

# The Boisi Center Report

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On April 30, BC's host Bert Garza, together with Fr. Jim Egan of the Holy Deserret, held a panel discussion dealing with the results of the two year initiative the sponsored on the Catholic intellectual traditions. He led a panel on representation of which a role the Center played in the Boisi Center's activities this year.

The most interesting part of that was our decision to have members of the Center seminar on a so called, which chaired, several to our unchallenged. Because of their representations, we had the best attended lunches since we saw the Boisi Center. There are so many to sponsor other events around the General, in particular to hear Professor's lecture on education and its implications for Christian ethics.

While we miss the cross-disciplinary conversations around the seminar table with colleagues, this project is not really at an end. We've been testing in our past meetings with the future of our work, and it's been exciting to hear acute discussions about leading leadership to our community, extending the conversation to students and other acute members at BC. We see that acute seminars, artistic endeavors, events are emerging over the months to come.

Another site is a so called deeded to communicate specific reactions on the Center. In the meantime, many of the seminar participants' lectures related to the Center can be found on the Boisi Center's site: [www.c.edu/boisi](http://www.c.edu/boisi).

This summer the Boisi Center will host another seminar, "Evil, Disobedience and the Common Good," sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Fifteen college teachers will surround the center will be in residence or sit there is discussing readings, making presentations and listening to guest lecturers. Although we have yet to meet them, our colleagues are a truly outstanding group.

The book "The Future of Liberalism" was published in February and is a read into its second printing. We have done a tour of events in the Twin Cities, Madison, New York and Washington. A panel discussion on the book was held at Brookings Institution featuring William Galston, Ross Douthat and E. J. Dionne. Another was held here at BC featuring Sarah Bieder and Dan Ahorn. The book was received wide and general with enthusiasm. A panel of experts will appear in the winter.

The other big news on the book front is that this summer Barack will visit us while publishing the results of our 2007 conference on gambling. Eric Lipton and I are the editors, and the book is called "Gambling: Mapping the American Moral Landscape."

This has been a rough year, particularly for higher education, indeed one expects to have as usual a slate of events as possible over the next year, and we're reporting on them at the appropriate time.

Realism is a school of thought in international relations that asserts the need to carefully assess and project national power to achieve maximum stability and security among states. Some political realists (such as Henry Kissinger) deny any role to ethics or morality in this process, while others (such as Walter Lippmann and Reinhold Niebuhr) have argued that moral issues must be a part of any serious realist analysis. On February 18, less than a month after President Obama promised in his inaugural address foreign policy that would not sacrifice ideals for security, the Boisi Center brought together three of the nation's most influential scholars on political realism. Andrew Bacevich (Professor of History and International Relations, Boston University), Jean Bethke Elshtain (Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics, University of Chicago) and Rev. J. Bryan Hehir (Parker Gilbert Montgomery Professor of the Practice of Religion and Public Life at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University) spoke to a packed audience about the role of realism and ethics in U.S. foreign policy at the dawn of the Obama administration.

Citing the preamble of the U.S. Constitution, Bacevich argued that the President is first and foremost obligated to “provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” Our posterity—future generations of Americans—cannot enjoy our present quality of life, he said, without a balanced budget, a cap on federal entitlements, alleviation of the current account deficit, an end to our dependence on foreign oil and the restoration of the environment and its protection from further harm. Likewise, a clearheaded appraisal of our common defense

counsels us to abandon the dominant view of “national security” as requiring global hegemony instead use our military for defensive purposes only. President Obama’s moral obligation to the American people demands no less.

