Probably the first thing to note is that both Hitler and Stalin hated modern art, largely because its meanings were not clear, but also, to the extent that if the meanings were understandable, they seemed to challenge reigning political orthodoxy. Hitler and Stalin wanted art to tell a politically acceptable, utterly unambiguous story. That these men could not appreciate modern art should at least warn us that there may be something in this art that resists their way of life.

Two things come to mind. First, modern art, when it rises to the level of excellence, embodies novelty, representing something new. Jackson Pollock, for example, approached painting in an entirely new way, dripping paint all over the canvas in uncontrolled patterns, something no one else had ever done. I could, of course, do the same thing today, but it would be “old hat,” so to speak, without much interest. Pollock is interesting precisely because he is pushing the boundaries of the establishment in new directions, representing, if you will, a “bid for freedom,” with all its excitement and energy. By valorizing novelty, he and other artists are implicitly urging us to imagine “what could be,” a central condition for cultural transformation, which no doubt would be deeply troubling to the likes of Hitler and Stalin.

But secondly, modern art is also often offensive. Oppenheim’s piece, for example, seems to offend many. As an “unsightly” heap of glass and metal and wood that seems haphazardly dumped in front of the Wellness Center, it is something, as one of my students put it, that her “brothers could have welded together in a weekend from junk hanging around our family farm.” Yet this offense may have a positive cultural role. Above all, it *provokes us to think*, something we highly prize at the university, and if we follow our thoughts out, we might discover insights about ourselves and our current culture that have significant value. For example, this “pile of junk” looks something like a building in disrepair. In fact, it is literally deteriorating, its metal rusting and its wood decomposing. Dwelling on this “junk” for a bit, we might come to see this piece of art commenting on the world we have constructed through all our industry and building projects. While we might like to think of our construction as an enduring legacy, this sculpture suggests it is all simply make-shift and deteriorating. Thus, we wonder, what good does all our building do in the long run? So the original offense, when thought about, ends up in ethical challenge: rather than being offended at the pile of “junk,” we now see, perhaps, we ought to be offended at what we are doing to ourselves and the world around us when we try to secure our legacy through building. In this way, offending art has the potential for radical moral transformation, something very disturbing to persons such as Hitler and Stalin who want to keep a tight lid on their imposed view of morality.

PWR

Jerry Soneson
Head of the Department

FRANCIS



Now in his 10th year on faculty at UNI, Francis Degrin reflects on what brought him to Iowa in the first place. "This is the school more than any other that put its money where its mouth was when they said, 'We want you to work in the community.' As soon as I got the job here, I cancelled all my other interviews."

Regarding his educational background, Degrin says that "the first thing you should know is that I am a high school dropout with six college degrees." After applying to college early (and getting accepted), Degrin attended undergraduate programs at Whitman College in Washington, Seattle University, and the University of Washington, as well as graduate programs at Seattle University, the University of Notre Dame, Villanova University, and Vanderbilt University. Because he found himself in so many different schools all over the country, Degrin was exposed to a lot of different perspectives. He believes this to be essential to formulating his own beliefs and opinions and to getting the best education possible. Not only were three of the above schools

supported by the Catholic tradition, but Degrin also attended Catholic seminary at Notre Dame. However, after realizing that continuing the seminary route would limit the paths he could take in life, Degrin veered away from that path, finding himself in the study of ethics.

However, Degrin was not always an ethicist. He began his college career as a math major. He then encountered Gödel's Theorem, which revolves around the limitations inherent in what one can seek from a seemingly logical system. Gödel's Theorem delegitimizes the claim that everything in math is absolute, and if math cannot answer its own questions, how can it answer OUR great questions about humanity? Therefore, Degrin began searching for answers elsewhere, and settled into ethics.

Ethics, Degrin claims, is not purely the idea of "right" vs. "wrong," like culture sometimes leads us to believe. *Ethos* originally meant "dwelling," which makes ethics the study of how we dwell, how people can flourish, and what it means to be human. In this way, the study of ethics relates very much to Degrin's religious background and education.

Degrin's most popular class is On Death and Dying, a Capstone course that incorporates more than one area of study. This class is important to any student's liberal arts education, because in it they learn that "only when you know how to die will you know how to live." The course teaches students not only what it means to die well, but also how folks often deal with, and how they ought best to deal with, the grief caused by the loss of a loved one.

