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Fall Semester Highlights

Reading the Gospels, Part One - Dr Richard Horner

Mondays, 7:20-8:10 pm, for everyone, Sept 12 through Nov 21
Wednesdays, 11:45 am-12:35 pm, for students only, Sept 7 through Nov 16

Reading Group

Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind, Mark Noll (2011, Eerdmans)

Fridays, 11:45 am-12:35 pm, Sept 16 & 30, Oct 28, Nov 18
Open to the general public. Brown bag lunch

Cinema at the Center

Moments of Meaning: Viewing Movies from the Inside Out

Fridays 6:15- 9:15 pm, Sept 9 & 23, Oct 7 & 21
Open to the general public. Pizza served.



This is just a sampling of what we can offer thanks to your generous partnership.

You may also sign up for e-considerations, our e-mail newsletter, that will provide you with regular updates during the academic year.

Visit the Study Center online at christianstudycenter.org for program details & updates.

This newsletter is a publication of the Christian Study Center of Gainesville which explores the intersection of Christian thought & academic discourse.

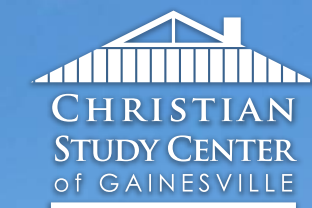


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UNDER CONSIDERATION



Sarah Hamersma

Interview: Sarah Hamersma

August 12, 2011

Long time friend and new board member Sarah Hamersma generously agreed to talk with us about her work as an assistant professor of economics and a friend to the Center. Sarah is also mom to Meredith, 4, and Lucas, 18 months and wife to Rob, an engineer at UF.

Laura: What brought you to the University of Florida?

Sarah: When I was finishing up my dissertation in economics at the University of Wisconsin, I did what most of my classmates did: I applied for almost every job available: 120 jobs! I left out a few geographic areas, hoping to stay in the Midwest or Canada (I'm Minnesotan, my husband is Canadian). There was an opening at UF in the subfield of "Applied Econometrics". My warm reception in the department and their quick offer made me quite enthusiastic about the job despite the distance from home.

Laura: We sure are glad you are here! What are your particular interests in your field of economics?

Sarah: I am very interested in anti-poverty policy. Right now, I'm doing work on understanding the effects of broadening Medicaid eligibility on peoples' employment and insurance patterns. The work I do involves large datasets (like the Census) as well as state records (such as welfare or employment records).

Laura: How does your Christian faith or understanding frame or shape your work?

Sarah: This is always a tricky question. I do think that my interest in anti-poverty policy reflects my broader interest as a Christian in issues of justice and mercy. Perhaps more than that, my faith helps inspire me to be very careful and honest in my statistical work, and to try to pass those values along to my students. I think my "applied econometrics" course is unique in spending the first couple of days discussing statistical interpretation issues and the idea of properly expressing one's numerical results in the text of a study. We find examples in which authors had such a strong notion that their analysis would show something that they convey this enthusiasm in their results even when the actual evidence is scarce. I want to give my students a critical eye when reading research. Of course, I also want to give them the tools to clearly and honestly evaluate and present their own work.

Laura: I think we've all as general citizens been confused by the variety of pronouncements made by experts armed with statistics! Certainly, a good understanding of statistical methods is vital to interpreting research. You've discussed with us a little about your research areas and the values you bring to them and to your class; perhaps you would share with us some of your hopes and aspirations as a university professor?

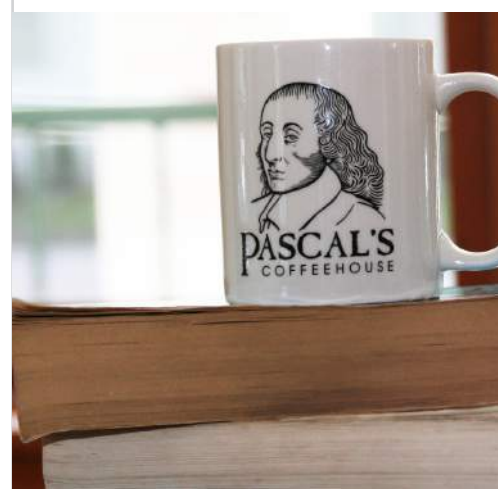
Sarah: On a personal level, my hope is to represent a sort of "plausible Christian scholar". I want to be a person about whom other economists will think: "She does good research, she is a Christian, and those identities don't seem to contradict for her." I think the view from professors in my discipline is very different from that of the students. I don't feel that students see anything particularly puzzling about a Christian professor, but I think my colleagues in the discipline of economics sometimes do.

