

NEH Application Cover Sheet

Awards for Faculty

PROJECT DIRECTOR

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Field of Expertise: Philosophy: Philosophy, General

INSTITUTION

University of Texas at San Antonio
San Antonio, TX

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Title: *Acquainted with Grief: Early Modern Feminist Conceptions of God, Evil, and Theodicy*

Grant Period: From 1/2014 to 8/2014

Field of Project: Philosophy: History of Philosophy; Philosophy: Philosophy of Religion;
Interdisciplinary: Renaissance Studies

Description of Project: The following is a plan of action to complete a book manuscript entitled, *Acquainted with Grief: Early Feminist Conceptions of God, Evil, and Theodicy*. This book follows a recent uptick in scholarship on early modern feminism in philosophy, directly responds to contemporary, atheistic feminist critiques of theodicy, and meets a need for a comprehensive analysis of feminist contributions to theodicy. My research bridges gaps between distinct but related humanities disciplines-- history of philosophy, philosophy of religion, feminist epistemology, and women's studies and so will attract a broad readership. The fellowship will allow me to participate in several activities that will strengthen my manuscript: to frequent Rice University's rare 18th - 19th century works, to participate in the Texas A&M Glasscock Humanities Women's and Gender Studies Working Group, and to study at the 'Woman's Collections' at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

REFERENCE LETTERS

Michael Almeida
Professor and Chair
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1a. Research and Contribution. The traditional problem of evil says that the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good God is inconsistent with the presence of evil in the world. A perfect creative being would know how—and have the abilities to—prevent systematic and pernicious harms. Three hundred years ago, G.W. Leibniz’s *Theodicy* became the most significant philosophical monograph devoted to the problem of evil. Since that time, theodicy—the defense of divine perfection—has faced significant obstacles. Contemporary feminists forcefully argue that theodicy is a doomed project because it justifies God’s role in undeserved suffering by relying on a concept of ‘evil’ that is too abstract and removed from human agency which brings about atrocious, foreseeable harms (e.g., Card 2002, 2010). Fueling the feminist worry is that since the *Theodicy*, only men have been taken seriously as contributors to the philosophical project of theodicy, even though a number of female contemporaries of Leibniz made noteworthy strides in philosophy of religion, often writing in the guise of political treatises or, even, novels that emphasized civil rights. I propose a book, tentatively entitled *Acquainted with Grief: Early Modern Feminist Conceptions of God, Evil, and Theodicy*, which will answer the feminist call for philosophers of religion to address whether theodicy can adequately account for concrete moral evils and the suffering of the powerless, meets a need for a comprehensive analysis of the contributions made by female scholars in the early modern period as serious philosophers of religion, and argues that these women support the goal of traditional theodicy even though they each offer potential critiques of it.

My book will suggest that theodicy would be better served against the contemporary feminist critique if it could integrate a sense of human moral evil that is not distant from thicker expressions of moral evil—those “institutions of evil”—like systematic rape or genocide. Such thick expressions are found in the early modern period, and the best demonstrations are found in the writing of Leibniz’s female peers, especially Mary Hays, Catherine Macaulay, and Mary Wollstonecraft and including Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell, Anne Conway, and Lady Mary Shepherd. These scholars should be considered as early feminists, committed to a concept of ‘evil’ situated in civil rights abuses and oppression, who also defend divine perfection in spite of evil in the world. Hays, for example, argues that certain pernicious harms are perpetuated especially within the moral agency of a patriarchal political structure (1798). On Macaulay’s view, political atrocities stem from human institutions which propagate systemic injustices, and were never divinely intended to “enslave female nature” (1790). Wollstonecraft was more skeptical of theodicy’s ability to redeem the particular suffering of women (1794), given that misery is a moral evil that frequently results from human intentions. An early modern feminist critique of theodicy’s efficacy in Leibniz’s time can thus be considered as a political statement centered on the human agency of moral evil—tied to, though independent of—the theoretical notion of suffering.