DEGNIN

PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In addition to his teaching, Degnin spends much of his time working in the community. The chair of the organizing committee for the North East Iowa Medical Ethics Conference, a speaker for many functions, a member of the ethics committee, and a night relief chaplain for Covenant Medical Center, Degnin also teaches ethics for family practice residents as well as teaching at various hospitals. In 2011, he won the Veridian Community Engagement Award for his work. He has also had multiple former residency students come back and tell him that they get more ethics and communication training from his class than from medical school.

Does his community work in area hospitals come back to the classroom? "Very much so," Degnin replied. He uses real life examples of patients he has seen, and mentioned that he does not think his classes would be as successful if they did not incorporate this aspect of "reality."

To keep balance in his life, Degnin spends his leisure time dancing socially and in amateur ballroom dancing competitions. During his clinical fellowship back in Nashville, Tennessee, a couple of nurses spent quite some time talking him into going dancing. When he finally gave in, he had no idea that he was going to one of the best dancing organizations in the country. Degnin was hooked. He currently trains under two former U.S. Champions, and he may be one of the top-ranked amateur dancers in the state.

Speaking of UNI, Degnin genuinely enjoys his faculty colleagues as well as the students. The diversity of his students delights and challenges him. He guesses that his course On Death and Dying draws students with a wide range of classwork backgrounds and that sometimes they might find themselves unprepared for the amount of work. He enjoys trying to find that happy medium to keep the class accessible yet challenging. He also appreciates the opportunity and encouragement he is given to work in the community. At times, no doubt, he may also wish we had a little amateur ballroom dancing competition in the local area. [PWR](#)





John Burnight came to UNI in August 2011 as a Visiting Assistant Professor. This fall, he has been put onto the tenure track, with responsibilities for teaching Religions of the World, Old Testament and Other Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, and Judaism and Islam. Burnight defended his dissertation, a 500-page study on chapters 3-5 in the Book of Job, in January 2011, and he graduated from the University of Chicago's Department of Near-Eastern Languages and Civilizations in March of the same year with a PhD in Hebrew Bible / Northwest Semitic Philology (which is the study of ancient texts, including inscriptions, myths, and law codes).

When studying a dead language, teaching seems to come with the territory, especially if you have pursued a PhD. "While I love the research part," Burnight says, "once I started teaching, I found that it was really all I wanted to do. I can't believe that I have a job where I am so excited to go to work every day. Other jobs that I had before graduate school didn't do that for me." His enthusiasm for his work is infectious.

JOHN

In fact, Burnight delights in the opportunity to work with students. When asked what he liked best about UNI, his answer was immediate: the students. "They have the most positive attitudes I have ever seen. They genuinely want to learn and take a great interest in what I have to offer. They're a talented bunch, and just a good bunch of young people. The best student body I've ever worked with, and I've taught in Michigan, Connecticut, North Carolina, and Illinois."

But how did Burnight get into the study of religion in the first place? At the University of Minnesota, where Burnight did his undergraduate work studying International Relations, he found inspiration in a class on the cultural roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict. From there, he was encouraged to take a class on contemporary Israeli literature. Burnight cites this class as a major turning point in his life. He discovered his own interest in that area of the world, was inspired to take a class in Hebrew, and has been studying ever since.

There is a joke among biblical scholars that whoever studies the book of Job will inevitably want to trade places with Job himself. Burnight, however, revels in his work. He takes an intertextual approach to the story, looking at how the book of Job relates to the rest of the Bible. He sees how Job uses literary allusion to make comments on Israel's theology at the time. In fact, he argues that the book of Job is one of the earliest examples of protest literature, tacitly critiquing the rest of the Old Testament. His theory is that the highest value of the author of Job is truth, specifically truth over dogma, for when God finally speaks to Job, he condemns Job's friends for trying to persuade Job to repent when he had never done anything wrong.

BURNIGHT

PROFESSOR OF RELIGION

Burnight believes that the study of religion and the study of the Bible are so fundamental to our culture because of the influence that this text has had over Western culture. Furthermore, this study is academically interesting because in studying religions, we start to see how they all have commonalities. They all ask the same questions. Where do we come from? What is the meaning of life? How should we live? Different religions may try to answer them differently, but because people throughout time have turned to religion to try to answer these fundamental questions, we see just how powerful the impulse to religion is within humanity.

Because his love of the Ancient Near East grew out of his initial love for international relations and contemporary issues, it follows that Burnight has a great love for news and current events. He even goes so far as to describe himself as a “junkie.” He also enjoys reading, running, as well as traveling. He lived in Israel for the summer of 2005 as well as during the school year from 2007-2008.



