

'The Good, Goods and the Good Life'

Biennial Conference in Philosophy, Religion and Culture - 2004

Abstracts

Angert-Quilter, Theresa

Macquarie - History

Acts of Thecla, The Good, The Goods and The Good Life

My paper is an examination of the theology of virtue and the ascetic life in the Acts of Thecla. The Acts of Thecla which are a part of Codex Sinaiticus, witness to a very early Christology and Ethics contemporary with the New Testament. This Acta is representative of a body of orthodox Christian literature which was only discouraged in mainstream Christian tradition in the late Patristic period in the West. It maintained a strong influence even after its suppression in the West, and has never been sidelined in Eastern Christian thought. The Christology and Ethics of this text is born out both in its understanding of what is good and in its critical attitudes toward the acquisition of property and domestic stability. Saint Thecla remains a role model of the Spiritual Doctor serving the Living God. Her commitment to radical itinerancy for the sake of the Gospel and the text's tradition of the goodness of Christ are still inspirational.

Buckley, Tim

University of Sydney

The Republic and Gravity's Rainbow: Living under the Sign

In quite different ways Plato's Republic and Thomas Pynchon's most infamous novel are connected by literally overarching themes (for the symmetrical structure of the Republic cf. Brumbaugh 1987). Few texts are submitted with quite so much gusto to a dominant idea or sign as these. In the Republic the master-sign is the concept of justice; in GR it is the V-2 bomb as the anti-Rainbow (anti in that it is sign of a broken covenant, in perhaps because it is a sign of defiance created by the human race in the face of God).

Intimately connected to this thorough binding of the text to a single sign is a problem presented by both texts. What kind of life does one lead under a sign? And if we accept "the good" as a principle, as a determining sign etc, does "the good life" form organic whole, or are the two halves of the formula to some extent mutually destructive? Any reader of the Republic must reasonably ask whether the strictures imposed on life by justice are a worthwhile trade-off. And any reader of GR must be struck by the way that the life under the anti-Rainbow, precisely through being perverted, re-channelled, dammed, is utterly riotous in its proliferation (just as it is in the debased constitutions of Republic VIII).

Butler, Joel

Faculty of Law, University of Sydney

Reading Paris Hilton's "Simple Life" as a return to the lost paradise? Traditional conceptions of the simple life and some thoughts on the resurrection of the body

Contemporary popular readings of the Fox Television network's popular television series "The Simple Life" depict the two main characters of the series, Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie, as spoilt and self-absorbed rich girls indulging their immaturity among the simple, honest and hard working innocents of a small rural American community.

However, an alternate reading is possible. Prior to their fall, Adam and Eve were said to have existed in a garden where everything their hearts desired was plentiful and there for the taking. After the fall, and coexisting with a fall from innocence and grace, the pair were condemned to a life of toil and suffering. Would it be possible to read the series "The Simple Life" as an allegory of a return to the Garden? In such a reading, the rich girls apparent selfish naivety might be read as a primeval innocence, and the "simple life" of the girls' rural hosts a reflection of a fallen state of being in the world.

The paper shows that viewing the structure of the series in this matter gives rise to some interesting insights on the nature not only of our fallen corrupted state but also raises some interesting questions about our future natures as resurrected bodies. The paper examines both biblical concepts of the good life and early Church father's conceptions of the earthly paradise and contextualises these with contemporary concepts of the "good" and "simple" lives.

Colledge, Richard

St Paul's Theological College, Brisbane, University of Qld.

Being and the Intimation of the Good: William Desmond's 'Agapeic' Ontology

The paper deals with a key theme in the work of William Desmond: viz., the primordial and intrinsic goodness of being, and the need for ontology to wholeheartedly integrate this insight within its scope. Within current debate, Desmond's thinking on this theme is rare insofar as it represents an independent attempt (i.e., substantially unaligned to any particular 'school' of thought such as Thomism) to ground ethical, aesthetical and religious thought in a thoroughly ontological context. The paper begins by establishing Desmond's key claim about the intrinsic goodness of being in the context of what he characterises as the nihilism of the modern assumption of the rift between being and value. In the context of his affirmation of this primal goodness, the paper then traces Desmond's confrontation with the problem of the meaning and origin of both moral goodness and evil, particularly in terms of his take on the *conatus essendi* of beings and human beings in particular. In broadly affirming his account, questions are nonetheless raised in the paper concerning his resolution of the problem of the persistence of evil through a quasi-theological vision that has moved beyond the realm of hermeneutic ontology per se. This problem comes into particular focus with regard to the tensions in his account of 'natural evil' and the questions raised there concerning whether an "agapeic origin" so globally conceived can simultaneously be understood as the source of an agapeic care that is intimate to the singular existent. Nonetheless, these methodological 'over-reachings' aside, what is affirmed is his fierce determination to dwell mindfully in what he describes as the "perplexity of the between", while pointing the way toward a "metaphysical trust" in the agape of being.