Not only does the work of early modern female scholars presage the atrocity paradigm of contemporary atheists (i.e., morally culpable human evil situated especially within a paternalistic political structure), but their work also employs methodologies of contemporary analytic theists. Recently, Eleanor Stump has taken the lead (implicit in the scholarship of these early modern women), to use biblical narrative as a conduit to theodicy. In this project, I will agree with Stump that theodicy could succeed in using narrative to attack concrete harms if the theodicean narrative is communicated second-personally (rather than abstractly). I will also argue, however, that second-personal access to theodicy in a narrative is possible only if the narratives are epistemically accessible to both parties—and that locating theodicy outside of the atrocities suffered by women (and identified by Card) dooms the second-personal project of traditional theodicy. This monograph will thus use the political and literary narratives of female scholars of the period to show, first, that these women were doing theodicy in the early modern period (which is significant in itself) and that (even more) the unique contributions they made to theodicy also answer the worries of today’s feminists.

Organization. The book will have six chapters: *Chapter One, Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (explores the problem of the atrocity paradigm and contemporary theodicy and

suggests the book's proposed solution); *Chapter Two, Redemptive Accounts* (discusses personal efficacy in eradicating evil, the focus of Hays and Macaulay); *Chapter Three, Virtue Accounts* (argues that moral development is impossible without moral failure, especially for Hays and Wollstonecraft); *Chapter Four, Eschatological Accounts* (mirrors Leibniz-- evil is part of the landscape of an all-things-considered good-- but there are important differences in the female writers, especially Macaulay though also Wollstonecraft); *Chapter Five, The Significance of Minor Writers* (focuses on research I discover at Rice and UNCG, but also to include Cavendish, Astell, Shepherd, etc); *Chapter Six, On the Possibility of Contemporary Feminist Theodicy* (synthesizes its contributions, compares it with contemporary methodologies, and anticipates criticisms).

Intellectual Significance and Building Bridges. My contribution will, I believe, move the philosophical discourse on theodicy forward in an important way, informed by voices to which philosophy is just beginning to listen.¹ My book will build bridges between distinct but related humanities disciplines -- history of philosophy (early modern scholarship), philosophy of religion (theodicy), feminist epistemology (standpoint theory), and women's studies (the atrocity paradigm)—and so will attract a broad readership. Even more, the ability to incorporate under-utilized research and to receive regular input from top scholars (please see **1b.** below) makes the project all the more propitious.

I use "building bridges" to highlight that this research project fits the NEH's *Building Bridges* commitment to explore the civic role of women both internationally and at home. This book, which obviates the philosophical significance of women scholars in the early modern period who were using civil rights injustices (such as suffrage, education, the right to work, sexual autonomy, etc.) to fight against moral evil, took it upon themselves to bridge political divides. The book will be progressive because it grounds responses to the problem of evil in the lived experiences of those who suffer. Finally, the book rights a philosophical wrong, by showing these women, who have often been excluded from the philosophical canon because they were not considered 'philosophers', were both anticipating and improving arguments their male contemporaries were making.

1b. Methodology and Work Plan. The faculty award will allow me to participate in three unique research activities, which will facilitate a stellar work product. I am invited to research unpublished early modern pieces at Rice University's Woodson Research Center (consisting of rare manuscripts, dramatic pieces, and miscellaneous personal writings, including correspondence of Leibniz, which can only be viewed in Woodson's Reading Room). I also have permission to research the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's "Woman's Collection" (which includes singular editions of texts by Wollstonecraft and Hays, an out-of-print 1696 text by Mary Astell, and an entire unpublished holdings section on *The Feminist Controversy in England, 1788-1810*, which will be vital for Chapter Five). Integrating rare and unpublished items into the text will strengthen my arguments, will add value to the manuscript, and will be attractive to publishers. But, I also have been invited to participate as an *ad hoc* member in the Women's and Gender Studies Working Group at Texas A&M's prestigious Glasscock Center for Humanities Research. As a member, not only will I volley ideas with other members of the A&M collective, but I will present my new chapters to the group as colloquia papers. In short, the faculty award will enable me to fill gaps in my special collections research by including infrequently-utilized primary texts and to be a member of a Tier-One humanities research group that will directly strengthen my writing and make the overall project more compelling to a broad range of humanities disciplines, scholars, and students.

