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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DIVINITY SCHOOL

SPRING 2020

Criterion



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO | Divinity School

FROM THE DEAN

Reflection on illness, death, suffering, justice—this is the common work of the many religions we study and teach at the Divinity School. In the current crisis, as we all struggle with new fears about our health and futures, it is the more incumbent upon all of us at the School to find new ways to offer that work to our communities, and our world. Our work is taking place under unprecedented conditions of remoteness, but it is all the more vital for that.

How is the School tending to the present hour? The initiatives are as diverse as the needs. Our students face many new challenges to their health, their finances, and their possibilities for study, research, and future employment. Our staff and faculty, too, confront the challenges of new technologies and pedagogies, the illness and death of relatives and friends, and a high degree of uncertainty, as indeed we all do.

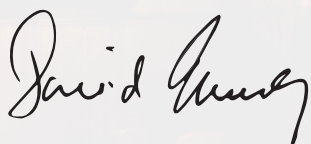
Together we are meeting many of those challenges. We are providing equipment and training for remote teaching and learning. We are providing emergency financial support to students through a collaboration with the Divinity School Students Association's Swift Cares Fund, supporting workers at the closed Coffee Shop, and continuing our multi-year effort to lower tuition and expand financial aid. Financially, at least, next year's students will be the best supported in the modern history of the School.

These are material steps, but just as important is the virtual work we are doing together as a collective intellect and community. Not only our courses, but our workshops, committee meetings and our study hours, our Wednesday Lunches and Open Spaces, all continue remotely but unabated. Indeed, our courses are reaching more students than ever, perhaps because the questions we are asking feel more urgent to so many.

And what of our research? Here too, it seems that questions we have long been asking are newly relevant to many. But we've also worked on new (to us) forms of scholarship to offer to present need. For example, the Divinity School collaborated with The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to poll the American people about their views on religious freedom and public health, as well as about the pandemic's impact on Americans' religious beliefs and behaviors. Those polls provide policy makers and the public with important information at a time when religious freedom has become an important element in debates over public health policy throughout our nation.

It is always true that none of us knows what lies ahead, but today it feels truer than ever. Uncertainty, fear, and suffering seem much more palpable in our community today than when I last sent you an issue of *Criterion*. I do not dare to prophesy, but I will prognosticate: this coming year will see us learning, longing, debating over ways of being in the unfolding moment. But in every one of those moments, and by whatever means necessary, we will continue to be present to one another, and to the work of thinking and teaching about religion.

I hope you will take a moment to peruse the pages that follow, for a taste of that thinking and teaching. And above all, I hope for your continued well-being in these times.



DAVID NIRENBERG
DEAN OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
DEBORAH R. AND EDGAR D. JANNOTTA
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE PROFESSOR

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EVERY GIFT MATTERS

Philanthropy is a key part of supporting the stories in *Criterion*. Your gifts provide aid to students in need of fellowship support, enable scholarly work at critical hubs of research and academic exploration, and maintain the classrooms and facilities in which professors and students work together to expand knowledge of the world and its religious traditions. Your gifts matter. Help us continue to flourish as a community where important questions are pursued with tenacity and care.

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OUR MASTERS PROGRAMS welcome students of all ages and backgrounds. With the goal of making the academic study of religion more accessible to those who wish to pursue it with rigor and sophistication, students can focus on topics including Buddhism and Religious Ethics. See our website for more information.

SELECT NEW COURSES

Every year our faculty develop new courses across the range of our curriculum.

Buddha Then and Now:
Transformations from
Amaravati to Anuradhapura

Buddhism in Early
Theravada Literature

Contagion: Plague, Power,
and Epidemics

Contemporary Topics in
the Study of South Asian
Religion: Imagining South
Asian Islam

Deconstruction and Religion

My Body, My Self: Asceticism
and Subjectivity

Narration and Law:
Levinas's Talmudic Readings
and the Imperative of Ethics

Pure Land Buddhism

The Radiant Pearl:
Introduction to Syriac
Literature and its Historical
Contexts

The Sacred Gaze: Beholding
as a Spiritual Exercise in the
European Artistic Tradition

Theological Criticism:
Creation and Gender



What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Religion?

"WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT RELIGION?" IS SUCH A HAUNTING, TROUBLING, AND ANXIETY-PRODUCING QUESTION FOR, IRONICALLY, SCHOLARS OF RELIGION. As an undergraduate major in Religious Studies, I went happily through my degree program completely confident that I understood my object of study. When I got to the last semester of my senior year, I took a required course called something like "What is religion?" It undid everything that I had learned previously and made me fundamentally question what I had been doing. As a consequence, I entered my master's program full of doubt, doubt that has never fully resolved itself. However, the instability, the variability, and the multiplicity of answers to this question is something that I have come to deeply appreciate about the field. In the last week, my reading has ranged from Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, Tomoka Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions* to Tulsi Srinivas' recent ethnography *The Cow in the Elevator: An Anthropology of Wonder*. Each of these scholars is working with a very different definition of religion and that is a good thing—it is the intellectual refusal of finitude to a question that cannot have a single answer. With projects ranging from religious emotion in new religious movements as a mode of perception to the poetics of Sufism as an idiom for human love in medieval Persian poetry, my students at the Divinity School mirror this richness. Indeed, the variability of students' questions and the answers they come up with speaks to the liveliness of the study of religion within the walls of Swift Hall.

So, what am I talking about when I talk about religion? What is my contribution to this beautiful multiverse? My research is on a minor religious community of medieval Digambara Jains whose most visible and vaulted religious practice was extreme forms of asceticism practiced in the nude that culminated in fasting until death. This particular strand of Jainism, I think, brings to crisis the idea that any tradition can be purely otherworldly in its orientation. We get to see this amazing moment in about the ninth century when nude Digambara monks began writing epic-length poetry in accessible languages that attempted to make sense of the here and the now, the every day, the *this-worldly*. They come up with cosmologies, ontologies, and soteriologies that make sense of love and hate, relationships between humans and animals, what it means to be in a body, and the pain of losing it. For Jains, religion was a hyper-explanatory vehicle to theorize being alive with the amplified stakes that the ultimate goal of liberation, a state of disaffection, is a hard sell after the wonder of being in the world. The answers that they come up with are different than their Buddhist and Hindu interlocutors but, presciently, for the Jains, the question of religion always had a multiplicity of correct answers.

SARAH PIERCE TAYLOR, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

AUDREY GORDON, 2020 ALUMNA OF THE YEAR

Upon recommendation from the Divinity School’s Alumni Council, the Board of Trustees of the Baptist Theological Union has named **Audrey Gordon** (MA’70) the Divinity School Alumna of the Year for 2020.



A pioneer in the field of end-of-life care, Dr. Gordon has published extensively, held numerous prestigious positions in academia, religious education, and the public health sector, and also maintained a thriving private practice as a family therapist.

After receiving her MA in the field of psychology and religion, she continued her studies at Northwestern, where she completed doctoral work in History and Literature of Religions, and then the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she received a PhD in Public Health Sciences.

Retired from the gerontology faculty in Community Health Sciences at the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Dr. Gordon founded and led the Southeast Lake County Faith in Action

Volunteers, a group serving seniors and disabled adults in their homes. Over her career she has been a professor of public health, a hospital chaplain, and a hospice professional, among other positions.

Her extraordinary achievements in the fields of death and dying have deeply affected and informed students and practitioners across disciplines, as well as changing the way many in our culture experience death. The work she did with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross on the stages of grief is still taught today. Her work in the vanguard of the hospice movement has helped transform a critical area of the American health care system.

“Dr. Gordon’s contributions to the fields of palliative and hospice care have been immense,” said David Nirenberg, Dean of the Divinity School, of the award. “She has eased the suffering of many, and changed the way in which our generation experiences the end of life. It is difficult to imagine achievements more worthy of this recognition.”