Cowburn, John

United Faculty of Theology

The Word 'Value'

This paper will examine the history of the word 'value'; values and ethics; and axiological problems.

Curkpatrick, Stephen

Churches of Christ Theological College, Victoria

Levinas and envisaging intangible imperatives for the good

Modern consumerism pervades everything that is personal, including the uniqueness of the human face. While this phenomenon challenges ethics based on *the face of the other* (Levinas), such ethics can be interpreted within non-phenomenological possibilities in a context where the face has assumed the plasticity of a mere consumer visage. Initially, this assertion asks if the face is irresistible in the quest for ethical leverage and as an imperative for *the good* (*apropos* Levinas). H.G. Wells's *Country of Blind*, situated in an ambiguous overlap between sight, blindness, sociality and imagination, provides a literary surface to explore *the face* within intangible ethical imperatives for the good.

Dockrill, David

University of Newcastle – Liberal Studies

The Goodness of God and the Pre-existence of the Soul: the Promise and Problems of a central doctrine in Seventeenth Century Neo-Origenism

The mid-seventeenth century Cambridge revival of Christian Platonism led to a reassessment and positive estimation of Origen's Platonistic Christian theology. Some of the Cambridge Platonists and others, most notably Henry More, George Rust, and Joseph Glanvill came to construct Neo-Origenist theologies in which the soul's celestial pre-existence of earthly life and its fall through sin into the terrestrial state were central theses with significant theological ramifications. The case for the soul's pre-existence was based upon two considerations. First, the central doctrine of Platonic theism, viz., that God cannot will that which is other than the best. The second, the crucial role which this doctrine can play in making clear the justice of God's providence. The doctrine of pre-existence was viewed by its diverse critics as either heretical and/or groundless. Among the former were conservative catholic minded Anglicans who returned to Cambridge early in the Restoration of Charles II. They were theologians who were deeply disturbed by the anonymous A Letter of Resolution Concerning Origen (1661), commonly but problematically attributed to Rust, and More's Immortality of the Soul (1659) and The Grand Mystery of Godliness (1660), a christological study in which the pre-existence of the soul and other Origenian doctrines were applied. The latter included a range of critics: Cambridge

Platonists and Latitudinarians such as More's fellow leader in the Platonic revival, Ralph Cudworth and Platonically influenced Latitudinarian divines such as Edward Stillingfleet as well as leading Anglican figures such as Samuel Parker and Issac Barrow and non-conformists Edward Warren and Theophilus Gale. In stating and defending the doctrine of the soul's pre-existence, More was the undoubted leader through his many writings on the topic starting with his *Philosophical Poems* (1647) and ending with his detailed 1681 commentary on Glanvill's *Lux Orientalis* (1662), the most attractive and focussed of the works in support of the Neo-Origenist view. More's 1681 commentary on Glanvill's provided him with the opportunity to reply to his critics, particularly Parker and Warren. His success in further recommending the doctrine, however, was limited. Internally, the hypotheses of existence and a pre-terrestrial fall raised questions which showed to ill-effect their dubious speculative basis. More importantly, the climate of opinion, an expression used by Glanvill, was changing. The conditions which must be met for Neo-Origenism to flourish include a culture where a Platonic metaphysic is a powerful option for understanding the world in its God-given diversity. In mid-century the revival of Platonism in Cambridge was such an option; by the end of the century its force had started to ebb.

Douglas, Alexander

Australian National University

The Virtual Good: Absolutism and Virtuality in Moral Belief

Authors like Slavoj Žižek strongly criticise modern society for favouring a pluralist, pragmatic "ethics" of tolerance over a project of positing genuine positive moral and political beliefs. True radicalism cannot fit into this conservative logic, which demands that all moral or political beliefs be tempered by a self-effacing acknowledgment of their own subjectivity. Against this conservatism, Žižek calls for a radical Hegelian positing of moral beliefs as both universal and necessary, not reduced to fit into an order of pluralist tolerance. As the philosopher of Difference, Deleuze becomes, for Žižek, the representative of this tolerant, pluralist pragmatism. Against this Deleuze, Žižek attempts to read a different Deleuze, the Deleuze of the virtual Whole, which Žižek allies with his own Hegelian notion of the immanent Absolute: political practice as both necessary and universal. But Žižek fails to see the connection between Deleuze's key concepts, between Difference and the Virtual. While Žižek is correct that Deleuze's concept of the Virtual can be invoked as a remedy to today's pluralist, conservative nihilism, he ignores Deleuze's assertion that this virtual Whole precisely can never be *given*; instead it is always differentially actualised by the creation of new differences, new lines of differentiation. Difference is creative for Deleuze; that Žižek is wrong in equating Deleuze's notion of difference with the trend toward today's decentralised global capitalism is apparent in the lack of creativity in this social order. A Deleuzian solution to the 'stagnation' of modern politics would thus reside in bursts of creativity, new actualisations, new lines of difference, which would not at all be a positing of the Absolute but a re-opening of the actual to the virtual Whole from which it is actualised. Deleuze and Žižek conceive of very different problems with the social order: for Deleuze it is a lack of creativity and openness, while for Žižek it is a lack of universality and transcendence. I wish to argue, drawing from Deleuze's Bergsonian inheritance (which Žižek ignores) that Deleuze's creative revolutionism seems much more to the point than Žižek's Absolute revolutionism in a social order whose lack of radicalism seems to be drawn from boredom, disinterest, and indifference, not tolerance, pluralism, and difference.