Burnight in front of the Dome of the Rock

Since coming to UNI, Burnight has come to see just how much he enjoys teaching. He is particularly delighted now that he has a number of students with whom he has had more than one class. “It’s always great to see a few familiar faces on the first day of class!”

Still speaking of students, Burnight believes that too often students are trying to get through school so that they can get started on “real life.” He says, “While getting a job is indeed essential, a liberal arts education acts as an end in itself: it opens us up to the possibility of a much fuller, more interesting, and rewarding life. It enhances our ability to think critically. It can convey the lessons of history and experience—lessons that have been hard-won and taken years to acquire—to those who face similar challenges. And it can lead us to think about concepts, opinions, and beliefs that we may never have considered.” Burnight supposes this is especially true of those who study philosophy and religion. These disciplines highlight how some of humanity’s most influential thinkers—from the Buddha to Plato to Jesus to Kant—have dealt with questions about the meaning and purpose of life, how we should live, and what it means to be human. Of course, we can never truly know the answers, but in Burnight’s opinion, the important thing is to develop an interest in exploring the questions. He ends with saying that “more than any set of facts or figures, dates or names, I hope our students leave college with the view that their education has not ended, but rather has just begun.”^{PWR}

HARRY BROD

Dr. Harry Brod, Professor of Philosophy and Humanities, has always been fascinated with superheroes and still holds on tightly to his old comic book collection, the “research” materials from which emerged his new book. *Superman is Jewish?: How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the Jewish-American Way*, released this November by Simon & Schuster (audiobook by Tantor), discusses how the Jewish culture and experience, particularly that of Jews in America, is reflected in some of the most popular and iconic superheroes in the public consciousness.

Few readers realize that many superheroes, including Superman, Batman, Captain America, Spider Man, the Hulk, the Fantastic Four, the Avengers, and the original X-Men were all created, whether wholly or in part, by Jewish men. Their likes include Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster (Superman), Bob Kane and Bill Finger (Batman), Jack Kirby and Joe Simon (Captain America), and Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (the Hulk, Fantastic Four, Avengers, X-Men, and many more).



Harry Brod
Professor of Philosophy & Humanities



Brod makes it abundantly clear that he is not asserting that the comic book characters themselves are Jewish. In fact, the majority of the characters that he discusses have no overt ethnicity or religion. He is only equating their stories, their feelings, and their backgrounds with that of Jewish-American people.

Superman is, quite literally, an alien in a foreign land, and he feels he needs to hide his true character, his special powers, behind a mild-mannered disguise. The **X-Men** are outsiders persecuted for being different, and even more noticeable is Magneto's paranoia, which comes from surviving the Holocaust. **The Hulk** is, in essence, a nice, smart, likeable guy who is afraid that people will not like him when he gets angry. **The Thing** (from Fantastic Four) uses humor to deflect the pain of being a permanent outsider because of his appearance. **Spider-Man** is plagued by guilt for not saving his family, and, although Peter Parker is not specifically Jewish, his story is very much representative of how many Holocaust survivors felt.

Brod says, “You’ve got men who are facing specific anti-Semitic stereotypes: weak, cowardly, overly-intellectual, wearing glasses. You’re basically describing Clark Kent. The moral of the story is that little do they know, beneath the street clothes is Superman. You had immigrants, poor, working-class guys excluded from the

mainstream who took a critical distance and fed America back a super, larger-than-life idealized image of itself: the superheroes.”

He argues that during the time when comic books were really starting to come into being, Jewish men were locked out of the more lucrative publishing opportunities such as novelization or advertising. Comic books at the time were the cheapest, most low-paying, most exploitative corner of the industry, and this is where the Jews found themselves.

Although Brod has not done any previous work on these issues, he enjoyed the research immensely. His background may have prepared him to write on the characters and stories and ideas they expressed, but comics are a visual medium, something Brod does not usually focus on. “I had to work my way through finding a way of writing about the art,” he said. “I’m very pleased that I was able to do so.”