Dr. Gordon’s Alumna of the Year lecture, entitled “September Song: The evolution of hospice and end-of-life care,” will be delivered during the Autumn Quarter, date TBD.

ALUMNI AWARDS

Know an outstanding alumnus/a? Nominate them for an alumni award today. For more information, please go to bit.ly/UChiDivAlumniAwards.



IN THE CLASSROOM



This Spring in Theology 52225 students have the opportunity to explore whether doing good requires capital and whether capital can do good in Social Entrepreneurship, cotaught by **Dwight N. Hopkins**, the Alexander Campbell Professor of Theology, and alumnus **Steve Peterson**, PhD'01 (early modern theology and philosophy). Peterson, who also holds an MBA and an MDiv, built a career in bond markets, and has turned his expertise toward addressing social crises, using financial markets to create social change.

CLASS:
THEOLOGY 52225

INSTRUCTORS:
Dwight N. Hopkins,
the Alexander Campbell
Professor of Theology,
and **Steve Peterson**,
PhD'01

Milton Friedman, a major player in the Chicago school of economics and Nobel Prize winner, famously argued that the purpose of business is to maximize profits for shareholders and that for business to engage in the social is tantamount to dabbling in socialism. “On one side of the campus, we find a legacy of bottom line profit for the wealthy. On the other side of the campus, we find a tradition of transcendent values for the people

and notions of the common good,” writes **Professor Hopkins**. “Is it God versus Mammon? The Divinity School versus the Business School? Can profit and purpose and cause and commercialization work together in harmony toward the same transcendent goals?”

What’s the class about?

DNH: The class looks at what human and social values can be brought to bear on businesses. Or put another way, what types of business enterprises can concretize the best values

to help the common good. We explore the possibility of combining purpose and profit—the Divinity School and the Business School.

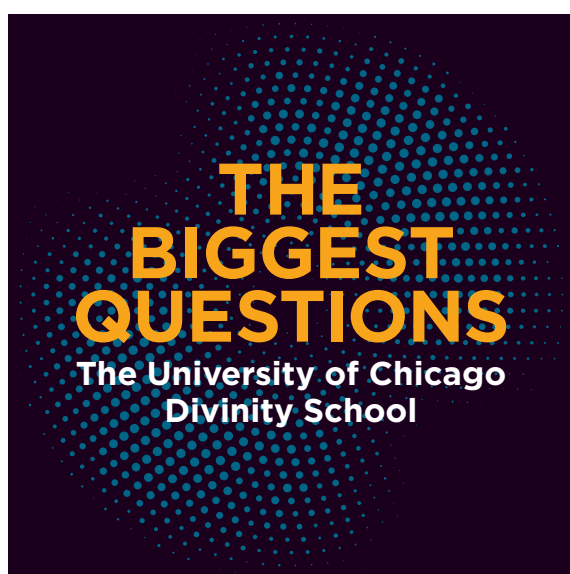
What was your inspiration for this class?

DNH: My historical and future interests revolve around questions of wealth. By wealth, I mean who owns earth, air, and water. We need the materiality of wealth to enhance people’s well being. At the same time, values can speak to larger concerns not limited by one individual, country,

or concrete practices. Many people have belief stories where the central figure offers opinions about wealth. For instance, one could say that in the stories about Jesus, we might find that a lot of his lessons come from examples about economics. And from the side of businesses, there is a growing movement, from global to local enterprises, embracing corporate social responsibility or the environment-social-governance perspective or diversity-equity-inclusion.

IN CONVERSATION

The Biggest Questions Podcast is a new venture from the Martin Marty Center for the Public Understanding of Religion. Hosted by Professors **Kevin Hector** and **Jeffrey Stackert**, it will present interview-style conversations with scholars, including Divinity School faculty members, about one of the biggest questions of our time—religion. The aim of the podcast is a lively discussion of the broad range of ideas and practices that constitute religion and how scholars make sense of them. Visit our website to listen to the full interview with Professor Erin Galgay Walsh: divinity.uchicago.edu/biggestquestions.



JS: What are your biggest questions when you're working on women in antiquity?

ERIN GALGAY WALSH: I'm really driven to think about what women in Narsai's audience thought as they listened to him

praising the boldness of the Canaanite woman. Would those words give them courage in moments of hardship in their own life if they had difficult home lives, would her example have helped them speak up? Or did it inspire them to think about their own relationship to the divine and to Jesus differently?

I'm interested too about men who heard these texts. Did it change how they saw women in their own lives? I am always

taken with the question about how texts present the ideal form of the Christian life. Whether you're talking about hagiography or homilies or poetry, they're filled with exempla and ideals of what Christian life should look like and how people should translate the Gospel into their own lives, everyday Christians, not the extraordinary Christians. I always keep in mind the lukewarm and the struggling.

KH: So interpretation isn't just or even primarily, 'what do these texts literally mean,' but the translation into life, how these readings shape us and shape how we experience ourselves, experience one another and so forth. This is a much bigger question in an important respect than just trying to figure out what the text literally means.

EGW: That is at the core of my work. One of the reasons I work on these particular texts is to trouble the notion that the Bible is just a book we have on the shelf. I remind my students that most people in antiquity and subsequent centuries did not have access to the Bible as a single book. They knew these poems. They recalled homilies. Try to imagine what your knowledge of the Gospel would be or what stories from the Hebrew Bible you would know if you just had artwork and poetry. It is much more piecemeal but also communal—because you are hearing it within the community. But it would shape how you saw the Bible and revelation, and you would be living that message in a different way.

"I am always taken with the question about how texts present the ideal form of the Christian life." ERIN GALGAY WALSH



The Grounds of Being Research Fellowship, established jointly by the Divinity Students Association and Grounds of Being, our student-run coffee shop, is awarded annually to a Divinity School student who is pursuing research or supplementary training in their academic field during the summer.

Greg Chatterley (PhD'20) is the inaugural recipient of this fellowship. An historian of American religions, he will also be a Divinity School Teaching Fellow for the coming academic year.

What is your work about?

GC: Many things at once: race, religion, economy, social order, communal identity, and more. More specifically, my current research analyzes the concept and social formation of modern 'white evangelicals,' with a heavy emphasis on the racial adjective. What makes white evangelicals 'white?'



To answer that question, I revisit the long-told history of white evangelical activism and organization across the twentieth century with eyes trained on evangelicalism's raced social orders. I analyze ideas, motivations and social structures that transformed, enlarged and reinforced the assumed white racial identity of the conservative religious tradition. My work builds on existing studies of white evangelicalism that have long centered southern narratives of slavery and Jim Crow, but I pivot my focus instead to

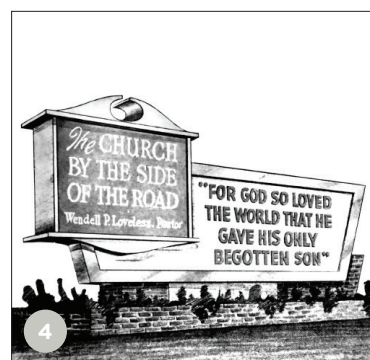
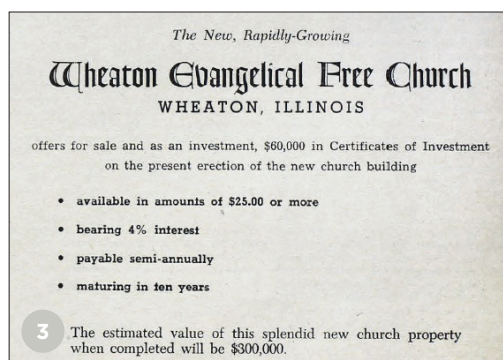
the racial traditions of the urban north, of postwar suburbanization, and of 'moderate' opposition to the black civil rights movement. I describe suburbanization as an inflection point where modern evangelicals reorganized both materially and ideologically to contain challenges to white supremacy and to rearticulate a 'kinder' vision of persistent racial segregation and inequality.