Out of the six chapters of the book, much of the substance of Chapters Two, Three, and Four is already in press. By the award period, I will have completed Chapter One and much of Chapter Six (leaving space for changes from new research on minor writers). During the award period, Chapters Three and Four will be augmented with new Wollstonecraft research, Chapter Five will be researched and written, and Chapter Six will be completed. During the award period, then, the following need to be performed: **1.)** access Rice University Woodson Center's rare manuscripts; **2.)**

examine the UNCG holdings; **3.)** draw out the theodicean arguments from these texts with an eye towards the social-political context to which they refer; **4.)** integrate the new findings to the already completed portions of the manuscript; **5.)** write Chapter Five; **6.)** compare the early feminist theodicies to current theists and to the contemporary critique of theodicy in Chapter Six; **7.)** present versions of the book's main arguments at A&M while revising. My research will be framed in the 32 weeks between January 2014 to August 2014:

TIMELINE: *First Six Weeks:* at Rice for step 1. The research hours during the first six weeks when I am not at the Center will be dedicated to working on steps 3-4. *Weeks Seven and Eight:* at UTSA, focused on step 4. *Weeks Nine and Ten:* at A&M, concentrating on steps 5-7, especially to develop a thorough outline of the remaining two chapters to be completed. *Week 11:* at UTSA during Break, integrating research from Rice into step 5. *Weeks 12 and 13:* at UNCG for steps 2-4. *Weeks 14-18:* at UTSA writing, especially steps 4-6. *Weeks 19-20:* at A&M, step 7 for Chapter Five and new writing on Chapter Six. Ten weeks remain, exclusively for writing. *Weeks 21-31:* at A&M and UTSA. The writing phase will fill in mostly-complete chapters with new work, and I will edit Chapters Five and Six based on feedback from the Glasscock Working Group. *Week 32:* at UTSA, performing final edits while formatting the manuscript for publishing house review.

1c. Competencies, skills, and access. The project refocuses philosophical inquiry on female scholarship in the early modern period to theodicy and so, my background in early modern philosophy of religion situates me to have the proper historical and theoretical competence to successfully take on such an endeavor. I have published two articles and an invited book chapter on Leibniz's theodicy, as well as a textbook on the history of philosophy (which includes a section devoted to Leibniz and the problem of evil). This work has afforded invitations to participate in invited-only symposia, the University of Notre Dame's 2010 Leibniz conference and Purdue University's 2012 "Challenges to Religious and Moral Belief" conference. Further, my research on early modern *feminist* theodicy is truly gaining traction. I have given two invited talks (one at Taylor University and another at the University of Texas-Pan American) on early modern feminist theodicy, as well as a main program paper at the American Philosophical Association meeting on Mary Hays' theodicy, and a paper on Catherine Macaulay's theodicy at the highly-respected biennial Margaret Wilson Conference at Dartmouth. Both of these papers are already in press at top philosophy of religion journals—the Hays paper with *The Journal of Religion* and the Macaulay paper with the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*.

1d. Final product and dissemination. This award allows me to complete a project that meets a true need in the field, is timely and compelling, and which draws upon rare resources. At the end of the award period, I will have a completed book manuscript, ready to send to a variety of strong publishing houses. I also anticipate that (like the Hays and Macaulay chapters) parts of Chapters Five and Six will include topics that I will treat separately as stand-alone journal articles. In addition to marketing through conference, colloquia, and publishing venues, my department will advertise the book, NEH grant, as well as the *Building Bridges* campaign.

1e. Statement of Eligibility. The University of Texas at San Antonio is a Hispanic-Serving Institution, as determined by the Department of Education and the data on file with the National Center for Education Statistics.