Finally, Brod makes a point of emphasizing that the book truly is for everyone. “It doesn’t presuppose any special knowledge about comics or Judaism, and it’s for the general public—it’s not a specialized academic work.” In fact, Brod has begun to hear from readers that they have learned a great deal about both comics and Judaism because of his book, and that some people who have never read graphic novels have even begun to pick them up. **PWR**

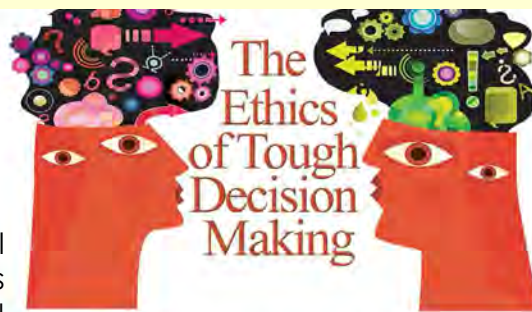
FRANCIS DEGNIN

ON ETHICS IN A HOSPITAL SETTING

Northeast Iowa
Ethics Conference

AGENDA

Wednesday, September 26, 2012



As an UNI faculty member who specializes in Biomedical Ethics and who is highly active in the community, Francis Degnin, Associate Professor of Philosophy, is often asked

to speak at conferences or seminars having to do with ethics in medicine. He is able to bring a unique expertise as a hospital ethicist as well as a teacher. One annual event he helps to organize is the Northeast Medical Ethics Conference, a collaboration between Allen College, UNI, Covenant Medical Center, and the Northeast Iowa Family Practice Medical Education Foundation. The purpose of this is to serve local hospitals, providing ongoing training for Nurses, Physicians, Social Workers, Chaplains, and other providers.

In addition to helping organize the event, Degnin gave an hour-long seminar entitled "Coping with Challenging Patients." The goals of his talk included describing the four primary forms of patients who are "difficult" or "challenging;" however, he suggested that the problem lies more with the physician, and even suggested renaming his lecture "Challenging Provider-Patient Encounters." In particular, he showed how some patients' MUS (Medically Unexplained Symptoms), particularly those corresponding to difficult-to-diagnose or non-recognized conditions like fibromyalgia, can lead to problematic assumptions on the part of the provider. For instance, a provider might come to believe that the patient is merely faking his or her symptoms. He also identified how attitudes toward patients could lead to "self-fulfilling prophecies." Finally, he listed strategies for coping with both "challenging" patients" as well as their caregivers. One example is to be respectful of patient needs or concerns, or simply to listen from a position of neutrality.

FACULTY INVOLVEMENT

DEPARTMENT EVENTS

PHILOSOPHY & WORLD RELIGION PICNIC

Although the department can claim two majors, it is not often the two come together for events. The most recent occasion for a joint venture occurred on Friday, September 21st, as the Philosophy and World Religions Department hosted a picnic for both majors at the park on Seerly Blvd. Religion faculty member John Burnight organized the event, and he and Jerry Soneson, Head of Department, grilled burgers and bratwursts for the students and other faculty. Students mingled with faculty and with each other, discussing politics and popular culture, eating dinner, and even throwing a Frisbee around. Everyone enjoyed getting a break from their day, getting to see the professors in a more casual setting, and starting the weekend on a fun note.



JORDAN BANCROFT-SMITHE

PHILOSOPHY



Year:
Fifth-Year Senior

Majors:
Music
Philosophy

Favorite Class:
Logic

Favorite Book:
On Liberty
by John Stuart Mill

Fifth-year senior Jordan Bancroft-Smithe keeps himself busy throughout the school year. Though he came to UNI for the music department, he quickly found himself drawn to philosophy after taking an honors section of Philosophy: The Art of Thinking with Professor Holland. Jordan states, "The single most important thing about the philosophy major is that taking these classes teaches you how to think. Becoming a skilled thinker has helped me out in so many ways, the least of which is becoming the student body president."

As the second student body president in the last three years to be a philosophy major, Jordan believes that this speaks volumes about the department as a whole. "Your major, no matter what it is, influences anyone in this position," he says. He elaborates that a student's major becomes the "lens" through which he or she looks at everything in life. What he finds wonderful about a philosophy "lens" is that it encourages looking at problems through as many lenses as possible, which then enables him to use the most practical lens for addressing the issue at hand.

In addition to this time-consuming position, Jordan is also the president of the Philosophy Club. When he does find the occasional spare moment, he spends it catching up on his favorite TV shows or engaging in dialogue with friends.

Jordan sees Logic as the most important class he has ever taken and even believes that it should be required of every student. Beyond that, Jordan says that every class has had some sort of impact on his life, as he tries to apply concepts and material from each class to everyday situations. Even each of his majors impacts the other: "Being a philosophy major has taught me how to appreciate music much more than I did before," he says, "while the music in my life has allowed me to gain a unique perspective on many of the theories we discuss in class."

Because of the philosophy program, Jordan is equipped with the ability to sit down and figure out very complex problems quickly. He feels this is an invaluable skill for helping him be successful after graduation. His plans for life after UNI, however, are very tentative. He might spend a few years working off student loans before trying to get into higher education advocacy or public service or going to grad school for Political Philosophy.