What did you work on as a recipient of this fellowship?

GC: First, let me express my sincerest gratitude to Grounds of Being for providing this much-needed support for graduate student research. It consistently amazes me that students are organizing so effectively to meet the needs of their peers and colleagues. The funds that Grounds of Being awarded me helped to offset the accruing costs of travel, time off work, copying, postal fees, research fees, and digital subscriptions for research and writing software, among other often mundane and hidden expenses of research. This past summer, I traveled with some

frequency to gather primary documents from various archives and institutions across Chicago's suburbs. For my lecture as the Grounds of Being research fellow, as an example, I detailed findings of suburban investment at one influential postwar evangelical congregation in Wheaton. My research, afforded by this fellowship, uncovered unique evangelical entanglements with suburban planning and development

capital in the 1950s and -60s. These entanglements both provided and proliferated a sanctification of capital investment as a method of expanding God's kingdom. At the same time, the success of suburban development affirmed to evangelicals that suburbs themselves were sacred land where God's will was easily discerned. Among other things, this perspective limited white evangelicals' sympathy for growing critiques of suburban racial inequality. I argue, accordingly, that white evangelical opposition to civil rights in the 1960s and after is best understood not as an old defense of Jim Crow white supremacy, but rather as a new defense of emerging 'suburbanized' racial orders of the mid- and late-century.



1 Expertly planned to attract new suburbanites, the Wheaton Evangelical Free Church, "The Church by the Side of the Road," leveraged emergent evangelical social networks to build a growth-oriented church.

2 A young Billy Graham (center) raised funds for the start-up congregation, but evangelical businessmen like Robert Van Kampen (left) organized work behind the scenes. **3** Church trustees included local leaders in construction, real estate and financing who employed sophisticated strategies, like the sale of private bonds, to capitalize the project. **4** Some ideas worked better than others: plans for a stately roadside sign ran afoul of Wheaton zoning ordinances.

Photos courtesy of The Compass Church (Wheaton Campus), Historical Records, Wheaton, IL. "Certificates of Investment" ad first published in *The Evangelical Beacon and Evangelist*, October 13, 1953.

Spring Quarter 2020

As part of the University's commitment to help prevent and slow the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus disease, the Divinity School moved to remote learning for all classes for the Spring Quarter of 2020. Swift Hall closed its doors and sent students, staff, and faculty to their homes. We cancelled some events, and postponed others. And we adapted to the remote environment. Faculty moved their teaching, and even office hours, online. We met and gathered in Zoom, in Microsoft Teams, on social media channels, and even over the telephone. *Sightings*, our twice-weekly digital publication focusing on religion in public life, delved into numerous facets of the current moment. We found ways to offer thoughtful gatherings and events, such as Open Space and Wednesday Lunch (bring your own lunch!) on how to have a professional online presence. We prepared for a virtual Convocation (June 12). For this issue of *Criterion*, we reflect on some of the ways we met the challenges of an unprecedented event.

OPEN SPACE ONLINE

Kevin Gregory

It wasn't a question of "If?" but one of "How?" Open Space would continue into the Spring Quarter.

Open Space is a weekly thirty-minute gathering dedicated to rest, reflection, connection, and community. Each quarter the community is guided by a different question which arises from a work of poetry, fiction, or memoir. Every week the group gathers and someone from the community offers a reflection on the question, the group takes some silence to meditate on what was said, and then has a brief conversation about what was offered and where we found resonance with what was shared. It is a time for people to tell stories, share meaningful experiences, and connect aspects of what we're learning and thinking about in Swift Hall to our lives and the various traditions and cultures we come from.

When it became clear the question we had planned for the Spring Quarter was not adequate to meet

this current moment, we found a new one: "What is grounding you?" So much of our normal lives, what we think or believe is being taken to task right now in constructive and destructive ways. Out of this crisis, new relationships, fellowships, thoughts, solidarities, political imaginations and ideas are forming. The world is never going to be the same. It seemed important then to think about what our traditions and lives and experiences have to say about how to meet this time. What is being asked of us? Who is being harmed and left out? What might our experiences have to offer to what is being built and destroyed? What are we still holding onto?

This quarter we reflect on a prose poem by Kitty O'Meara entitled, "And the people stayed home." It is one of the pieces of "pandemic poetry" that has sprung up and flowered over online platforms as the coronavirus has spread. It is my hope that you might read it and think with us about what is grounding you now.

Kevin Gregory is a 3rd year MDiv student and the coordinator of Open Space for the 2019-2020 academic year.



WHAT IS GROUNDING YOU? AN OPEN SPACE REFLECTION

Erika Dornfeld

I have been without a pair of working headphones for about a month. This is unthinkable to me, even as I say it. I once bought a pair on my way home from dinner on the northside because getting home without a working pair of headphones was not going to happen. I run with them, walk with them, commute with them, work with them. I simply cannot do without them.

I think you know what has changed for me this month. When I read this prompt—what is grounding you—the answer came as a moment of déjà vu, walking down 61st street in the early evening. I had the strangest feeling, I felt like I was back in high school—like I'm walking down a dirt road to get the mail in rural Idaho ten years ago. It took me a couple of walks, a couple of runs, to figure that moment of déjà vu out.



I realized what had been reminiscent for me was the space in the air. It was the quiet. Not devoid of sound, but noise. There was no car noise, no building noise, no people noise. Instead it was birds, the wind knocking branches together, it was the shuffle of my own feet on the concrete.

And now, everywhere I go, I experience the return of ambient sound. I hear tree branches creaking 100 feet above me. The rat-a-tat-tat of ducks' wings on the pond in Washington Park is loud. I hear squirrels clawing on tree bark. There is the occasional slamming gate or whoosh of a car. But it catches my attention now in a way it hasn't in a long time. Because the hearing of it is an event.

I used headphones to hide from noise pollution. From noise. Using other noise, I tried to create some auditory space for myself, to lure myself into feeling like I also had some physical breathing room. I tried to pretend that city life doesn't wear on me. That it doesn't disappoint me.

Sometimes, I'll swim in the lake at the Point as far as the buoys allow me to go, stare into the fake ocean beyond. And I'll still hear the cars. I'm as far away as the city will let me get, and I still feel trapped.

I feel silly and embarrassed, expressing this part of city living is hard for me. No one else seems to yearn for stillness. I often extoll the dynamism and pulse of city life. And that's not a lie either. I also love being here. I get confused and down on myself that I simply cannot run without music, and prior to moving here, that had never been the case. But I've been forced to admit in recent days that it does wear on me because of how differently I feel and act now. I have zero desire to buy new headphones. When I reflect that the return of ambient sound has been so grounding for me, it makes more sense when I consider the soil I came from: soil with a lot of audible space. The population density of Chicago is about 12,000 people per square mile. The population of the state of Wyoming, where I lived until I was thirteen, was five.

So when I reflect on this lovely poem, thinking about my returned sense of being embraced by quiet, the line that stands out is "some met their shadows." The near constant clamor of human life has been a reluctant shadow for me. I don't think I would have even acknowledged it, were it not for the evidence, my complete 180 on headphone use.



I am grateful for the line in the poem, "and the people healed." I know my auditory freedom won't last, and that will mean the return of many many good things that I currently miss. I don't anticipate my dependency on my headphones to decrease overall in my life. I expect I'll need them even more after this. Where I hope my healing will be is to

remember that this was a real shadow, that city life has edges that sometimes prick and sting. I'm hopeful my healing will be that ambient-sound living is a closer memory. Will I make new choices and dream new images? I hope so. For now, I'm grateful to live a life free of headphones.

Benediction: If you've met a shadow to meet it with kindness.