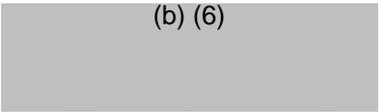
¹ See, for example, the University of Chicago's recent *The Other Voices in Early Modern Europe* series, which includes philosophers like Marie le Jars de Gournay, Laura Cereta, Gabrielle Suchon, and many others. Theologians have done a bit more to include different voices in theodicy; see as representative Davis (1980), Sands (1992), and even Scott (2011), who argues that theodicy in theology has "stalled" in large part to the feminist critique.

Bibliography

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Education-----

1995-1999, B.A., Philosophy. **Taylor University**, Upland, IN
1999-2001, M.A., Philosophy. **Texas A&M University**, College Station, TX.
Thesis: "The Existential Self in Gabriel Marcel." John J. McDermott, director.
2001-2006, PhD., Philosophy. **University of Memphis**, Memphis, TN
Dissertation: "Impermissibility, Moral Worth, and the Normative Sources of Action." Sarah Clark Miller, director.

Affiliations-----

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Texas at San Antonio
(8/2007-present)
Affiliated Faculty, Women's Studies Institute

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Stephen F. Austin State University
(8/2006-6/2007)

Select Awards-----

- Robert B. Papazian International Prize in Ethics**, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, for "The Integrity Problem, Reloaded," 2013.
- President's Distinguished Teaching Achievement Award (tenure-track)**, University of Texas at San Antonio, 2013.
- President's Distinguished Research Achievement Award (tenure-track)**, University of Texas at San Antonio, 2012.
- University of North Texas Young Philosopher Travel Grant**, for "Border Ethics: Philosophy and Recent Immigration Policy," March 2011.
- Faculty Development Research Leave**, University of Texas at San Antonio, Fall 2010.
- American Association of University Women Short-Term Publication Grant** (alternate), for "An Ethics of Hope," Summer 2010.
- Inaugural Colloquium Speaker**, Distinguished Alumni Colloquium Series, Texas A&M Department of Philosophy, April 2009.

Select Research Products (Relevant to Proposed Research and Research Success)-----

Books:

1. *Gabriel Marcel's Ethics of Hope: Evil, God, and Virtue* (monograph). London: Continuum, 2011; paperback forthcoming May 2013.
2. *The New Intuitionism* (editor). London: Continuum, 2012.

Textbooks:

1. *Themes in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt Publishing, 2009.
2. Instructor Resource Manual for *The Big Questions: a Short Introduction to Philosophy*, by R. Solomon, 8th edition, Boston: Wadsworth/Cengage, 2010. Contracted for 9th edition, forthcoming 2013.

Select Articles and Book Chapters:

1. "The Anxious Believer: Macaulay's Prescient Theodicy," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* DOI 10.1007/s11153-012-9365-2 online first Aug 2012, print edition (forthcoming).
2. "Atrocious Evil, Divinely Perfected: An Early Modern Feminist's Contribution to Theodicy", *The Journal of Religion*, (forthcoming).
3. "The Integrity Objection, Reloaded," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, forthcoming, winner of the Robert B. Papazian International Prize in Ethics.
4. "Leibniz and the Best of All Possible Worlds," (invited) in *God and Evil*, Geisler, Dew (eds), InterVarsity Press, 2013.
5. "Moral Evil and Leibniz's Form/Matter Defense of Divine Omnipotence," *Sophia*, volume 14, number 1, 2010, 1-13.
6. "Divine Omni-Qualities and Human Evil: Interpreting Leibniz without Middle Knowledge," *Philosophy and Theology*, volume 18, no. 1, June 2007.

Select, Refereed Presentations-----

1. "This Present Suffering: An Early Modern Feminist Revision to Leibnizian Theodicy, Part II", The Margaret Wilson Conference at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, June 22-24, 2012.
2. "This Present Suffering: An Early Modern Feminist Revision to Leibnizian Theodicy," (main program paper) American Philosophical Association, Seattle, WA, April 4-7, 2012.
3. "Early Feminist Theodicy: Political Evils and the Feminine," Women's Political Thought in Europe 1700-1800, Monash University Prato Centre, Prato (Italy), August 25-29, 2010.