Drum, Peter

Australian Catholic University – St Patrick's

The Forgotten Virtues: The Intellectual Virtues in Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas

It is argued that a number of recent virtue accounts of the good life say little or nothing about the intellectual virtues, so we are left wondering whether Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas were wrong in thinking that they were necessary for human flourishing. The Aristotelian account of the virtues and their role in living well is examined, to the conclusion that the intellectual virtues remain essential for human flourishing; therefore, where they omitted from conceptions of the good life, they should be unambiguously reinstated.

Duncan, Bruce

Yarra Theological Union

The notion of the good in the development economics of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum: is it 'thick' enough?

The UN Millennium Goals to help eradicate hunger and poverty in the world owe much to the work of some notable economists, including on the popular level, Amartya Sen. With the aid of the Aristotelian, Martha Nussbaum, Sen has developed an argument about human wellbeing based on his conception of enlarging human capabilities as essential for freedom. Nussbaum has argued for a 'thick, vague concept' of the good as the basis on which to build international consensus about strategies to reduce poverty and hunger.

Sen has also developed a critique of economics for its utilitarian assumptions, and argued that the 'engineering approach' has resulted in the separation of economics from ethics, and the impoverishment of both disciplines.

This essay presents an evaluation of the work of Sen and Nussbaum from the point of view of their philosophical views about teleology as it bears on economics, and particularly considers their work in the light of the writings of Leo Strauss.

Farrell, Marie

Catholic Institute of Sydney

'Bonum diffusivum sui': Theology of 'The Good' in Thomas and Dionysius

In considering the theology of divine procession and the abundant fecundity within God, (ST I 27, 5) St Thomas draws explicitly upon the wisdom of Dionysius concerning 'the Good' as is set out in Chapter IV of the *Divine Names*. It is here that we meet the axiom acknowledging that the very nature of goodness is to be diffusive of itself:

'Let us move on now to the name "Good", which the sacred writers have preeminently set apart for the supra-divine God from all other names. They call the divine subsistence itself "goodness". This essential Good, by the very fact of its existence, extends goodness into all things.'

The purpose of this reflection is to recall first of all Dionysius' eulogy — we might well say supra-eulogy — of 'the Good' as it pertains to God. 'Soundings' from St Thomas' *Summa Theologiae* will then be taken with the view to re-appropriating, perhaps, an appreciation of the attribute of goodness as it affects contemporary theological anthropology and Christian spirituality.

Farrelly, Ross

John Colet School, Belrose.

Preliminary title of paper: Integration of Essence and Expression – The Key to a Good Life

Aristotle made the observation that in order to determine what is good for something, you need to know what sort of a thing it is. Thus if we want to know what sort of life will be good for us, we need to have self knowledge. We need to know our own nature and to live in accordance with that nature. We must have integration of essence and expression. Thus the full discovery of human nature and a complete realisation of that human nature in thought, word and deed is the telos which lies at the heart of a good life.

How man's essential nature can be discovered and the realised in action is an age old question. Is there a common human nature or are all people uniquely individual? This paper suggests some aspects of a common human nature and draws on recent research by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and the concept of psychic negentropy to suggest a mode of action which is best suited to the expression of this nature.

Forrest, Peter

School of Social Science, Arts, University of New England.

Collective Pride and Collective Shame

Suppose something has gone so badly wrong with the divine plan that we are all damned (to a pleasant but futile Hell) The exceptions form a handful of genuine saints. In that situation we might think that the handful of the saved had not achieved as high a good as they would have had the rest of us been saved as well. That suggests that the highest good for individual human beings requires participation in a community that achieves a great good. The purpose of this paper is to give an account of a collective good and a collective evil that are irreducible to what is good and bad for individuals, namely pride and shame, and how this collective good impacts on the individual good, namely by participating in collective pride or shame. Applications will be made to the teachings of Original "Sin" and of Redemption.