Professors Elshtain and Hehir both began with historical perspectives, differentiating the classical form of political realism, which completely eschewed talk of morality and ethics, from the modern version, which is open in varying degrees to ethical considerations. Elshtain focused her remarks upon a particular form of modern realism epitomized by the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. Christian realism, as this view has come to be known, argues that a theological understanding of human nature—as invested with natural rights and capable of transcendence, but

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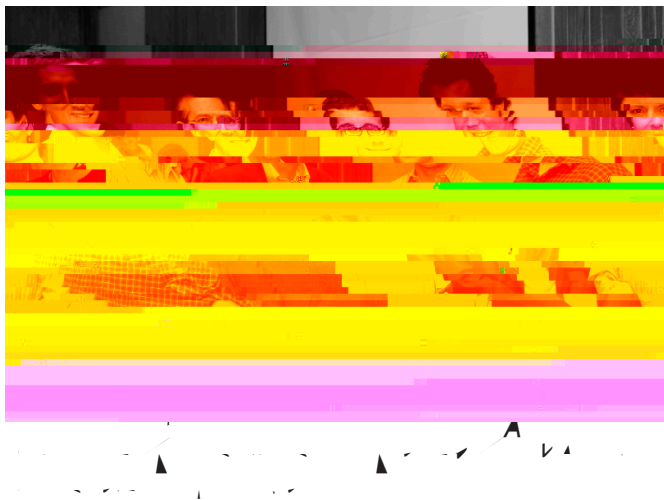
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Timothy Samuel Shah, Adjunct Senior Fellow for Religion and Foreign Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, spoke on March 18 about the role of global evangelicalism in democracy around the world and across time. Shah began with the illuminating statistic that 600 million evangelicals, of the 700 hundred million

**B**oston College student service leaders Dan Couch (A&S '09) and Matt Raffol (CSOM '09) each gave an impassioned account of their service experiences under various organizations on campus. Along with Robert Murphy, Associate Professor of Economics, and Jennie Purnell, Associate Professor of Political Science, they served as panelists at an event organized by the Boisi Center Student Advisory Panel on March 19. Andrew Bianco (A&S '09) served as moderator.



Couch, serving on the Boston Council, emphasized the ability of service projects to change students' perceptions of how their individual choices affect the world beyond. Raffol, active in the Pedro Arrupe Program, as well as having been a participant in various immersion trips, said BC's Jesuit commitment to service and education allowed students to transform their values into informed social action.

Murphy surveyed the latest research, including his own, on foreign aid at the governmental level and indicated that despite good intentions these programs have not been very effective. Murphy concluded that the real question was not the amount of foreign aid that would alleviate poverty, but how the aid would be employed to assist people. The best way to help, he believes, is service on the ground rather than at large organizational levels. Purnell, who researches faith-based social activism, while also directing the BC Center for Student Formation, spoke to the ideal of service in relation to the Jesuit mission. Purnell proposed that the term "service trip" was a misnomer because service extends in two directions -- from the students and from those they assist. Justice that comes out of solidarity is the Christian ideal. Service and education are integral components to realizing human potential from a Jesuit understanding.



Noah Snyder, Assistant Professor of Geology, spoke about technology and field observation in his geologic work on rivers on February 4. Snyder noted that paths to knowledge across disciplines have similarities, incorporating different perspectives and approaches to knowledge.

Snyder talked about the ways in which geologists approach their field research. Using advanced technology, there is a temptation to simply work off of aerial photography images, topographic maps and digital elevation models. Snyder noted how helpful technology can be, but emphasized how important field work remains. By observing a given area, a geologist can contextualize the rest of the data, making field work imperative. In an example of the relationship between technology and fieldwork from his own research, Snyder recounted his experience while doing his PhD near the San Andreas Fault in California. After months of work, he expected a certain result from the data he collected, and when he did not get that result, he was only able to account for the variables because of the work they had done on site. Intimate familiarity with the physical traits of the ground explained the surprising outcome. Digital technology enhances the possibilities of fieldwork, but the two should be pursued in tandem.

The kind of work Snyder conducts has wide applications, and he cited the work done in New Orleans on the levees to avoid catastrophe again. Snyder himself is currently working in Maine to help protect endangered species. By recognizing different “ways of knowing,” one can connect disparate threads to arrive at constructive and revealing conclusions, as Snyder’s work proves. ■

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Paul Davidovits, Professor of Chemistry, addressed the relationship between science and faith at a lunch colloquium on March 25. In particular, he discussed how faith affects science and scientific discovery. To begin, he offered a definition of faith, which is “a firm belief in something for which there is no proof.” In this definition, Davidovits emphasized how faith is characteristically optimistic and a basic human trait.

