

Record #1851

Christina Van Dyke CRF Application 2009-2010

Last Name	Van Dyke	First Name	Christina	Department	Philosophy
Project Title	Beatified Bodies: Mysticism, Philosophy, and Ultimate Happiness				
Project Abstract	<p>Although contemporary scholars of medieval philosophy generally dismiss mystics and the mystic tradition as irrelevant to the philosophical concerns of the Middle Ages, medieval mystics often engage issues central to philosophical theology, such as the nature of the Trinity, God's attributes, and the possibility of universal salvation. Rather than dismissing mysticism as irrelevant to the study of medieval philosophy, in this project I address how the 'affective' mystic tradition—which focuses on the way in which mystical union can be experienced and expressed in emotional, physical, and sensory terms—intersects with a topic of significant philosophical interest: ultimate happiness, identified in the Middle Ages as our beatified existence in the afterlife. Building on my chapter on mysticism in the forthcoming Cambridge History of Philosophy and drawing on the writings of both mystics (such as Hugh of St. Victor and Gertrude the Great) and philosophers (such as Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure), I will examine points of disagreement and points of commonality between the medieval mystic and philosophic traditions to present a more comprehensive and balanced picture of beatification and the role of physicality in the afterlife than is currently available.</p>				
Outside Funding	<p>I am currently in the process of applying for funding for this project from two outside sources: 1) an NEH 2009 Summer Fellowship (for which I am one of two faculty members nominated by Calvin) and 2) an ACLS Charles Ryskamp fellowship for the academic year 2009-10.</p>				
Project Details	<p>See pg. 3</p>				
Project Outcome	<p>The final outcome of this project will be a book-length manuscript; I plan, however, to write and publish at least one chapter (focused specifically on medieval philosophical and mystic attitudes towards women's bodies) in a top journal of medieval studies (such as Speculum, Vivarium, or Mediaeval Studies) before the completion of the rest of the book. The personal benefits of this project for my scholarly life are great: it represents my first attempt to synthesize my two areas of specialization (medieval philosophy and the philosophy of gender) at the same time that it involves the further development of a fairly new area of research for me (medieval mysticism). I am extremely excited at the prospect of delving more deeply into a central area of Christian doctrine from these three perspectives. Combining these three perspectives will also benefit the profession: as I state above, scholars of medieval philosophy have almost completely neglected the mystic tradition, and scholars of mysticism have done little to engage the philosophical world in their work. I believe that contemporary work in the philosophy of gender on embodiment (on which I taught a graduate seminar last spring at CU-Boulder as a visiting scholar) provides a means of bridging these two significant fields of study. Finally, this project will benefit the college both by increasing its reputation as a home for high-level scholarship and by laying the groundwork for further interdisciplinary work in the classroom.</p>				
Pedagogical Impact	<p>This project has the potential to impact my future teaching in several ways. First, it will increase both the breadth and the depth of my knowledge of medieval philosophy and the philosophy of gender—the two main areas in which I teach. Second, it will allow me to draw connections between the two areas in ways that will enhance my teaching of both, and that will allow my students to see important interconnections between the fields that few scholars—much less students—are currently in a position to appreciate.</p>				

Finally, I hope to use this work as an impetus towards developing interdisciplinary links between the Philosophy department and other departments that teach courses in medieval studies, particularly English, History, and Classics.

Itinerary/Work Schedule As mentioned above, I am applying for a CRF in connection with an NEH 2009 Summer Fellowship, which would support the first major stage of research on this project. Regardless of whether I receive that funding, I plan to spend the summer at the University of Colorado at Boulder, availing myself of both their extensive library resources and the professional relationships I formed there on sabbatical last year with scholars who specialize in medieval philosophy, medieval mysticism, and contemporary gender studies. Having a three-course release in the Fall of 2009 would allow me to build on that initial momentum—an extremely important aspect of success for scholarly projects of this nature! Having a release for interim as well would also put me in the position of having completed the bulk of the research in both primary and secondary literature (which is a substantial task, given the demanding nature of the translations required for work in medieval mysticism and philosophy) by the end of January 2010, in addition to completing drafts of two to three chapters, at least one of which I plan to submit separately for publication. In addition, I anticipate applying for a year-long fellowship to complete the rest of the project in the 2010-2011 academic year, most likely at either the Notre Dame Center for Philosophy of Religion or the Center for the National Endowment of the Humanities.

Budget I anticipate no budget expenses for this project in addition to the three-course release and my regular research and travel fund.