Erika Dornfeld (MDiv'14) is Director of Field Education and Community Engagement; a role which involves a commitment to both academy and community, deepening student engagement between classroom and conversation.

RELIGION AND THE CORONAVIRUS: POLL

A poll undertaken as a partnership between The Divinity School's Marty Center for the Public Understanding of Religion and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research explored the impact of the outbreak of the coronavirus on religious beliefs and behaviors and views on the intersection of religion and public life and health. Conducted between April 30-May 4, this initiative continues to position the Divinity School at the center of developing conversations around issues of pressing public concern.

In-depth information, including methodology, can be found at divinity.uchicago.edu/about/ap-norc-partnership.

SIGHTING RELIGION IN PANDEMIC TIMES

Joel Brown

Of the seventeen columns *Sightings* has published (as of today) related to the COVID-19 global pandemic, some of them observe the way our lives have changed, while others try to make sense of the social, political, cultural, and religious transformations that are taking place.

What the majority of them have in common, however, is encouraging us to shift our gaze forward, even if only for a moment, to start thinking about what columnist Richard Rosengarten described at the outset of the pandemic as the “ultimate dimensions” of COVID-19. This, I think, is the special contribution of *Sightings* to a broader conversation about our world in this season of uncertainty and trial, as well as to a deeper understanding of ourselves as humans in this moment when our nature as social beings is being tested and reimagined. It is for these reasons that we’ve chosen to reprint Professor Rosengarten’s “The Coronavirus and Us” essay here, which was also one of the first we published about the pandemic.

We also hope that you’ll enjoy this list of selected *Sightings* essays on the pandemic (right), but please know that it’s only a sampling of what *Sightings* has published over the last few months dealing with COVID-19, as well as on other topics about religion in public life. We encourage you to visit our archives to explore the full collection, including the insightful reporting and expert commentary on the place of religion in current events and public life by our outstanding team of columnists, led by the inimitable Martin Marty, along with Richard Rosengarten, William Schweiker, Cynthia Lindner, and Russell Johnson.

Joel Brown is Editor of Sightings and a PhD Candidate in Religions in the Americas.



SELECTED SIGHTINGS

Evan F. Kuehn: “Measuring the Apocalypse”

Where we will and won’t find meaning in this global pandemic

Margaret M. Mitchell: “How Republican Politicians Get Schooled on the Bible”

An investigation of the Bible study (and its teacher) influencing how Republican politicians understand the coronavirus pandemic

Russell P. Johnson: “The Strange War on COVID-19”

William James and the potential benefits of “war” analogies for fighting COVID-19

William Schweiker: “Pan-Nemesis: COVID-19 and Beyond”

Do religious myths have anything to teach us during this present crisis?

Cynthia G. Lindner: “Faith in the Time of Coronavirus: The Power of Spacial Solidarity”

How the global pandemic is reshaping the lives of communities of faith

PSALMS ONLINE: SPRING 2020
SIMEON CHAVEL

I am a Gemini, born under the sign of the twins—or the split personality. Garrulous and social, but also given to the puzzle, driven down Alice’s rabbit hole. And when the winter quarter ended mid-March, I found myself torn.

Campus cleared like usual, but with COVID-19 gathering steam students and staff tethered themselves to their homes and reduced activities. I continued my daily commute at isolated hours, but now it had an eerie feeling, tinged with danger. I had my projects to advance, books to consult, underlining them in triumph or flinging them in dismay, room enough to stretch, music to hear, and coffee to spare. But the world outside was suffering and tense. It was hard to know how to be in the moment.

As the days passed and the virus worsened, the library shut, the campus closed, and the University moved online. I had Spring break to remake myself from researcher to teacher. Sure, I have developed some pedagogic competence over time, beyond simply modeling my research habits, my forms of analysis, and my writing, but mainly it was through experience. Sure, I have used the online platform, but mainly as a storage site for files, images, and links students could access and work with on their own time. I signed up for crash courses in essential higher-level video-integration tools of the platform, which presumed better knowledge of the basics. I went onto the platform to begin learning both its pedagogy and its interface, but I found these too sophisticated for me. And I made use of the guidelines and resources provided by University administrators, tech support, and librarians, but I felt overwhelmed. My instinct was to load the courses with as many resources as I could, devise a vast array of assignments, and prepare mixed modes of teaching. It was a classic case of compensatory overkill. Feeling my loss of control, I was shifting my anxiety to my students.

The sheer exhaustion of the byzantine courses I was preparing led me to an epiphany. All those emails and sessions repeated a crucial principle: to account for students who might be unwell or caring for others, in a faraway time zone, with

weak connectivity, with few books, in a disruptive setting, and facing exacerbated learning challenges. I had missed this principle; now it would become my mantra: keep it simple. And as it turned out, the determination to keep things simple made my courses more efficient, more interactive, more effective—more Chicago.

One of my courses this Spring is the biblical book of Psalms in the original Hebrew. I am interested in the book as a distinct collection of ancient poems about divinity, kingship, peoplehood, justice, and integrity, some of which may originally have been in use in worship, but the full set of which defies any neat categorization—by author, period, theme, topic, style, length, voicing, mode, genre, and poetics. Many of the students are on their way to ministry, some are future scholars, and several, as always, are there for personal interest. But the course is designed primarily to serve students who have begun learning biblical grammar and vocabulary; this would be one of their first systematic attempts to read biblical literature in Hebrew. In other words, the course captures these students at a formative moment. How would I keep them focused on grammar and vocabulary, while introducing them to the more literary and historical dimensions of the text?

Mantra: keep it simple. One short psalm per week, covered in two meetings. In the first, we drill grammar, build vocabulary, and identify recurring elements and patterns; in the second, we translate the whole and use the structuring elements to analyze it. We use no printed books, just what is available online; no commentaries, just the Bible, dictionaries, grammars, and worksheets I prepare to help guide the process. In our meetings online, we go round and round the Brady Bunch window discussing forms, meanings, patterns, and ideas. Stripping the course down to these pedagogical essentials has made it efficient. We maintain both pace and focus. Most importantly, it has unlocked students’ creativity as, collaboratively, they develop the range of possible analyses and criteria for deciding them, rather than adjudicate the options laid out by other authorities.

Our first poem was Psalm 133, only three verses long, about how bounty can allow family to stay together on the same plot of land. This was

Psalm 133:1-3

An ascending song of David

Look, how fine and how sweet
brothers living as one
like the finest oil over a head
descending over a beard
the beard of Aaron
descending over its/his full length
like the dew of Hermon
descending over the mountains of Zion
because there Yahweh decreed blessing
life evermore!

תהילים קל"ג, א-ג

שיר המעלות לדוד

הנה מה־טוב ומה־נעים

שבת אחים גם־יחד

כשמן הטוב על־הראש

ירד על־הזקן

זקן־אהרן

שירד על־פי מדותיו

כטל־חרמון

שירד על־הררי ציון

כי שם צנה יהוה את־הבִּרְכָּה

חיים עד־העולם

an ancient ideal of an agricultural life in which landholdings were too small to be split among children from one generation to the next. Both the grammar and the imagery give the experience of overflow. Grammatically, the poem comprises a single sentence that contains a series of similes formulated to flow one into the other, so that the audience is never quite sure where one begins and the other ends. The imagery features dripping oil—a staple of ancient life; a cascading beard—a sign of longevity; and flowing dew—the source of divine bounty.

Worksheets, grammars, and dictionaries were enough for students to develop the different possible readings, unlock the overall theme, and see how they worked together.

I miss, of course, my research resources at the library, and I'll be relieved to get them back; but my pedagogy has become ever more Chicago and will come with me back to the classroom.

Simeon Chavel is Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible.

Picturing the Spring 2020 Classroom

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Read more about Social Entrepreneurship, cotaught by Dwight N. Hopkins and Steven Peterson, on page 6.

With learning moved to the virtual environment for the quarter, we asked our faculty to take shots of their Zoom classrooms for this issue. We think the results are rather good!