“ I’ve learned that philosophy is something to be respected. It runs as an undercurrent to everything we will ever do. We come into contact with philosophy every minute of every day, and without it we would be lost. ”

To students considering taking philosophy classes, Jordan says, "Do it. Even if you don't major in philosophy (although we would love you to), I've seen it do wonders to people. It will blow your mind and open you up to so many possibilities."

WYNNE JOHNSON

STUDY OF RELIGION

When she first came to UNI, Wynne Johnson planned to major in both Anthropology and Music. After quickly learning that she was just not cut out to be a music major and discovering her love for Professor DeBerg's Religions of the World class, she declared a major in the Study of Religion. Now a sophomore, Wynne also has an interest in languages, taking four years of Spanish and two years of French in high school. She is also minoring in French and is currently taking Biblical Hebrew with Professor Burnight.

Wynne sees a strong connection between her two majors. Culture and religion are so closely linked that it is difficult not to associate one with the other. "Religion," she says, "can help explain multiple aspects of human thought and behavior." Wynne believes that, as our global marketplace grows, a solid understanding of culture and religion is one of the most valuable tools an individual could have. This is because of the prevalence and abundance of different religions throughout the world. As we meet other cultures, in order to understand them, we must have a greater knowledge of the religious beliefs that shape other societies.

With two fairly time-consuming majors, a minor, and an active student voice in the Explorers of Religion club, Wynne rarely has spare time. However, when she does, she usually spends it with her friends, reading, or watching TV.

While Wynne cannot choose a favorite class, she sees the importance that her Religions of the World course played in her life. Without this class experience, Wynne says that she would never have realized that she wanted to study religion. Raised in a religious family, she thought that she knew everything there was to know about Christianity. After Professor DeBerg's class, however, she became aware of the holes in her knowledge and saw how many of her own beliefs were profoundly shaped by her religious background. It was also in this class that she learned that people are a product of their environment and that a basic understanding of where people came from and what they believe can help you understand humanity on an entirely different level.

To future Study of Religion students, Wynne says that you must be in the right mindset in order to fully appreciate these classes. This might especially be difficult if you come from a religious household, but you must distance yourself from that to understand religion in an academic sense. Only then can you appreciate it in a whole new way.



Year:
Sophomore

Majors:
Anthropology
Study of Religion

Minor:
French

Future plans:
attend grad school
become a professor
teach religion at
a university

“Once I learned how to look at religion in a scholarly manner, I developed a much deeper respect for all religions. It was one of the experiences that I believe will change my future, and it taught me how much more there was to learn.”

... making **SERIOUS**
STUDY *possible*

IMPACT OF SCHOLARSHIPS



The scholarship I have through the department provides me with resources that I would be hard-pressed to find otherwise. Due to my scholarship, I don't have to work very many hours per week during the semester and I have more time to devote to my schoolwork and other on-campus activities. This allows me to be engaged in a variety of student groups on campus, from student government to an LGBT political advocacy group. In addition to this, my scholarship also motivates me to continue to do well in my coursework. I understand that the department has made an investment in me and my future and through this understanding it is easy for me to be diligent in my classes and thoughtfully engage the material.

- Corey Cooling



Since the scholarship helps cover part of my tuition, that means I don't have to work as much while taking classes. This has made it possible for me to very involved in campus organizations, such as the UNI Freethinkers and Inquirers and Northern Iowa Student Government.

- Stef McGraw

If you would like to start your own scholarship or lecture series, contact Debra Umbdenstock at debra.umbdenstock@uni.edu or (319) 273-7727.



EXPLORERS OF RELIGION

Beginning in the fall of 2011, students created a new club, the Explorers of Religion, with Professors John Burnight and Betty DeBerg as faculty advisors. Much like the Philosophy Club, group members gather every other Tuesday to talk among themselves. Typically, meetings consist of an issue or topic that is brought up and then discussed. Burnight says that the club also tries to put on 3 or 4 events per semester. Previous events have included last year's film series on the Life of Jesus, which included watching Jesus Christ Superstar, Jesus of Nazareth, Godspell, and The Passion of the Christ. This semester, aside from the fall Philosophy / Religion picnic, the Explorers of Religion hosted a couple of events on the Mayan religion, including a video and discussion as well as a lecture by Professor Anne Woodrick (UNI Department of Anthropology). The plan for the upcoming semester, however, is to do more in coordination with Professor Betty Deberg's new course, "New Religious Movements," which will focus in the spring on Scientology and Mormonism. Furthermore, members of the Explorers of Religion have attended events sponsored by other groups, such as Rabbi Jay Holstein's lectures on Genesis at First United Methodist Church in Waterloo (October 5-7), and two lectures in the Canterbury Forum Series: one by Professor Brian Jones (Wartburg College), on Sodom and Gomorrah as a case study in Historical Geography, which took place on campus October 10, and one by Professor Judith Jones (Wartburg College) titled "Feminine Images of God," which took place at St. Luke's Episcopal Church on October 28.