I like the idea that there are people who might wrestle a little with the fact that I

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Students at the CSC



The new Pascal's Coffee mug

Interview: Sarah Hamersma (continued from page 1)

don't fit their mold of a Christian, which would be fairly anti-intellectual and politically myopic. I've never encountered any personal hostility among my colleagues at UF or in the discipline at large, but I have seen some general bewilderment, and that makes me smile. I enjoy the idea of challenging presuppositions that way.

I also have a strong interest in serving students during such a critical time in their lives. My students know I am a Christian from the first day of class when we do general introductions, and many semesters I have a student or two who arrive at my office hours partly to get help on homework and partly just to share that they are Christians too. Especially when these students are making big decisions, they are able to let their guard down when they tell me about unusual things they're thinking about doing, like missions or seminary. I love being that person that they can talk to. I also love the chance to share aspects of my faith when getting in a conversation with a student who doesn't share my faith outlook – for instance, when I give advice about surviving graduate school or law school, I can share that part of what made it “work” for me was a dedication to weekly Bible study and church attendance to

help me be in community with other people who shared my core beliefs. This helped me remember “who I was”. I recently told a student this and he thought it was probably the best advice he'd gotten so far. Will this make him interested in Christian faith? I don't know. Will it make him less skeptical of Christians in the future? I hope so.

Laura: One of the things I've noticed is that when you are at the Center, you sometimes have quite a group of students around you.

Sarah: Whenever I teach undergraduates, I hold office hours at the CSC just before the midterm and final exam for my course. The CSC atmosphere seems to make it a place where students are less stressed and more open with questions. We laugh a lot and also do a lot of good work. My office, while not completely formal by any means, is simply not as good for developing that rapport. The CSC space also has more room—we just pull up another chair, and another, and another! At other times I am there working quietly and I am often moved when I (accidentally, of course) overhear the depth of conver-

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The “New Atheists” Confirm Christian Teaching

The “new atheists” point out that one need not take the Bible seriously or believe in God at all in order to have a sense of right and wrong. Christopher Hitchens, for instance, observes that “conscience is innate” and that we all have “whatever it is that makes us behave well when nobody is looking,” (2007, p. 256). Similarly, George Stenger observes that the majority of human beings from “all religions or no religion agree on a common set of moral standards,” (2007, p. 195) and he observes that people do not need the scriptures in order to arrive at this agreement. Hitchens and Stenger are quite right in pointing these things out, but what's odd is that they view these truths as constituting an argument against Christianity.

If you know Christian teaching better than Hitchens and Stenger apparently do, however, you know that Christianity actually agrees with their view of the moral nature of human beings. Christianity teaches that all human beings, whether religious or irreligious, have a deeply ingrained moral sense. Christianity teaches that since every one of us bears the image of God, we can expect to find just the sort of moral conscience at work that Stenger and Hitchens find. People may stop believing in God, but the image of God will continue to do the work of providing a moral compass. When Stenger and Hitchens note that theists and atheists alike share a common moral sense, then, they are only confirming what Christianity teaches.

Richard Dawkins lends further support to a Christian view of human nature when he observes that people are often unable to account for the moral sense that they find in themselves and in others. Dawkins rightly observes that people may not be able to give a coherent argument for why they view some actions as right and others as wrong, but they will still have such convictions. This moral sense among people as to what is right and

wrong, Dawkins notes, “is stronger than their ability to articulate their reasons.” Again he observes, “the principles that make up our moral grammar fly beneath the radar of our awareness” (2006, p. 223).

This also confirms a Christian understanding of our moral nature. While the image of God is ineradicable, it is also deeply flawed, and so we can expect to find some confusion and contradiction in our moral lives. This will mean, among other things, that people will often be unable to make sense of their moral nature and yet will still have a solid sense of right and wrong. This is what Dawkins observes, and this is just what we would expect to find if there is, in fact, an ineradicable but flawed image of God in each of us. As with Stenger and Hitchens, then, when Dawkins' observes that people often live moral lives without being able to account for their own moral convictions, he is only confirming what Christianity teaches.