PSALMS

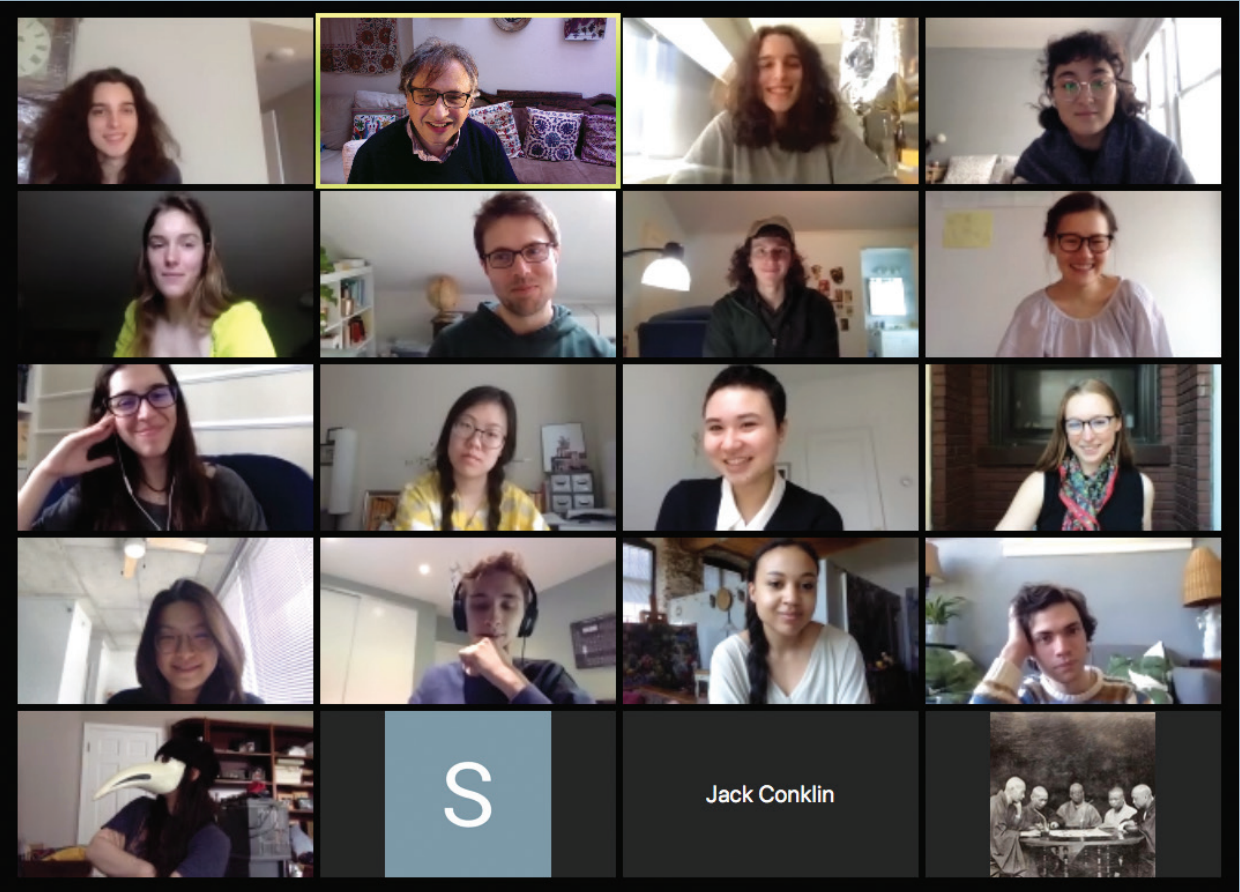
Read about Simeon Chavel's Psalms class on pages 14-15.





BIOETHICS

Bioethics, with Laurie Zoloth, the Margaret E. Burton Professor and Senior Advisor to the Provost for Programs in Social Ethics, explores issues and problems of modern dilemmas in medicine and science—and how arguments and practices from faith traditions and from philosophy offer significant contributions that underlie policies and practices in bioethics.



VEILING THE IMAGE: SACRED AND PROFANE FROM ANTIQUITY TO MODERNITY

This class, taught by Visiting Professor of Art History Jas Elsner, explores the fascinating culture of covering and veiling sacred icons, or images that were thought to cause trauma or outrage in the European tradition.

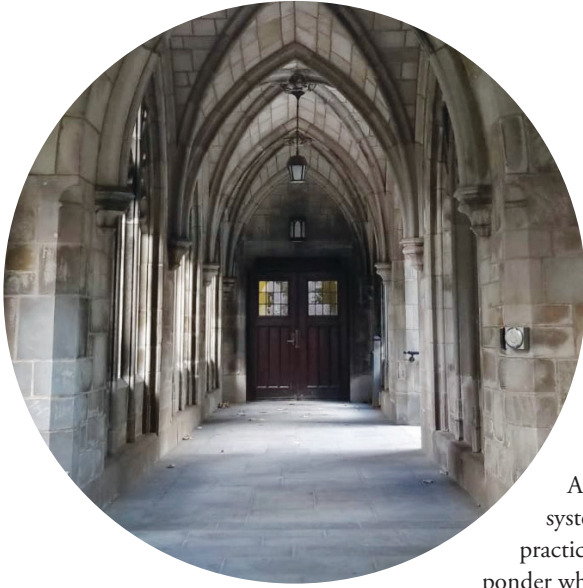
A photograph of a Gothic-style stone ceiling with a hanging lantern. The ceiling features intricate carvings and a central hanging lantern with a chain. The text "The Coronavirus and Us" is overlaid in the center.

The Coronavirus and Us

EXPLORING THE “ULTIMATE DIMENSIONS” OF COVID-19 AS AMERICANS PREPARE THEMSELVES FOR A SEASON OF QUARANTINE AND ISOLATION

BY RICHARD A. ROSENGARTEN | PUBLISHED ON MARCH 16, 2020

The constantly evolving news regarding the coronavirus is largely, and appropriately, couched in medical and scientific terms. What we can and cannot know about it, what we should do to avoid it and—at least as important—to contain or limit its spread, are matters to which medical science speaks, and we should all listen. These are the proximate, immediate dimensions of an epidemic, and they merit full and explicit address.



**LURKING IN THE NOT DISTANT
BACKGROUND, HOWEVER, ARE THIS
EPIDEMIC'S ULTIMATE DIMENSIONS.**

As we learn what we can, and as individuals and social systems begin haltingly or earnestly to follow the best practices to limit the spread of the virus, we also will begin to ponder what is happening and what it means. The import of the coronavirus will not be exhausted by its medical resolution. Even as we

hopefully await its resolution—in a state of isolation or quarantine, or at a minimum of “social distancing”—we will live and need to reckon with a solitude that neither medical science nor social media can fully address.

One resource for this enforced solitude might be found in two short books written in direct response to the cataclysmic Lisbon earthquake of 1755. That catastrophe was considerably less subtle than the coronavirus: abrupt and literally seismic, it was a natural eruption that forged fissures in a major city and what we now call tsunamis in the oceans. Its reverberations were literal, immediate, and concretely disruptive.

Arguably the first globally referenced natural disaster, Lisbon's earthquake commanded widespread attention and consideration. Often taken as a literal index for the modern world's engagement of the ancient question of theodicy, polemicists of all persuasions did not hesitate to invoke it for their contradictory purposes. (By contrast, the philosopher Immanuel Kant assembled all the data he could about the earthquake, and composed an astute, if today little read account that anticipated the science of seismology.)

Better known to subsequent generations are two treatises each published exactly four years after the earthquake by two individuals of greatly variant perspective who sought to address the earthquake's import for human existence.