Fox, John

La Trobe University

The Best Things in Life are Free

Clearly, many of the best things in life - love and friendship, understanding and mastery of skills - cannot be bought, but can be debased by being conceived and dealt with in terms of economic categories. But this paper focuses on a positive alternative conception of such goods, using a notion of mutuality and some ideas of Butler and Whitehead to argue that they are significantly alike. Incidentally, this reinforces a picture of the worthwhile human life as much freer than is suggested by its painting in universalistic and deontological terms.

Franklin, James

School of Mathematics, UNSW.

Secular versus Catholic conceptions of the Good in Australian education

The designers of the Australian secular education system in the 1880s had many answers to Archbishop Vaughan's charge that state schools were of their nature "seedplots of future immorality, infidelity and lawlessness". They included civics and morals lessons, instruction on the "common core" of Christianity, conceptions from Freemasonry, the Empire, the classics, organised sports and cadets. The theory and practice of these plans will be briefly surveyed, as will Catholic criticisms and alternatives, in the light of Catholics' denial of divine command theories of the Good. Some attention will be given to the philosophical question of whether a conception of the Good without God is coherent. The examples will mostly be taken from my book *Corrupting the Youth: A History of Philosophy in Australia*.

Gentle, Allison

United Theological College

God, good, goods: Divine Providence in the 21st Century

Nearly a hundred years ago, Evelyn Underhill identified two poles in religion: the mystical and the magical. The mystical seeks after God for God's own sake; the magical seeks after God for the favours God can bestow.

This paper looks at the contemporary religious landscape in the light of this distinction: How close is the "prosperity gospel" of Brian Houston to the "prosperity consciousness" of Anthony Robbins? Is the middle-class lifestyle of the average churchgoer evidence of a God who provides or are we beneficiaries of, and perpetrators of, institutional sin? Has "divine providence" become a justificatory ideology for Christian and post-modern seeker alike?

And where can we find unself-interested seeking after God? Is this a personal discipline to be found in individuals on various paths and in various Christian denominations? Or are there identifiable centres of mysticism in the contemporary scene?

Gray, Frances

University of New England

Death, Philosophical Praxis and the Good Life

This paper explores the consequences of acknowledging that we are the dead walking with the dead. I argue that if we take the view that life frames death, rather than the view that death frames life, then we are forced to refigure our living as ethical creatures. Using Aristotle's notion that we become virtuous by practising virtue, I argue that happiness thought of in terms of human flourishing, should temper our attitude to death as the inevitable end we must all encounter. Acknowledgement of our dying and our death enhances the ethical imperative to live virtuously and to promote human flourishing. I adopt a Buddhist reading of death and dying to interpret the Aristotelian perspective.

Helmy, Nicole

University of New England

Emanuel Levinas and the Good beyond Being: Does Ethics Need the Good?

Appropriating Plato's definition, "The Good is beyond being")-, Levinas maps out the journey of the self from its captivity in a "being without exit" to the Good that is "otherwise than being". Levinas' premise is the amphibology of "being"- distinct existents and the existence they have in common.

Weariness, indolence, shame and nausea attest to the self's desire to escape from the horror of the "there is", being without exit. In ipseity, contentment with him/herself, the "I" achieves separation from the totality of the "there is", but s/he soon grows restless in the uncertainty of its future and solitude. Venturing from his/her dwelling, the "I" encounters the Other whose absolute alterity challenges its sovereignty. In the face of the Other, there is an accusation and a demand that cannot be escaped from. The response, "here I am", constitutes the move beyond being –achieving ethical subjectivity.

Levinas' Good is not an ontological category. From its first stirrings, subjectivity is a desire to escape to an otherwise than being, fulfilled in the response to and for the Other. Is then the Good a guide that is no longer needed past the ethical moment?

Hutchison, Katrina

Australian National University

Can we choose between the Good, goods and living the good life? Assessing recent philosophical accounts of free will

In attempting to reconcile free will with the possibility that determinism is true, some philosophers (such as John Martin Fischer and Harry Frankfurt) rely on the distinction between "guidance control" (the type of control that requires an individual to be the ultimate source of her actions, but does not require that she is able to choose between more than one action) and "regulative control" (the type of control that requires that there are a range of possible actions, compatible with the facts of the past, from which an individual can choose). It is control of the former variety that some philosophers (largely following in the footsteps of Harry Frankfurt) make use of when they argue that the ability to do otherwise is not a requirement of a theory of free will, or a requirement for holding someone morally responsible for their actions. My intention is that the paper will look at recent compatibilist accounts of free will in relation to both causal and theological determinism, with a mind to providing or choosing an account that retains the individual's ability to do otherwise.