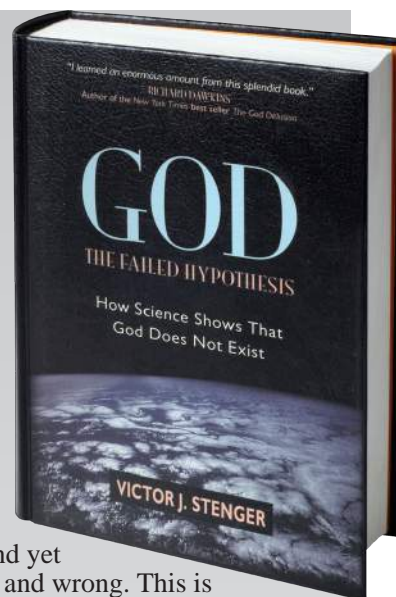
Dr. Richard Horner is the Director of the Christian Study Center

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Mifflin, 2006).

Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great* (Hachette, 2007).

Victor Stenger, *God the Failed Hypothesis* (Prometheus, 2007).

If you are interested in more on this subject, keep your eyes and ears open for our upcoming series Reason, Faith, and Theism: In Conversation with the “New Atheists” in 2012.



News & Notes

Chair Fund

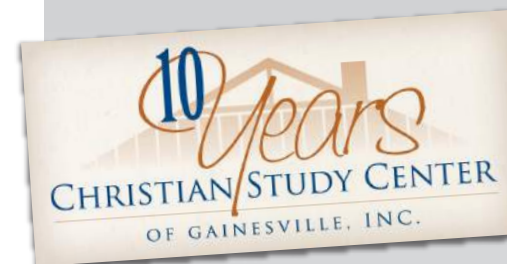
Thanks to you we ended “Chair-ity Fundraiser” with \$500 extra to use for the ever-present furniture needs of the Center. Thank you, friends. Since God did not make us as incorporeal beings, your donations are genuine contributions to the work of the Center everyday!

Culture Seminar

We are excited about hosting noted Christian scholar and scientist, Dr. Jennifer Wiseman as a guest of the Center in 2012 as we restore the Culture Seminar, a vital piece of our programming that was lost to budget cuts in the last few years. If you want to support bringing in noted scholars whose work influence culture and shape the minds of the next generation, please consider a gift to the Culture Seminar (costs range from \$2500- \$5000).

Tenth Anniversary Year

Special thanks to the many volunteers who helped with advertising, music, food, and their time to serve during the weekend of our Tenth Anniversary in April. We were delighted to reconnect with many of our alumni and friends.



One of our new chairs!

Pascal Happenings

Pascal's doors are opened and our Nuovo Simonelli espresso machine is on to serve delicious drinks all semester. Pascal's is sad to see long time barista Britt Daniel graduate and move on, but we welcome a new member to our team, Juan Alcala. Juan joins Sean Hill, Sally Privette, John Quinn, and manager Laurie Goddard to whip up great coffee this fall.

Planned Giving (does that mean I have to have a plan?!)

Perhaps you'd like to help the Center, but don't have any extra funds to donate now. You may want to consider a planned gift: one given out of assets, not income. You may choose to donate a stock, make a charitable bequest to the CSC in your will (of a certain amount or a percentage) or even make the CSC a beneficiary on a Certificate of Deposit. Please contact us if you make any of these plans!

Passages

We are saddened to report that Susan Sommerville, wife of former board member John Sommerville, passed away early on the morning of September 5th. John and Susan have both been central members of our Study Center community from our first days till the present. Our dear friend and valued colleague, John, and all who loved his dear wife Susan, are grieving "yet not like those without hope." She died as she lived: a woman full of grace and peace. We will miss Susan more than we can put into words.



Be sure to grab one of our new Pascal's mugs for only \$8.99!

Interview: Sarah Hamersma (continued from page 2)

sations between students discipling one another in the perfect environment of the CSC.

Laura: We've talked a lot about students, but do how does the Center serve and work with faculty?

Sarah: I appreciate the opportunity it gives faculty to get involved, whether by attending or helping lead a class, or by serving in leadership with the CSC to make decisions about

each year's curriculum. More personally, it is a place of affirmation for my calling as a Christian, a scholar and a teacher.

Laura: Thank you Sarah for your contributions to our mission as we bring scholarship and Christian reflection together in service to the University and the Church.