SHOWCASING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH:
INTRODUCTION TO PAPERS FROM THE 7TH ANNUAL UNDERGRADUATE PHILOSOPHY CONFERENCE AT SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY EDWARDSVILLE

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For each of the last seven years, philosophy students at SIUE have organized and hosted the Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference, drawing students from throughout the United States and Canada to present their research. Beginning last year, the faculty advisers for the conference have joined with Polymath to offer conference participants the opportunity to have their papers published in a peer-reviewed journal. Papers presented at the conference are reviewed by two professors of Philosophy, who choose the very best for inclusion. From the twelve papers presented at the Seventh Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference on November 9 and 10, 2012, seven have been selected for publication in this volume.

Three of the papers selected for publication address issues concerning God and religion. In “Desire and Attachment: Finding Union with God,” Aaron Schultz of Grand Valley State University argues that we ought to emphasize the similarities between religious traditions rather than the differences. Based on a close reading of the poetry of St. John of the Cross, Schultz demonstrates the similarities between Christian and Buddhist conceptions of suffering and spiritual growth. In “Narrative Found in Nietzsche: Illuminating Our Life-Affirming Stories,” Malachi Sullivan, also from Grand Valley State University, suggests that a Nietzschean conception of narrative can help to replace the meaning that people experience as lost once they abandon belief in God. And finally, Erik Zimmerman of SIUE argues in his “Addressing the Divine: Rethinking God qua Love” that we can avoid the error of conceptualizing, and thus limiting, the being of God by understanding the divine as a kind of love, which we experience as a passivity in the face of radical otherness.

Two of the papers address contested interpretations of major figures in the history of philosophy. In “Back to Schopenhauer,” Larry Busk of Webster University argues against the facile rejection of Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy, suggesting that it ought to be taken more seriously, especially in light of current cultural trends favoring naïve optimism. And in “The Liberalism of John Stuart Mill,” James DeBew of Indiana University defends the traditional interpretation of Mill as an ethical and political liberal against a heterodox interpretation that treats him as an opponent of individual liberty.

Finally, two papers are devoted to questions relating to selfhood and personal identity. In “Strawson and Self: Reconciling Hume and Reid,” Allison Preyde of Trent University argues that two prominent conceptions of personal identity—one associated with David Hume and the other with Thomas Reid—both fail on their own terms. She goes on to argue, however, that the two theories describe personal identity more adequately if they are understood as points on a spectrum of human experience. And in “The Dissociated Self: An Archaeological and Genealogical Analysis,” Hillary Uldricks of Grand Valley State University advances a conception of the dissociated self, building on the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Uldricks argues that the self is best understood as constituted within networks of historically shifting relations of power.