philosophy club
explorers of religion

BOOK SALE



The Philosophy Club and Explorers of Religion hosted their annual books sale on November 27-28 in the Center for Multicultural Education. The textbooks, journals, and other texts donated by Philosophy and World Religion faculty covered a wide variety of subjects. Philosophy Club buttons and t-shirts were also for sale.

Look for UNI Department of Philosophy & World Religions
on [facebook](#) to STAY UPDATED
with department news and upcoming events.
www.facebook.com/NorthernlowaPWR

RYAN PUHRMANN

Philosophy Major, Ethics Minor, 2009

After graduating UNI with a double major in Philosophy and Psychology, as well as a minor in Ethics, I enrolled in the Master's of Science in Psychology program at DePaul University in Chicago. During my time at DePaul, I worked collaboratively within an active research lab on a number of projects studying prejudice, stereotyping, dehumanization, and religiosity. In addition to this experience, I was fortunate to attend the first ever Summer Institute for Cultural Neuroscience at the University of Michigan. After two challenging years at DePaul I had the privilege to move back to Cedar Falls to begin working as an Admissions Counselor for UNI. I quickly discovered a new passion for Student Affairs, particularly assisting students as they explore and decide to apply to this great university I consider my home. In addition to the core of my duties working with prospective students on a daily basis, I am in charge of all of the social media efforts carried out by the admissions office. I am proud to be able to discuss my experience as a graduate of the Department of Philosophy and World Religions with prospective students on a regular basis.



JUSTIN TAYLOR

Religion Major, 1998

After graduating from UNI in 1998 I got married, and Lea and I moved to Minneapolis to be part of a pastoral internship-seminary program at Bethlehem Baptist Church (along with other UNI alums Dustin Shramek and Matt Perman). In 2000 I was asked to serve on staff full-time at Desiring God Ministries as the Director of Theological Resources and Education, which involved being on the



leadership team and theological editing for John Piper (with whom I have co-edited a number of books). In 2006 we moved to the northwest suburbs of Chicago, where I work for Crossway Books, a non-profit evangelical publisher. My major project for the first couple of years was serving as the managing editor for the ESV Study Bible. I currently serve as Vice President of the Book Division. I also co-edit a series entitled "Theologians on the Christian Life" (the Bonhoeffer volume will appear later this year). I am also the co-author of a commentary and chronology on *The Final Days of Jesus*.

Lea and I have adopted three children. I serve as an elder in our church, which involves teaching Sunday School and preaching occasionally. In December 2012, I will (finally!) complete my Masters of Arts in Religion from Reformed Theological Seminary and will enter the PhD program in biblical spirituality at Southern Seminary, through their modified residency program. This will allow me to stay full-time at my current position.

I am deeply grateful for my time in the Study of Religion and the Philosophy program at UNI. It shaped and sharpened me in more ways than I can recount!

THANKS to all who sent in updates. If you wish to contribute to the next issue, please refer to the back cover of the newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you.

TREVOR BIBLER AND ALISON SUEN

Philosophy Majors, 2006

Alison and I have been trying to keep up on all that is going on at UNI. We thought you might enjoy some good news! Alison passed her dissertation defense for her Ph.D. degree in Philosophy at Vanderbilt in May! All that she has left is the printing/binding requirements. Also, I officially passed my qualifying exams for my doctoral degree recently as well. They ended up being 269 pages, 2.5 lbs, once I printed off all five exams. Now I will continue working on my prospectus for my thesis.

Here's some more good news: Alison earned a one-year lectureship to teach here at Vanderbilt next year: a 3 + 3 load--so not too bad. She was also offered a one-year teaching position at Trinity University in San Antonio, but this works out better for us, as I need the Vanderbilt University medical center to continue working on clinical bioethics.



KENT GOODROAD

Religion Major, 2006



The University of Northern Iowa's Religion Department gave me a strong grounding that has shaped me into a global citizen, a community organizer, and an entrepreneur.