One is Voltaire's *Candide*, or *Optimism*, a satire of what Voltaire regarded to be the untenable yet tenaciously held claim that, to quote the words repeatedly uttered by its philosopher Pangloss, human beings live in “the best of all possible worlds.” Voltaire has Pangloss maintain this claim over the course of approximately one hundred pages that document the increasing deprivation encountered by Pangloss's friend and credulous student, Candide, in the aftermath of the Lisbon earthquake. Ongoing illness, famine, and a case of syphilis do not deter Pangloss as he continues to spin elaborate sophistries to support his claim that even amidst these sufferings, theirs is “the best of all possible worlds.”

Voltaire concludes *Candide* with a decisive rebuke to Pangloss. The previously compliant Candide and his few remaining counterparts, finding themselves in a state of exhausted resignation, resolve that their best recourse is “to work without speculating” because “it's the only way of rendering life bearable.” The final, famous *coda* is provided by Candide himself: “we must cultivate our garden.”

The other resource for us, also published in 1759, is Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*. Johnson's concern is not a philosophical system. Instead Johnson seeks to excoriate human vanity, in particular our presumption that the purpose of life is our individual and collective happiness.

In Johnson's narrative, Rasselas and his teacher Imlac discover that to make happiness the chief end of life is to follow a path of continual frustration and, ultimately, failure. Johnson writes to admonish those "who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy," and "who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow." To act on the premise that progress is a realistic expectation is to deny the constants of human life.

Unlike Voltaire, Johnson was not writing a satire; also unlike Voltaire, Johnson was less of an enemy of religion, specifically Christianity. Johnson thought that religion, rightly understood—a crucial qualification for him—was the best counsel against human vanity. Johnson chose to ventriloquize in *Rasselas* the wisdom of the Old Testament, while situating his tale in Ethiopia. An anti-colonialist, Johnson saw the "vanity of vanities" in the individual and in the state. Good religion not only counsels the individual against such delusion but names its promulgation by the state.

“The import of the coronavirus will not be exhausted by its medical resolution.”

RICHARD A. ROSENGARTEN

Voltaire in France and Johnson in England wrote, from the perspective of four years, about a disaster of transnational impact in Portugal. We now face an unfolding pandemic of unknown duration and largely speculative impact. But we will need to balance productive solitude with strategic public action. Taken together, *Candide* and *Rasselas* afford resources to face that future and the decisions it will demand. At stake are fundamental questions about the marks of civilization—political, religious, ethnic, social. Rather than merely being alone, let us find solitude by the cultivation of our respective gardens, and let us act on the recognition that our individual happiness is a matter of vanity and of secondary import to a needful world.

We do not live in the best of all possible worlds. But that fact is of negligible import to the obligations we have to the world we do inhabit. And for the foreseeable future, that world has decisively gone viral.

Richard A. Rosengarten (PhD'94) is Associate Professor of Religion, Literature, and Visual Culture at the Divinity School.



Hemophilology

THE HEMOPHILOLOGIST IS A KIND OF SECULAR WITNESS, OFFERING AN ACCOUNT OF TRUTH, PAIN, SENSITIVITY, AND CARE, ALL AT ONCE.

BY ANAND VENKATRISHNAN

I ■ “Those of us who live with disabilities are at the forefront of the larger discussion of what constitutes a valued life. What is a life worth living?”

KENNY FRIES, “THE NAZIS’ FIRST VICTIMS WERE THE DISABLED”

The New York Times, Sept. 13, 2017

Several months ago, I watched an interview with two North Korean refugees about the process of their resettlement in South Korea. They spoke in some detail about their circuitous routes of escape—one through China and Mongolia, another through Vietnam and Laos—as seekers of asylum never fully afforded state protection. I do not know the circumstances behind the video; government-sponsored repatriation is never innocent. But the interviewees spoke openly about their struggles to assimilate into South Korean society: stigmatized for their provincial accents, suspected of espionage and disloyalty, shocked by the sudden transition from pre-industrial to advanced capitalist society—modernity’s most classical narrative.

While describing the difference in values between the two cultures, one of the interviewees revealed that he had attempted suicide in his last years of high school. When pressed, the young man, slender and pale, with a full head of curly black hair, replied that he was driven to despair by having to compete with his fellow students to get ahead in life. Not only was he at an educational disadvantage, he was also chronically ill, he said, since he suffered from hemophilia. When I heard this, my heart sank and my stomach leapt,

clashing at the nexus of pity and fear. Hemophilia is a rare genetic blood disorder that affects the clotting process, and requires constant access to expensive medication in order to prevent hemorrhage triggered by small injuries. It’s also one I know well: I have a severe version of the disorder, Type A, Factor VIII deficiency. For this man to have been a stateless refugee with such a condition, whatever the degree of severity, is almost unimaginable. That he mentioned it first in the context of his academic anxiety is, to me, even more troubling. What kind of society transforms disability into desperation? And what kind of political economy structures it?

As an X-linked trait, hemophilia primarily affects men, while women are carriers. The Hindu in me believes that this is karmic retribution for generations of patriarchy. My mother says I was a leech in a past life. Most modern histories of hemophilia highlight its presence in the royal families of Britain and Russia, the Romanovs in particular. For years my only point of reference had been Prince Alexei and his wild *starets*, Rasputin: the hypnotic healing procedures, the hastening of the end of Tsarist rule, the horrible murders of the royal family. More recently I was surprised to find a hemophiliac in Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore*, a gender-fluid librarian who drives a flashy sports car and offers mysterious advice. But there are other genealogies as well. Sanskrit legends tell

of the demon Raktabīja, Bloodseed, who fought with the great goddess Durgā in cosmic battle. She sliced him into pieces, but from every drop of his blood that hit the ground, another Raktabīja sprang up, stronger than ever. The goddess finally defeated him by calling upon the dark, ferocious, bloodthirsty Kālī, who sped about lapping up each drop before it sprouted. In this Age of Discord, perhaps hemophilia is Raktabīja's return. After all, gods and demons reincarnate too.

Having hemophilia was an intensely private thing for me as a child. Of course, my friends knew, and were caring enough to maintain the line between prankish and protective. What I mean by "private" is the sense that what I had was uniquely my own. I never entertained the idea of attending one of the many summer camps for young people with blood disorders that the local children's hospital offered. Besides the fact that there was little chance of meeting girls at a hemophilia camp, I did not want to meet anyone who presented a different picture of something that I thought was impenetrably individual. What I had could not become an object of shared experience; it was a silent, concealed badge of difference, yet one by which I refused to be defined. For there was also the fear of being marked forever as physically other. Varieties of this fear have pursued me throughout my life. It is easy to understand the teenage turmoil of feeling unattractive and unwanted. But there are also ethical vulnerabilities. As an adult aspiring to solidarity with grassroots activists, I have had to wonder: How do I put my body on the line, when it is the weakest defense I possess?

If I have never thought to reflect openly on what it means to live with hemophilia, it's because I'm one of the lucky ones. I am fortunate to have the resources, the privileges, and the support I need to sustain a healthy, happy life. I grew up in a comfortable home, never wanted for daily needs, and was supported financially throughout my education. Apart from a strong reluctance to travel, an indefensible hatred of exercise, and a progressive limp from moderate arthritis, the psychological and physical effects of my condition have been manageable. To maintain this fragile equilibrium, however, involves daily intravenous infusions of a wildly expensive synthetic clotting agent. Over the years, veins tire, scars congeal, and, more metaphorically, nerves fray. Some disabilities are only invisible until they show: in drooping eyes, in punctured skin, in hesitant steps. It is not pleasant to think that one encounters the world deficient, that to become "normal" requires daily, painful

artifice. But there is no normal, there are only shades of injury, some genetic, some generational. At the clinic I used to attend in New York City, I was the model patient because I could sit with my legs folded. The waiting room was a portrait of old white men in wheelchairs, arthritic black men with pronounced limps, grizzled Latino men with Medicaid wristbands, humorless Asian men with rickety walkers. Blood is the great leveler; disorders do not discriminate.