Research Funding History Since joining the Calvin faculty in 2001, I have received the following research funding: • a two-course release from the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship in the spring of 2004 to complete my section of Aquinas's Ethical Theory: Metaphysical Foundations, Moral Theory, and Theological Context (currently in production at the University of Notre Dame Press and expected out in Spring 2009); • a CRF-funded two-course release in the fall of 2006 to work on a two-paper project on Robert Grosseteste's early thirteenth-century integration of Aristotelian epistemology with an Augustinian theory of divine illumination (one paper of which is coming out in the next volume of the British Journal of the History of Philosophy, and the other of which is currently resubmitted with conditional acceptance at the Journal of the History of Philosophy); • a Sabbatical Grant for the academic year 2007-8, which (together with supplemental funding from the University of Colorado at Boulder) enabled me not only to complete my editorial work on the Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy (currently in production at Cambridge University Press) but also to write and submit two brand new papers as well, one of which is the chapter on mysticism for that volume that forms the foundation for the project for which I am currently requesting funding.

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Expanded Project Description:

Contemporary scholars of medieval philosophy generally dismiss mystics and the mystic tradition as irrelevant to the philosophical concerns of the Middle Ages. Yet, even when not self-consciously engaged in formal intellectual speculation, medieval mystics often engage issues central to medieval philosophical theology, such as the nature of the Trinity, God's attributes, and the possibility of universal salvation. (Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Love*, for instance, addresses all three of those topics.) The central goal of this project is two-fold: 1) to address how the 'affective' mystic tradition—which focuses on the way in which mystical union can be experienced and expressed in emotional, physical, and sensory terms—intersects with a central topic of medieval philosophical interest: beatitude, or the ultimate happiness possible only in the afterlife, and 2) to present a more comprehensive and balanced picture of medieval conceptions of beatified bodies and the general role of physicality in the afterlife than is currently available. This project breaks important new ground in scholarship on medieval philosophy; insofar as it brings mystic texts currently outside the margins of philosophical consideration into conversation with texts that are considered more 'main-stream', it also represents an interesting opportunity for specialists in mysticism to engage with philosophical issues and literature outside their own purview.

The expected outcome of this project is a book-length manuscript, divided into three primary sections. First, I will provide a general overview of beatified existence in medieval philosophical discussions of the afterlife from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, with special attention paid to prevailing attitudes towards the resurrected body and its role in ultimate happiness; second, I will present an overview of the same topic from the perspective of the affective mystic tradition in the same time period—itsself a neglected topic in the secondary literature on medieval mysticism; third and most importantly, I will examine points of disagreement and points of commonality between the mystic and philosophic traditions in order to provide a fuller understanding of medieval attitudes towards embodiment and its relationship to happiness than can be gained by examination of either body of literature in isolation.

In undertaking this new project, I both build on earlier scholarship and draw current research interests together for the first time. In fact, my former research projects and interests suit me rather uniquely to accomplish this project. My doctoral dissertation focused on (among other things) issues of physical individuation and identity in Thomas Aquinas's account of the bodily resurrection. The nature of perfect happiness in the afterlife—and the nature of the body post-resurrection—is a closely-related topic which proves to be of substantial interest for philosophers and theologians throughout the Middle Ages; in this project I will return to Aquinas's account, also examining the views of university scholars such as Bonaventure, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham. In addition, I will also build on my recent work for the chapter on mysticism in the forthcoming *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, delving more deeply into the writings of figures such as Hugh of St. Victor, Gertrude the Great, and Catherine of Siena to examine ways in which their views of physicality and the divine are expressed in their discussions of the afterlife and beatitude.

Furthermore, in order to bridge the gap between current discussions in scholarship in medieval philosophy and medieval mysticism, I will draw on my research in the philosophy of gender. As Caroline Walker Bynum has aptly demonstrated, contemporary gender studies offers rich resources for understanding the medieval tradition of affective mysticism; to this point, however, no one has applied these resources to philosophical discussions of the bodily resurrection, much less to the connections between those discussions and mystic portrayals of ultimate happiness. I believe, however, that current theories of embodiment provide both a framework and a language in which to present a significant account of the points of tension and of agreement between these philosophers and mystics—an account that will not only illuminate our understanding of medieval conceptions of the importance of physicality in ultimate human happiness but that will also demonstrate that conception's relevance for contemporary discussions of the bodily resurrection and beatitude in philosophical theology.