After graduating May 2006 from UNI with degrees in Religion and Music (Piano), I took a position with the French Ministry of Education as an English Assistant in 4 French Primary schools. I lived in a small town called Dieppe right on the coast of Normandy, where I taught English to children ages 6-11. When I wasn't in the classroom, I was traveling (seeing the sites that were referenced in my "New Testament" class with Dr. Kenneth Atkinson), hiking, or discussing David Hume at the bar with friends.

July 2007, I returned to my hometown of Minneapolis, Minnesota, to start a music business with an old friend from high school, and I am the sole proprietor of my own piano business (www.kentgoodroad.com).

Since 2007, I have been working in faith-based community youth work. In affiliation with different ELCA Lutheran congregations as well as a handful of youth non-profits, I have helped to organize hundreds of

young people from all different faith, race, and social/economic backgrounds in community service, racial and gender justice, and employment opportunities.

In 2011, I started playing the piano with a global music group affiliated with the ELCA Global Mission unit. As recently as last month, I wrote and premiered a song with a 25-person gospel choir (with members ranging in age from 7-72) and 4 rappers, that was a call for peace. What made this project so successful, was the fact that I could navigate among different cultural and religious worldviews. This skill is a direct by-product of my time spent at UNI studying different religions and what gives people meaning.

Thank you UNI Religion Dept., staff, and students, for helping to equip me to be who I am today :)

TIMOTHY JAMES HARMON

Philosophy and Religion Major, 1989

My spouse is Heather Harmon, who also graduated from UNI as Heather Keeney with degrees in Elementary Education and History Education. I earned my Ed.S. in School Psychology in 1992 and worked in that field for some time, from 1992 to 2006. In 2009, I graduated from United Theological Seminary in the Twin Cities, and I am currently the pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Lake Park, Iowa. I fondly remember my time at UNI, especially Dr. Robinson and Dr. Crownfield in religious studies.

JOHN FORDYCE

PHILOSOPHY

John Fordyce, a 2008 UNI graduate, is proud to be an alumnus of the Department of Philosophy and World Religions. He chose UNI because he thought the school “would offer the opportunities of a large state university but would also offer the cultivating environment of a small college.” After graduating with undergraduate degrees in both Economics and Philosophy, Fordyce says that “All of my suspicions about UNI came true. I was able to learn more than I could have imagined. I had a wonderful time in Cedar Falls, and I made many friends from many different backgrounds.”

While at UNI, Fordyce was involved in football, rugby, various academic clubs, student government, and volunteering. He states that he joined them to broaden his base of experiences and meet new, different people. “As my father used to say, no matter who the person is, you can always learn something from them.”

After graduating from UNI, Fordyce attended Harvard Law School, choosing this institution because of its reputation, its size, and its location. He graduated in 2011 after having the opportunity for a “small town guy from Iowa to head to the east coast and meet people from around the world.” His philosophy degree gave him the skills to accomplish much while at law school: picking apart arguments, reading complicated cases and literature quickly, and writing on par with what his law professors expected. He suggests that the department recruit more students looking to go to law school, because his degree did help him with his studies at Harvard. In addition, philosophy, he understood, was one of the three most popular undergraduate majors for students attending Harvard Law School, the other two being Economics and Political Science.

Fordyce now works in the Mergers and Acquisitions Department, at the firm of Sidley Austin, in Chicago, representing clients who buy other businesses and are being bought by other businesses. He specializes in technology and drafts commercial contracts involving the development and licensing of technologies, patents, trademarks, and software. He estimates that more lawyers working at his law firm graduated college with a philosophy major than any other undergraduate major, confirming his claim that philosophy is a super major for pre-law students.

As for future philosophy majors, Fordyce has the following advice: “The study of philosophy will pay great dividends if you seriously consider the issues presented and embrace your classes with an intellectual curiosity. . . . Your professors can be some of the best resources you will have, but you have to take the initiative to seek them out. As with so many things in life, you reap what you sow.”



Hometown:
Aurelia, IA

Favorite Classes at UNI:

- Ethics with Professor Holland
- The Human Person with Professor Lahroodi
- Epistemology with Professor Lahroodi
- Logic and Wittgenstein with Professor Boedeker

Favorite Books:

- Plato's *The Republic*
- John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*
- Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Favorite Memory from UNI:

“Long, leisurely bike rides on the Cedar Falls/Waterloo bike trails. The scenery is gorgeous and varied, and this time allowed me hours to think and collect my thoughts ... Times like this were part of what made me the person I am today.”

GRANT ROZEBOOM:

“IF YOU ARE MY END, THEN WHAT ARE MY MEANS?”