Capitalism, on the other hand, does, with spectacular brutality. Two years ago, the homegrown plutocracy called the U.S. Senate tried to strip millions of citizens from access to affordable healthcare. As if it were not enough to try and survive in a society that only values humans for their productive capacity. Freedom is a historically hollow word for many people in this country whose bodies have been chained to the unholy machinery of civilization. As for those bodies unable to serve this all-consuming fire, to what god will they appeal? In the case of one Korean student, the stigma of sickness in a capitalist culture nearly killed him, when statelessness did not.

As a professor, then, I am compelled to foreground the health and welfare of my students above all other considerations. What is a humanities education if it does not resist these inhumanities? The pressure to achieve individual success at the expense of others conditions much of contemporary academic life. My disciplinary training compels me differently. Philology, or in the broadest sense, how to make sense of texts, requires collaboration with the living and the dead; one reads with you, the other reads through you. We do not simply work together, but rely on each other, just like I hold my partner's hand to walk when my arthritis flares up. For years I believed that my choice of intellectual career was separate from my physical condition. Now I wonder, with J.M. Coetzee: Is the act of slow reading meant for a slow man?¹

■ ■ ■ **"It seemed to me that this world has a serious shortage of both logic and kindness."**

HARUKI MURAKAMI, 1Q84

When I was a child, my Sanskrit teacher, a four-foot-eleven, sprightly woman, with a Ph.D. and a persistent wheeze, told me a funny *cāṭu*, or clever verse, attributed to the twelfth-century poet and philosopher Śrīharṣa. As a young boy, Śrīharṣa was so

prolific and so unintelligible that his uncle gave him some lentil soup to dull his senses a bit. After a while he asked Śrīharṣa how he was doing, only to receive the following complex alliterative reply meant to resemble chewing, one that I still remember by heart:

aśeṣaśemuṣīmoṣamāṣam aśnāmi mātula

“Uncle, I’m noshing on mash so my mind may be mushed.”

Recently I happened upon this hemistich again in a book on Śrīnātha, the poet who wrote a Telugu version of Śrīharṣa’s intensely learned and beautiful epic poem, the *Naiṣadhyacarita*. I suspect that the verse, like my teacher, was of Telugu origin. Only what I always thought she was trying to tell me was not that I was precocious, but that it was okay to nibble on snacks while I studied. The misremembered lesson had its own moral, one quite appropriate to Sanskrit culture: learning and pleasure are equally important, and, ideally, they would become indistinguishable. Her kindness and patience with me, and her delight in my unsteady progress, was its own evidence.

The reason I value philological education is just this: that it is pleasurable. The ethics of that pleasure, that opening up and relishing, is clear to me in a world of dangerously narrowing possibilities, in which pleasure, like labor and resources, is squeezed out of the people and redistributed upward for a predatory few. It was the most insurgent philologist of them all, Malcolm X, who exemplified the potent combination of a love for learning widely and a passion for fighting injustice:

*You can believe me that if I had the time right now, I would not be one bit ashamed to go back into any New York City public school and start where I left off at the ninth grade, and go on through a degree. Because I don’t begin to be academically equipped for so many of the interests that I have. For instance, I love languages. I wish I were an accomplished linguist. [...] I would just like to study. I mean ranging study, because I have a wide-open mind. I’m interested in almost any subject you can mention.*²

Malcolm’s activism on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised was enabled by his already extraordinary skill with language, from reading the dictionary cover-to-cover in prison to debating conservative commentators on television.³ And yet he sought academic qualification in the subject, not for prestige, but to satisfy his curiosity. He located his humanity—or his princeliness, to follow Ossie

Davis⁴—in his ability to take back language and history from their abusers, to give them back to the people. Philology was at once pleasure and power. Could it also be politics?

There is a story that circulates among Sanskritists of an apocryphal meeting between Erich Frauwallner, the Nazi German scholar of Buddhism, and Sylvain Lévi, the French Jewish scholar of Indian religion and literature. The story goes that during the Nazi invasion of Paris, Frauwallner accompanied an SS raid in order to seek out the great Lévi. When he found his residence he instructed everyone to wait outside. After engaging Lévi in a long conversation about Sanskrit philology, he departed, and told the guards that there was no one home and they should go on their way.

The meeting was impossible for even more reasons than the most obvious: that Lévi died in 1935, years before the invasion. But I think the moral is more than simply that respect for learning transcends regimes of hatred and violence. It is that when the world is falling apart around you, or you yourself may be complicit in inflicting unspeakable suffering, one of the most radical methods of resistance is to stop. Philology here is not just about slowing down but actually stopping to think, to turn over different possibilities, to debate options, to explore the intertextual archive, to enter the minds of those who stopped long ago.

The late Srinivas Aravamudan, in his book *Guru English*, likens the study of the humanities under the threat of nuclear war to the setting of the Bhagavad Gita, the philosophical conversation between Krishna and Arjuna, which takes place in between two armies (*senayor ubhayor madhye*) arrayed for apocalyptic battle (*yoddhukāmān avasthitān*). It isn’t clear how long time stops, whether they are simply prolonging the inevitable. Krishna says that everyone present has already been slated to die (*mayaivaite nihatāḥ pūrvam eva*). But in those hours of poetry and questioning, the reader experiences an eternity, from grand cosmic visions to inner moral psychology, that may revise completely what they think is real and true.

Before returning to complete my thoughts on disability and education, I want to share what Sanskrit philology looks like in practice, or, to paraphrase Harunaga Isaacson, “the task of understanding people’s minds.” A few years ago, a colleague and I teamed up to conjecture a fix for a corrupt line in the *Gurunāthaparnāmarśa*, or *Remembering My Teacher*, by Madhurāja, who was

writing in Madurai, in present-day Tamilnadu, some time after the twelfth century. Madhurāja's poem was in praise of the tenth century Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta, whose writings made their way to the south of India not long after their composition. Verse 29 in the Kashmir Sanskrit Texts Series (KSTS) edition reads as follows:

*madhurā maheśva***-kathā-makaranda-dhuni-
parimala-majjana-dhvani-pavitrita-bhakta-janā |
abhinavagupta-nātha-vadanāmbuja-vāg-bhramarī
śiva śiva gādha-mūḍham api māṃ mukharikurute ||*

Even without knowing the rather rare seventeen-syllable meter nardāṭaka (aka kokilaka), it is clear that there are problems in the first quarter of the verse. The compound, comprised of individual words separated by hyphens and linked by many possible relationships of meaning, is obviously missing syllables, which I marked here with asterisks. The splitting of the first word from it disturbs what should otherwise be an elegant, elongated two-line compound meant to agree syntactically with the compound in the third quarter. The meter, a fixed pattern of heavy and light syllables, at least provides a structure within which to emplot the required syllables. But what could they be, and where, and why?