Select, Invited Presentations-----

1. "A Comment on Kant on Morality, Religion, and Purpose in Life", Baylor University, Baylor/Georgetown/Notre Dame Philosophy of Religion Conference, San Antonio, TX, November 9, 2012.
2. "Do Women Tell a Different Story about God and Moral Evil?" Taylor University Philosophy Department colloquium, Upland, Indiana, September 5, 2012.
3. "The Artistic Theodicy: Literature and the Divine in Early Modern Philosophy." (*keynote*) The University of Texas at Pan American, Department of Philosophy, Coalition against Violence and Exploitation, December 7, 2011.

Select, Relevant Professional Service-----

1. (invited, funded) Chair, "Challenges to Religious and Moral Belief: Disagreement and Evolution" Conference Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, September 2012.
2. (invited, funded) Chair, "Leibniz's *Theodicy: Context and Content*", University of Notre Dame, Indiana, September 2010.
3. Organizer, South Central Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy, with Texas A&M University, 2010.



Sent Via E-mail

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to recommend Dr. Jill Hernandez for an NEH Faculty Research Grant. Dr. Hernandez's proposal entitled '*Acquainted with Grief: Early Modern Feminist Conceptions of God, Evil, and Theodicy*' addresses the problems that arise for traditional Leibnizian theodicy in response to concrete moral evils. Dr. Hernandez aims to show that the contributions made by female scholars in the early modern period support Leibniz's overall theodicy, but also offer important critical commentary on the traditional theodical project. In defense of Leibniz, the proposal shows that the work of these early modern feminist philosophers can be cogently adduced against some powerful contemporary feminist critiques of Leibnizian theodicy. The contemporary critique urges that traditional theodicy focuses too closely on divine agency in permitting undeserved suffering and dangerously understates the role of human agency in effecting moral evil. In proper perspective, the moral responsibility for evil—especially radical evils and moral atrocities—falls much closer to human agents than divine agents.

In my estimation Dr. Hernandez's project uniquely engages a fascinating number of problems in the history of philosophy, feminist theory and the philosophy of religion. It brings to bear on Leibniz's theodicy and its contemporary feminist critics the work of Catherine Macaulay (1731-1791), Mary Hays (1759-1843), and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1798). The work of these early modern scholars is adduced in support of a subtler Leibnizian project. These scholars provide a concept of evil that avoids the contemporary concern that traditional theodicy cannot accommodate pernicious harms. Dr. Hernandez argues that Macaulay, Hays and Wollstonecraft are early feminists who defend the traditional divine attributes and a Leibnizian view of pre-established harmony. It is observed that, on at least Macaulay's view, gender differences ground political atrocities through institutions that perpetuate injustice against women that a perfect being would never intend. Hays, and to a lesser extent Wollstonecraft, also argue that certain evils are gendered, so that pernicious harms tend to be perpetuated in patriarchal political structures. Dr. Hernandez urges that the narratives of Wollstonecraft, Macaulay, and Hays can be used to show that these women were in fact doing theodicy in the early modern period and that their contributions to the theodical project support traditional theodicy and provide a cogent response to criticism of contemporary feminists.

Dr. Hernandez research schedule positions her extremely well for this project. She has published numerous peer-reviewed articles on Leibniz, Kant, and the problem of evil.

She has published a monograph with Continuum Press entitled *Gabriel Marcel's Ethics of Hope: Evil, God, and Virtue* on Marcel and the problem of evil. She has presented numerous conference papers that bear directly on the problem of evil in early modern philosophy. Dr. Hernandez has of course published other important work that bears less directly on the current project. She has edited *The New Intuitionism* also for Continuum Press, published articles on moral theory, existentialism, border ethics, and published a textbook in modern philosophy entitled *Themes in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*.