What makes an action morally right? Why do we say that an action is “right?” Whether the action is attending your friend’s piano recital or giving your nephews gifts at Christmas, what makes that the “right” thing to do? This year, the UNI Philosophy Club invited University of Northern Iowa alumni and Stanford grad student, Grant Rozeboom, to campus, where he lectured on just this issue.

On the evening of December 6th, Rozeboom spoke on consequential vs. non-consequential ethics in relation to Utilitarianism and Immanuel Kant. Before discussing the end-based view of moral rightness, he provided the audience with a few definitions. He started, therefore, by defining a “morally right act” as one that serves certain ends. He further divided this end-based view into two sub-categories. The first is “consequentialism,” the belief that an action is morally right in virtue of serving ends that are among the outcomes that it brings about or promotes. The works of John Stuart Mill are fundamental to this view. The second, however, is “non-consequentialism,” in which an action is morally right by serving ends that are not among the outcomes that it brings about or promotes. This position, of course, is that of Immanuel Kant, who defends the “Formula of Humanity” by telling us that the human being exists as an end in itself, an objective end, worthy of respect.

Rozeboom went on, pointing out some potentially worrisome flaws in this non-consequentialist view. The appeal of the consequentialist view, he stated, is in how it can provide an informatively non-circular and general explanation of why some action is right or wrong. “Informative” because it says something about why the sort of action in question serves morality’s ends. It urges us, for example, to look for the extent to which pleasure results from the act. “Non-circular” because it does not appeal to the claim that the sort of action in question is already and initially morally right or wrong. “General” because in explaining why the sort of action in question serves morality’s end(s), it draws on an account of how actions serve (additional) ends, a general theory of human purposes that generalizes beyond morality’s ends, the latter being to create pleasure or happiness.

Non-consequentialism, however, is not quite as cut-and-dry. Take, for example, Alan Donagan’s Kantian theory, which postulates that respect for human beings as rational creatures entails treating adults as responsible for their own actions. To coerce or physically force someone to do something is therefore not respecting him as a rational creature. The potential problem with this statement is that it is not informative, because it treats the claim, “treating persons as responsible for their own affairs,” as the meaning of the claim, “treating them

as an end.” This statement may also be circular, because the fact that it is wrong to physically coerce someone seems to be the best explanation as to why this is inconsistent with treating them as responsible for their own affairs. Finally, this is not general because its account of how actions serve ends works only for the ends of human beings, which are the ends that Dognan thinks are distinctively served by morally right actions.



Once he had set up the problem, Rozeboom went on to suggest a potential solution. He believes that there should be an “expression-based account” of how actions treat (non-outcome) objects (or others, such as humanity or individuals) as ends. In other words, an action treats some object as an end in virtue of expressing some attitude by which we non-instrumentally value that object (valuing it, for example, by respecting, caring, or loving). Rozeboom makes the distinction between internal expression of this value and external expression. Internal expression, he explains, is where an individual, for example, chooses to do the dishes because it will make his wife happy and, because he loves his wife, there is value in making her happy. External expression, on the other hand, is expressing an attitude, not because it motivates the action, but because the act so conforms to the expectations of how someone who values this attitude (of love) might act in such a situation.

Regardless of which form of expression we accept (although Rozeboom would argue for external expression being more all-encompassing), this new expression-based account enables Kantian Non-Consequentialism to provide informative, non-circular, and general explanations of why actions are right.

After his lecture concluded, Rozeboom spent another hour answering audience questions. Discussion continued informally at lunch the next day, December 7, from 11 am – 1 pm in the student union. Later that day, Rozeboom hosted a workshop for the Philosophy Club covering this same subject.

All were welcome and the events gave students an excuse to take a break from studying for finals. [PWR](#)



DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY & WORLD RELIGIONS
CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50614-0501

ALUMNI RESPONSE FORM

In order to keep us and your UNI colleagues informed of your activities, please complete the form below and return to "Department of Philosophy & World Religions," UNI, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0501, or send an e-mail to pwr-newsletter@uni.edu. We are particularly interested in the current career paths of our alumni.

Last name First name Middle/Maiden name

UNI degree(s)-years

Address

City State Zip-code

Is this a new address? Yes No

E-mail address

Spouse's name Is spouse a UNI alum? Yes No

Your position and employer

New items of interest:

This update can be printed in the next newsletter!

Please do not print this update.

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Jerry Soneson, director

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Joel Haack, Dean

The University of Northern Iowa is
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employer with a comprehensive
plan for affirmative action.