Karalis, Vrasidas

Dept of Modern Greek, University of Sydney

The idea of privatio boni as the source of evil and Paul's perception of goodness in his Epistle to the Romans (a post Christian reading)

The main thesis of this paper is that the identification of evil with the privation of good is one of main sources of error in the understanding of what good and goodness are about and in the perception of a good life within Christianity. The relationship between good and evil has been one of the most influential hellenic elements in Christian tradition and in the way that Christian life has been perceived. However, post Christian readings of Paul's letter to the Romans (that is reading his letters without reference to the tradition that has been established around them) give a completely new perceptual orientation to what it means to be good both in actuality and intentionality. The main thesis of this paper is that Paul's ethics of goodness go beyond philosophical ethics of Plato and Aristotle and can be useful today when Christianity is challenged by oriental ethics of enlightened self-knowledge or the normative morality of modern authoritarian institutions.

Keane, Beppie

Macquarie University

The Child and the Good Life: Some Problems with Good and Evil in Young Adult Fantasy Literature

In *Literature and Evil* Georges Bataille identifies a trend in the construction of Good and Evil in literature: "Good" is the realm of reason, while "Evil" is represented by puerile forces of chaos. Childhood, for Bataille, represents a pre-moral wilderness, and he purports that Evil is the result of attempts to regain the freedom associated with childhood in refusing to accept the social constraints of adulthood. I will attempt to demonstrate in this paper that although Bataille's vision of Good and Evil is culturally pervasive, and most certainly present in fantasy literature written for adolescents, it is problematic in that it is irreconcilable with any reading of a child as a moral character.

Frequently, fantasy literature-- that is, literature in which fantastic elements such as magic play a pivotal role in the development of the text-- will depict Good and Evil as tangible forces, engaged in a struggle with tangible consequences. Fantasy literature for young adults operating thus often works in a two-fold manner that appears to affirm Bataille's notions of Good and Evil. Not only is Good represented a force of reason, and Evil as one of chaos, but the protagonists, being on the cusp of adulthood must choose reason over disorder in order to take their place in the author's vision of the "Good" life.

The process of choosing reason over the chaotic, unfixed nature of childhood occurs in texts that superficially contradict each other, such as C. S. Lewis's "Chronicles of Narnia" and Philip Pullman's "His Dark Materials". In both, the Good life is ultimately obtained by accepting the premise that reason is essential to forces of Good, while attempts to retain the puerile into adulthood is associated with succumbing to Evil.

This reading of young adult fantasy, however, becomes problematic when viewing the child protagonist as an entity capable of moral action. The weight of any moral action undertaken before the shift into adolescence and/or adulthood is trivialised by the child's status, but paradoxically, the child must be capable of serious moral action in order to become an adult. In resolving this paradox, either Bataille's vision of Good and Evil, or the child's status within that framework must be reassessed.

Kent, Grenville

Wesley Institute

Cybersex, Solipsism and the Song of Solomon

- A Sydney scientist recently patented a computer-controlled doll designed to enable virtual sex over the Internet.
- US\$1.5 billion is spent on porn sites yearly – a tithe of all money spent online.

Is much-hyped communication technology magically bringing us together, or somehow keeping us apart – from others and from ourselves? And what of the human soul? Can our relationships be adequately described by reductionism (making us "nothing but mammals", as the contemporary song puts it), or by traditional religious dualism, or do we need a more wholistic anthropology?

This paper will interrogate contemporary media/messages of sexuality from the theological standpoint of the Song of Solomon, a millennia-old text which has received growing attention in recent years.

Grenville Kent is lecturer in Old Testament at Wesley Institute and teaches courses on faith and the arts for dance, drama and design students. He has two degrees in Film and has directed documentaries, short dramas, commercials and animations. He is also working on a PhD in Old Testament literature from the University of Manchester.

Leach, Joe

Dept. of Geomatics, University of Melbourne.

Sacred Place or Cartesian Co-ordinates - A Clash of Spatial Ontologies

In deliberations at the Native Title Tribunal it has become clear that Australia's indigenous people and modern western culture view the world in very different ways. In the indigenous communities, territory is determined by story and song whereas in western law it is a matter of surveyed boundaries. This causes problems in native title determination but it is only a symptom of a deeper clash in the way the different cultures view the nature of space and the world around them. In traditional societies, space is defined by human and sacred values while modern western culture views space as a three dimensional grid extending to infinity, warped perhaps by gravity but independent of human existence or perception. Since the sacred and the divine can not be measured nor confined within such a grid, this utilitarian, reductionist view has no place for them - they do not fit. Not only does this give our society problems when conversing with meaning rich traditional societies but it also means that many in society live out their lives in a hostile, indifferent universe devoid of meaning. This paper will examine the way in which such a view of space developed within western culture and consider some alternative approaches.

Lynch, Tony and Avery, Stephen

School of Social Science, Arts, University of New England.

Singular Justification

We contend it makes sense to say that an action or decision A may be "right-for-X", but that just the same decision A, in the same circumstances -- whether conceived as the particularist or generalist has it -- may properly said to be "wrong-for-Y".