An NEH Faculty Research Award would provide Dr. Hernandez the time and support she needs to complete what I think will be a major contribution to contemporary work in philosophy of religion and modern philosophy. Her proposal places contemporary feminist criticism of theodicy in the context of early modern feminists such as Catherine Macaulay, Mary Hays, and Mary Wollstonecraft and contemporary philosophers of religion such as Marilyn McCord Adams and Eleanor Stump. Dr. Hernandez's unique philosophical study promises to yield a host of insights across a wide range of problems in the history of philosophy, feminist theory and the philosophy of religion. She has my strongest recommendation.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Almeida

Department of Philosophy and Classics
University of Texas at San Antonio

I am writing in support of JILL HERNANDEZ'S proposed project, 'Acquainted with Grief: Early Modern Feminist Conceptions of God, Evil and Theodicy'. I should start by saying that I am not acquainted with Jill Hernandez, and have no professional connections with her. I have a considerable research interest in women philosophers of the early modern period and have read several of Hernandez' papers.

The central problem of Hernandez' project, the problem of evil, conceived generally as involving questions like, Why are there atrocities in the world? Why do bad things happen to innocent people? Is a problem not just for philosophers but for all of us, and is treated by all of the Humanities in a number of different ways. Hernandez is focusing on the problem in its theological version, which asks. How can the presence of evil in the world be reconciled with the nature of an all-powerful, omniscient, all good God, that is, a God possessed all perfections? This too is by no means just a philosophical question, but it has been taken up by many philosophers, whose aim is to produce what are generally called, following Leibniz, theodicies, attempts to justify God's existence by reconciling the problem of evil with God's perfections. Hernandez proposes to come at this problem from two angles. The first is to take seriously the charges of some contemporary philosophers, including some arguing from a feminist standpoint, who suggest that the philosophical approach to theodicy is too abstract, too much focused on the possibility of evil and not enough on the actual atrocities that horrify us. Is it really necessary, one wonders, in order for God to achieve the end of human freedom and responsibility to employ means that permit genocide or individual acts of appalling cruelty. The first part of Hernandez' project involves accepting this critique and working through what a theodicy must be like that accepts atrocities in their actuality, from the inside, for the victims. The second part of her project involves looking for help in producing such a theodicy in a neglected quarter, the work of women writing in the early modern period, many of whom took very seriously the institutionally generated suffering of women. Hernandez grounds her project in the theodicies produced by these women, arguing that like contemporary feminists, early modern women based their accounts of evil on the actual sufferings of women. She argues that these theodicies have novel features which deserve to be assessed along with the more familiar canonical theodicies of men like Leibniz.

I think this is a very worthwhile and a very viable project. Hernandez has identified a significant body of work by early modern women philosophers which has been underutilized by contemporary philosophers and which deserves wider scrutiny. While the feminist nature of these women's writings has been brought to our attention, in focussing on the theological, Hernandez is actually directing us to the area which these women themselves would have regarded as most important and where they themselves directed their intellectual energy. What allowed most of these women to give themselves permission to commit the unusual act of writing and publishing was precisely the theological implications of their work. They took seriously the view that God had given men and women alike rational faculties and they supposed this meant that all rational faculties ought to be used in the service of religion. In highlighting the aspect of early modern women philosophers that she does, Hernandez is allowing them to put their best foot forward. She has therefore uncovered for herself a rich vein in which to work. In motivating and organizing her project as she does, as one that

moves between contemporary and historical concerns, she is providing how figures and in this case especially, neglected figures can contribute to matters that worry thinkers today.

I am completely confident that Hernandez has the skills necessary to complete this work with distinction. I am familiar with the papers she has written on Macaulay and on Hays, which will form the basis for two of the chapters of her book. They are models of scholarship in the history of philosophy. Hernandez is able to lay out the philosophical issues under discussion with clarity and to explain the nature of the views and arguments put forward in a way that does justice to the historical context in which they were developed. The plan of the work seems very well thought out. The only qualm I have is that I suspect she may find in the early stages of her work that there is more material to be worked over than she is allowing. But I think the project as outlined is nevertheless perfectly do-able and I see no difficulty in her bringing this project to completion.

In sum, I think Jill Hernandez' project is an important one, she is eminently qualified to carry it out, and I urge that it be funded.

Sincerely,

Margaret Atherton
Distinguished Professor of Philosophy
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee