UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH IN PHILOSOPHY: SELECTIONS FROM THE 8TH ANNUAL SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY EDWARDSVILLE UNDERGRADUATE PHILOSOPHY CONFERENCE

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Fall 2013 saw the continuation of one of the academic year’s highlights for the SIUE Department of Philosophy: its annual undergraduate philosophy conference. Fourteen undergraduate students from around the United States presented their papers on a rather wide range of philosophical topics. Of those fourteen papers, six were specially selected for appearance in *Polymath*. These papers were chosen both for their high quality and for collectively representing the diversity of philosophical research done across the field, a diversity that is enthusiastically endorsed by the SIUE philosophical community.

Two of the papers focused on issues and arguments raised by the prominent contemporary philosopher Alvin Plantinga. Yunus Prasetya’s (Calvin College) “An Analysis of Law’s Objection Against Plantinga” takes on the challenge of defending Plantinga’s contention that the acceptance of naturalism, and specifically evolutionary theory, renders untenable a commitment to humans having knowledge. Prasetya’s specific defense comes by way of a response to Stephen Law’s critique of Plantinga’s view. Separately, Andrew Rogers (Kansas State), in “Why Plantinga Fails to Reconcile Divine Foreknowledge and Libertarian Free Will” rejects Plantinga’s attempt to build on the work of theologian Jonathon Edwards, who argues that God’s knowing what will occur in the future does not preclude accepting that humans freely choose to act as they do.

Another pair of papers address topics broadly categorized as contemporary analytic philosophy. Adam Shatsky (Grand Valley State) takes on the question of “prepunishment” in his “Why Compatibilists Cannot Resist Prepunishment: A Defense of Smilansky.” Shatsky defends philosopher Saul Smilansky’s position that compatibilists—who hold that determinism is compatible with holding persons morally responsible for their actions—cannot avoid prepunishment (i.e. punishing a person for a wrong that she has not yet committed). The second paper is Hubert Wojciech Marciniec’s (Elmhurst College) “The Syntax of Biochemical Mentation.” Marciniec argues that biochemically constituted minds function in identical fashion as that of computer programs, and that an appreciation of that parallel offers some insights into better understanding the qualitative experience of consciousness.

The final two papers represent investigations on rather distinct subject matters. Victoria Koc (University of Pennsylvania) contends in her “Is ‘Art’ a Useless Concept?” that there is no coherent definition of art that successfully unifies all the disparate elements commonly identified as “art.” Koc maintains that, while we may not purge the concept of art from our discourse, the lack of definition implies that the concept does not carry the meaning that is routinely attached to it. Finally, in Neo Joevenn’s (DePaul University) “The Ethics of Vagrancy” we are introduced to an exploration of the ethical within a capitalist framework.

Both the philosophy faculty and students have gained much from eight years of hosting and participating in this conference. We are extremely proud of this event and are delighted to have begun in recent years offering select papers the opportunity to appear in *Polymath*. This is possible, however, only because we consistently expect to see undergraduate papers worthy of publication in this forum. Without question, the 2013 collection of papers further galvanize that expectation.