By this formulation we do not mean that different agents may come to take different things to be "right" or "wrong" in the same circumstances, but the stronger point that, for these different agents, it is a genuine possibility that different things are right and wrong. Once admitted, this possibility has implications on both the third and first-personal levels. Third personally, it implies that we should "relax our interest" in the hope for principled consensus on whether or not an agent did the "right thing"; while on the latter level it suggests that we allow "some special primacy" to the deliberating agent's "own findings and the decision that only he can make."

McCullagh, Behan

La Trobe University - Philosophy

Is a Christian life a good one?

Judgements of the value of a Christian life vary with the values of the judge. To those who value happiness it can seem miserable. To others who value the moral law it can seem wayward. Are there any universal values by which it can be judged? Not if values are a function of beliefs; but perhaps, if they are a function of dispositions.

Mintoff, Joe

University of Newcastle – Liberal Arts

Does life have an ultimate end?

Aristotle claims that there is some ultimate end - happiness, living or doing well - for the sake of which all intentional actions of a rational human being are done. Such a claim was the backbone of ancient ethics, and is a necessary part of any ethics claiming to discuss the good life (considered as a whole). However, depending on the relevant interpretation, Aristotle's argument for this claim either is premised on a natural teleology not currently in fashion, or involves an inference which is blatantly fallacious. The purpose of this paper is to briefly canvass recent arguments for this type of claim, which attempt to avoid these defects.

Mooney, T. Brian

University of Notre Dame

The Good of Communication: An existential analysis of communication break-down

One of the most common forms of debate involves the problem of "pidgeon-holing". We often seek to characterise others in respect to generic forms of discourse – you are left-wing, a feminist, a Catholic etc. This problem is rendered even more intractable when the very words that a philosophical or theological opponent uses are used in such a way that meanings become incommensurable or worse one simply doesn't understand the meaning at all. In Plato's dialogue *Gorgias* he broaches this problematic with a very interesting solution that has considerable appeal for contemporary problems.

Murray, Andrew

Catholic Institute of Sydney

Aristotle, the Good Life and a Good Constitution

Concerning the best regime, one who is going to undertake the investigation appropriate to it must necessarily discuss first what the most choiceworthy way of life is.' Aristotle, *Politics* VII, 1 (1323b14). At the beginning of his examination of the best possible regime, Aristotle indicates that determination of the best constitutional arrangements with depend on an understanding of what is the best kind of life. This stands in contrast to the modern liberal proposal that constitutional arrangements leave the question of the good life to the personal choice of citizens. This paper will use some of the work of Martha Nussbaum to explore the Aristotelian conception. Behind it is an interest in looking at the issues of emerging Pacific states, which may not find current Western conceptions of the state satisfactory arrangements due to discontinuities with existing culture and custom.

Owens, John F

Good Shepherd College, Auckland NZ

Aiming Beyond The Human As A Human Good: The Question of Transcendence

Much traditional philosophy thought that human life is to be understood in terms of something fundamentally beyond it, from which it derives, and to which it relates to get its significance. A major strand of contemporary philosophy calls this in question, fiercely resisting the idea that the human should be defined in terms of anything beyond it. Rather it sets out resolutely to describe the human in its own terms, refusing any reference to higher orders of things. Unlike some earlier attempts to carry out such a project, it manages to avoid any taint of calculative materialism or self-centredness. In the process it re-thinks some important categories which were traditionally associated with the human, in particular, notions of truth and moral goodness. The paper will discuss these questions with reference to such writers as Martha Nussbaum, Richard Rorty and Bernard Williams. It will examine the place of nominalist presuppositions in the twentieth century aversion to transcendence as a human good, and try to suggest a way ahead.

Pattenden, Rod

United Theological College

You cannot store up goods for heaven: Apocalypse and Art: George Gittoes

This paper examines the work of the Sydney artist George Gittoes who has made war and terrorism his subject matter. Since the mid 1980's, when he was influenced by movements of liberation in Nicaragua and the Philippines, Gittoes has sought to use his art as a medium of political investigation into the conditions of human survival and compassion.

He has been influenced by his understanding of Liberation Theology and the artistic practise of artists such as Vincent van Gogh who sought to make viewers aware of the horizon they inhabited as social and religious creatures.

Gittoes has investigated a variety of situations where conditions approach that of apocalypse – where values are under stress and lives are overturned in radical change, despair or hope.

Most recently he has been working on a body of work that has been drawn from visits to New York and Baghdad - both before and after the entry of US led forces in that city. From this eyewitness vantage point he has sought to make sense of the world of politics, religion and life after 'September 11' in the places most affected by the conditions of terrorism.

This presentation will focus on works and strategies that are present in the exhibition *No Exit: A Tale of Two Cities* that will be on exhibition at the Macquarie University Art Gallery at the time of this conference and curated by the author of this paper.

The curatorial approach will be investigated by connecting the artist's work with categories of apocalypse and the role of the 'artist as prophet' in the current post-modernist environment. Can art redeem, create or preserve the future as God's gift?

This paper intentionally seeks to make present to Theology the rich resources of the visual arts as means of accessing contemporary culture.

Pont, Graham

UNSW, Retired.

Good Living in Australia: the Vision of Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin

The problem of how to live a good life in Australia - as an Australian and not just a translated European – was very rarely addressed by the 19th-century colonials, most of whom tried as best they could to follow a traditional British life-style. An important exception was Dr Phillip E. Muskett (1857-1909), whose book 'The Art of Living in Australia' (1894) was the first systematic attempt to formulate a code of antipodean living based on geographical, climatic and health considerations: Australia, for Muskett, was 'practically southern Europe' and so 'with time and care Australia ought to be the vineyard of the world'. A century later, his agronomic prognostications and their gastronomic corollaries have largely been confirmed.

As its title indicates, Muskett's book really belonged to the Federation movement, which was powerfully affected by the first three international exhibitions held in Australia – Sydney 1879 and Melbourne 1880 and 1888. These great events not only promoted the aspirations to nationhood but also revealed the possibilities of a better and more appropriate life-style for Australians in general.

The gaining of nationhood in 1901 was not immediately followed by any significant progress in the literature beyond Muskett, who committed suicide in 1909. His next most important successors were the American architects Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin who, having won the international

competition for the design of Federal Capital in 1912, soon became permanent residents and passionate admirers of the local landscape..

During their Australian career of more than twenty years the Griffins completed the general plan of Canberra, revolutionised local architectural design and town-planning, built our first great restaurant (the Cafe Australia in Melbourne) and laid the foundations, both practical and philosophical, of what is widely considered today to be a good Australian life-style: one that is environmentally appropriate, ecologically sustainable, aesthetically satisfying, artistically creative, philosophically enlightened and spiritually harmonious.

This paper will attempt to summarise and evaluate the Griffins' most significant contributions to Australian life and thought, which extend well beyond their architecture and town-planning. In trying to create and live the Good Life in Australia, the Griffins systematically explored not only the possibilities of available science and technology but also boldly extended their research and speculation into history, philosophy, religion, economics, metaphysics, politics and ethics – even astrology, spiritualism and the occult.

Ironically, the most important evidence of their pioneering efforts in Australia is to be found in Marion Griffin's unpublished memoirs, 'The Magic of America', an extraordinary work which reveals the author as Australia's first female philosopher.

Quilter, John G

Australian Catholic University

The Religious and the Transcendence of the Good

In recent years, a number of theistic philosophers have sought to bring to bear on Natural Theology, the thought that the goodness in or of the world and the goodness of God should be brought into relation to address certain problems in philosophy. In particular, Robert M Adams in ***Finite and Infinite Goods***, develops this idea to offer a "framework for ethics". In many ways a sophisticated reformulation of the Platonistic Christianity of St Augustine, Adams' project is a comprehensive abstract account of many moral-philosophical chestnuts from the agenda of the Analytic tradition: the nature of *the good*, the nature of obligation, its relation to divine commands, and an approach to a number of questions in Metaethics, *inter alia*. In this paper, I want to develop a critical appraisal of Adams' project, with an eye to the general problem(s) of the relation of faith/ religion to morality, and the viability of a *natural* theological attempt to sort it/them out. I will offer a generally sceptical appraisal, while defending the thought that religious life is a(n) (otherwise) defensible context for interpreting and giving content to ethical language. In relation to this defence, another line of thought we will pursue is the place of a notion of "transcendence" in a certain kind of conception of morality that has historically found its home primarily in Jewish and Christian thought (particularly in relation to the place of guilt and the sanctity of persons in ethics), and whether that notion is helpfully interpreted by metaphysical speculation such as Adams'.

Reid, Kate and Seton, Mark

Macquarie University / University of Sydney

'If it feels good, do it': When 'body wisdom' becomes misrecognition

In fields as diverse as the performing arts and alternative health practices, there have emerged beliefs and practices that tend to reinforce the notion that "if it feels good, do it!" This may be partially a reaction to a former claim in contexts such as sports training that "if it hurts, it's doing you some good." However, in spite of such a polarity, possibly a more truthful and responsible practice for what is actually good for the body may lie somewhere in between. How you experience and perceive your body is not always a reliable indicator of what is appropriate or sustainable for your body.

Kate Reid and Mark Seton are both performers and philosophers. They have trained in a performance practice known as InterPlay. However, they have come to question aspects of its advocacy of *bodywisdom* – the belief that the body always 'knows' what is good for you. In this joint paper, each presenter will offer a specific set of observations and critical reflections on what is "at stake" when it is advocated that the body 'knows' what is good for you.

Kate, who is also a trained speech pathologist and theatre voice teacher, will, in particular, discuss how vocal performance techniques that "feel good" may actually do harm to the voice. Mark, who has recently completed his doctoral thesis on actor training, will highlight how habitual behaviours in actor training that "feel good" may shift the body into addictive behaviours that are not sustainable.

In drawing upon the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and the sociology of Bourdieu, a key question will be pursued: Must 'goodness' be sustainable, as well as pleasurable, in order to be of value?

Scarlett, Brian

University of Melbourne

Integrity and temptation

If living a good life involves having a good character, and if a character is a settled disposition to behave in certain ways, how does temptation fit in?

In Aristotle's virtue theory, virtue excludes temptation. Peter Abelard suggests that resistance to temptation is the only source of merit. David Hume does not address the question directly, but he does stress the central role of 'durable principles'.

In this paper I attempt to produce a synoptic vision giving due weight to each of these points of view.

Smith, Greg

Australian Catholic University – Qld.

Communing with David Malouf: Considerations upon salvation

Greg's doctoral focus at ACU Banyo explores themes of salvation in selected Australian poems. The paper will outline a hermeneutical reading of Malouf's "The Crab Feast"(1980) that brings to bear these twin dimensions of annual neighbourly banqueting and the universal hope for salvation.

Moments of salvation occur in a greater awareness of self and nature and others. Such rare moments counteract the post-modern destruction of the "delicate equipoise of the human psyche" (Eagleton) to bring richer realisations of a greater perspective about one's coordinates in time and place.

They can indeed become experiences of liminality, of reaching and crossing thresholds with greater courage than has been attempted previously. Such whispers, hints, traces or outlines reveal an identification of impulses with a pull to the sublime, within a sense of the broader vision, of the bigger picture, that transcends and explains the ordinary.

Whispers of the sacred engender altruism. For the concept of salvation shifts the frame of reference beyond one's own interests, pursuits and experiences to more enduring ones. This is an experiential vector towards personal transformation, "the tug to immortality" (Malouf). Here, the poet sings of such a moment of realisation. One could call it a moment of salvation for being an intense realisation of his mortality.

Trakakis, Nick

Monash University.

The Problem of Divine Hiddenness

God is thought of as hidden in at least two ways. Firstly, God's reasons for permitting evil, particularly instances of horrendous evil, are often thought to be inscrutable or beyond our ken. Secondly, and perhaps more problematically, God's very existence and love or concern for us is often thought to be hidden from us (or, at least, from many of us on many occasions). But if we assume, as seems most plausible, that God's reasons for permitting evil will (in many, if not most, instances) be impossible for us to comprehend, would we not expect a loving God to at least make his existence or love sufficiently clear to us so that we would know *that* there is some good, albeit inscrutable, reason why we (or others) are permitted to suffer? In this paper I will examine John Hick's influential response to this question, a response predicated on the notion of 'epistemic distance': God must remain epistemically distant and hence hidden from us so as to preserve our free will.

Whitehead, Derek H***What's the Good?: Self-Critical Art and Aesthetic Value in a Hyperanimated World***

This paper interrogates the possibility of 'the Good' in art by examining the relations between aesthetics – the philosophy *about* art - and certain metaphysical issues which surround art practice in the hyperanimate conditions of the contemporary world. The concept of the Good derives its lineage from the Ancient Greek *agathon* and the Latin *summum bonum*. However, the Good in its contemporary dress appears fraught and endangered by a postmodern autonomy which insists on forceful modes of self-realisation. This has taken eclectic, confronting and undiluted forms in the art of our time. The aesthetic impulse consciously wills into existence a certain *inalienable* art practice, and seeks to account for the creative urgencies felt within artists themselves, thereby defining them and their work in relation to - and often over against - the prevailing socio-cultural attitudes of their

day. In such a setting it is necessary to argue for a rigorous art practice which feels within itself the germination of 'a call' to question the claims of the truths/untruths of much present-day art, and to do so within the nexus of counter-aesthetic values. Here, significant art, historically and contemporaneously, carries a counter-dynamic of one kind or another. A noteworthy aesthetic philosophy must not only adopt a critical position which enables the artist to become a 'truth-teller' within his/her community; it must also encourage an engagement with art by means of created works which *challenge* and *disturb*. The task before us is to regain our sense of the truth-telling capacity of an artist's being - a deeply intimate way of going about a formally critical task - and to substantiate art's essential *way of being* in the world as a transforming aesthetic value. What is required is a self-critical art practice which works to expand the greater good of the community and to civilize human aspiration. I conclude by arguing for the possibility of an ethical face-to-faceness with created realities that might signal a renewed apprehension of art and art-making to move us *toward* the Good.