What we want the verse to say, what it wants to tell us, is an extended conceit about the bee that is the speech (vāg-bhramarī) perched on Abhinavagupta's lotus lips (vadanāmbuja). This bee/speech has the amazing ability to turn even a rank idiot (gādha-mūḍham) like me (Madhurāja) into an eloquent speaker, abuzz with words (mukharikurute). For those who hang around it (bhakta-janā) are purified (pavitrita) by its very sound (dhvani), its contented drone of absorption (majjana) in the fragrance (parimala) emitted by the stream of honey (makaranda-dhuni) that is the discourse (kathā) ** the great Lord (maheś[v]a) ** sweet (madhurā) ** ... and suddenly it all breaks down. Madhurāja, though, had proven himself a close reader of Abhinava's works, and frequently seemed to refer to their content. So when, in the course of a completely unrelated discussion, my colleague showed me verse 5 of Abhinavagupta's *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarśinī*, something stood out to me:

*pūrnavyākaraṇāvagāhanaśuciḥ sattarkamūlonmiṣat-
prajñākalpalatāvivekakusumair abhyarcya
br̥ddevatām |
pīyūṣāsavasārasundaramahāsāhityasauhityabhāg*

*viśrāmyāmy aham īśvarādvayakathākāntāsakhaḥ
sāmpratam ||*

Here Abhinavagupta talks about his education as a kind of progressive (and transgressive) Tantric ritual. First "purified by a full bath in grammar study," he worships the deity in his heart with "flowers of critical thinking, plucked from the vine of wisdom, blossoming at the root of sound logic." Then, having drunk to his heart's content "of beautiful literature, the wine of ambrosia," he now reposes in the arms of his lover, namely "discourse on the non-duality of the Lord (Śiva)." This last quote is what I have bolded in the compound in the final quarter. If we splice that phrase into Madhurāja's verse, everything makes sense, metrically and semantically:

*madhura-maheśvarādvayakathā-makaranda-dhuni-
parimala...*

Now the "honey" (*makaranda*) is clearly metaphorically identified with discourse on the non-duality of Śiva, a mainstay of Abhinavagupta's philosophical theology. Moreover, the adjective *madhura*, sweet, can be safely repositioned at the beginning of the compound. Not only does my conjecture fit the meter, it can also be plausibly explained as another of Madhurāja's clever allusions.

Before we could congratulate ourselves on a historic accomplishment, however, we realized that V. Raghavan's 1949 edition of the *Gurunāthaparāmarśa* had more or less the correct reading the whole time. It was simply not typed in properly in the KSTS edition, which made use of two additional manuscripts but apparently little use of proofreading. Raghavan's manuscript read *madhuramaheśvarakathādvaya-*, which he emended, a bit heavy-handed, to *madhuramaheśātādvayakathā-*. I think ours works better; it corrects the original metathesis and it maintains the reference to Abhinavagupta's verse in the *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarśinī*. But in this instance, the scribal error was a thoroughly modern one. I recently coined a German portmanteau for this exact situation, *Traurichtigkeit* (traurig + richtigkeit = sad-correct-ness): that feeling when you discover that an emendation you made is corroborated by another textual witness, only to realize that you can no longer display your genius in published writing.

There is still a lesson here somewhere. Maybe it is about paying attention to the misprisions of modernity. Maybe it's just that Raghavan read

everything. For my colleague and I to pause, to step out of time and into Madhurāja's mind (and, in an unintended way, into Raghavan's), was to break with what Paul Griffiths would call "consumerist reading."⁵ Although we did not replace it with religious reading, and allow our heart and mind to be nourished by the source text, that did not lessen the experience. For it was enough to think the way another person thought, to bring them into our gathering, to treat them as a companion: an intellectual exercise, begun in friendship, ending in friendship. Philology, as Victor Klemperer knew well, has unexpected consequences.⁶ It may not save us; nothing will save us; but every act that prises truth from the grips of obfuscation is a noble one in these dark times.

III. **"All you who walk by on the road,
look and see, if there is any sorrow
like my sorrow."**

LAMENTATIONS, 1:12

The image of Christ on the cross puts me in mind of a great many things: the ultimate symbol of universal suffering, the rejection of the infinite desirability of mortal life, the terrible consequence of nonviolent resistance to power. But sometimes, when I see that broken, beautiful body, I think of the hemophiliac. Both, after all, are drenched in blood. For the severe among us, the blood spills out spontaneously, not to wash away the sins of the world but to stain it, to remind it of our presence. The more invisible the disability, the more the desire to be seen. The hemophilologist, then, is a kind of secular witness, offering an account of truth, pain, sensitivity, and care, all at once—a virtue of the most humane scholars I have known.

That I once sought to separate my intellectual and physical lives, and now want to integrate them openly, is neither new nor unique. It is simply the sort of reflection I think is urgent for a society—civil, academic, and otherwise—that is so frayed and fractured, unable to reckon with the violence and sickness of its past and present. It is not enough to have had a stable, safe life, though that is the bare minimum that we must demand for all; life, to be life, has to be a flourishing, for the poor, for the weak, for the disabled. If I, motivated by the recognition of the care I have received, am trying to cultivate the same within my closest relationships, I see no reason not to have the same attitude

toward the texts I read, the students I teach, and the writing I never publish.

I was born on the wrong end of a genetic malfunction, a code misread, a link snapped off. By no effort or merit of my own, I have been made to feel whole. So I try, and fail, try again, fail again, and fail better, to direct that sense of fullness to others. Sometimes those others are, like me, corrupted texts. Sometimes they are loved ones. And sometimes, because life is unkind, they are just out for blood. I can help with that.

1 J.M. Coetzee, *Slow Man* (Penguin, 2006).

2 Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine, 1965), pp. 387–388.

3 "City Desk," Chicago, 1963: [youtube.com/watch?v=xcjJEgUnsHc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcjJEgUnsHc).

4 "And we will know him then for what he was and is—a Prince—our own black shining Prince!—who didn't hesitate to die, because he loved us so." Ossie Davis, "Eulogy."

5 Paul Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (Oxford, 1999).

6 Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: A Philologist's Notebooks* (Continuum, 2006).

Anand Venkatkrishnan is Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School. His book in progress, Love in the Time of Scholarship: The Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Indian Intellectual History, examines the relationship of bhakti, religion as lived affect, with philosophy as intellectual practice. It shows how Sanskrit scholars in early modern India allowed personal religious commitments to feature in and reshape their scholastic writing, a genre that was generally impervious to everyday life. His second project, Left-Hand Practice, studies the writings of a set of loosely related religious intellectuals in early 20th C. India who had significant ties with the political left.

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Faculty News



KEVIN HECTOR, Associate Professor of Theology and of the Philosophy of Religions, has been awarded a grant to study Memory and Personal Identity from the Templeton Foundation as part of a larger three-year collaborative project, titled ‘Collaborative Inquiries in Christian Theological Anthropology.’

Regarding the project, he says: “My next major project is part of a three-year, five-million-dollar grant that brings together a dozen scholars of religion who are pursuing research that engages substantially with science. My project is to investigate the role that memory plays in the construction of personal identity and, in connection with this, the light that this

can shed on theological notions like confession, testimony, and ‘telling one’s story,’ as well as the light that the latter can shed on the former.”

Hector has been a member of the University of Chicago’s faculty since 2007, during which time he has published both *Theology without Metaphysics* (2011) and *The Theological Project of Modernism: Faith and the Conditions of Mineness* (2015). He was the recipient of the University’s Faculty Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Mentoring in 2013. His scholarly work on both traditional and modern theology focuses on how to best understand faith commitments and how the outworking of faith commitments can shed light on broader cultural issues.



ALIREZA DOOSTDAR, Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies and the Anthropology of Religion, has been awarded the 2020 Vinson Sutlive Book Prize by the Anthropology Department at William & Mary, given to the best book utilizing anthropological perspectives in its examination of historical contexts and/or the role of the past in the

present. His book, *The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny*, explores contemporary Iranian metaphysical pursuits and their relationship

with science, state orthodoxy, and politics, an embodiment of his broader scholarly work on the connections between scientific domains and the occult in Iran. Doostdar, a member of the University of Chicago’s faculty since 2012, also received the 2018 Albert Hourani Book Award from MESA (the Middle East Studies Association) for his book.



WILLIMIEN OTTEN has been awarded an honorary doctorate from Københavns Universitet (University of Copenhagen), Denmark. Honorary doctorates are awarded to

researchers who have played a significant role in research or education and are the highest academic accolade that the University confers without the recipient first having defended a doctoral thesis in Denmark. Otten, Professor of the History of Christianity and Theology and Director of the Marty Center for the Public Understanding of Religion, studies the history of Christianity and Christian thought with a focus on the medieval and the early Christian intellectual tradition.





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