According to Davidovits, three categories of faith exist: faith that contradicts science, faith that is tangential to science and faith that drives science. Miracles, events that contradict all known scientific evidence, make up the first category. The second category is a realm of study in which science and faith should not and cannot overlap. This includes questions such as “Is there a meaning to life?” or “Is there a guiding cosmic purpose?” These questions cannot be answered by science and are therefore left up to faith. Finally, faith that drives science can be profound, such as belief in a unifying principle underlying the diversity of phenomena encountered in nature.

Davidovits fielded challenging questions about his presentation, such as the relationship between finding

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an explanation and finding meaning, and what actually qualifies as science. He also addressed the potential limitations of the human mind and whether human beings are actually capable of understanding the depths of the universe. ■



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**H**ow does evolution inform Christian ethics? This was the central question explored in a major lecture delivered on March 31 by Stephen Pope, Professor of Theology, Boston College. Pope is the author of the book *Evolution and Christian Ethics*, published in 2008. His lecture was co-sponsored by the seminar on the Catholic Intellectual Traditions that wrapped up its work this Spring. (See the Director’s Letter on p.1 for details.)

Evolution can be understood as a scientific fact or as an ideology. The scientific community agrees that evolution occurs, but a large number of Americans believe in the literal story of Genesis, in direct opposition to this claim. Many people fear an evolutionary ideology that promotes eugenics and other means of harming the human being. Academic Christian ethics generally rejects the usefulness of biology and evolution to its enterprise, but Pope argued that there is indeed value in evolution for Christian ethics.

A necessary biological function for morality emerges from understanding evolution. Species depend on encouraging trust and loyalty in culturally acceptable ways, in order to promote evolutionary success. This has five implications for Christian ethics: (1) understanding the evolutionary roots of ethics in relation to the natural law, (2) assessing our own moral commitments and integrity, (3) properly directing our behavioral and emotional responses, (4) recognizing selfishness as original sin and (5) transcending constraints of an evolutionary past.

Evolutionary altruism is another insight Christian ethicists have from evolution. This accounts for Christian love – *agape* – which is reproductively detrimental. Only *agape* and natural love can explain human behavior completely. Pope notes that justice rather than biology obliges human beings to act beyond natural love. Genetically, humans have a morality towards others in their group, but an enmity towards outsiders. Christian

ethics challenges the natural zones and helps move people beyond the imperative of genetic love.

A final contribution evolution makes to Christian ethics pertains to the nature of human dignity. Evolution is often perceived to undermine human dignity, for if we are descended from monkeys, we are no better than monkeys. Pope argued that dignity does not simply equal the various traits of different people, but rather the whole person as loved for being an individual. Consequently, there is continuity with other species and a responsibility within the natural person to honor that relationship. The church upholds human dignity in practical ways to combat the risk that evolution will undermine that dignity.

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**R**osanna DeMarco, Associate Professor of Community Health at Boston College, spoke on February 26 about her work with American women living with HIV/AIDS. She shared some of her struggles to understand the situation of these women, who statistically tend to be poor and non-white. DeMarco approaches her work from both an inductive and deductive manner; in addition to scientific statistical analysis, DeMarco personally interacts with a number of women with HIV/AIDS in the Greater Boston area.

Four of these women persuaded her to make a film with them about their lives – to be used as an educational piece encouraging others to avoid high-risk practices. The documentary, “Women’s Voices, Women’s Lives,” empowered the women involved in the making of it and is being shown internationally for AIDS prevention. DeMarco hopes that by encouraging women to speak out about their experiences, the circumstances that promote the spread of the disease will change. See the Boisi Center website for a link to the film.

Set designer Crystal Tiala, Associate Professor of Design in the Theater Department, gave a lively and hands-on presentation entitled “Intuition, Emotion, and Visualization” on March 11. Tiala described the process of designing a set, which involves research about the show, its historical context and the playwright. Using the collected information, she begins to develop an idea of what she wants the set to look like. She emphasized how important context is and argued that the context in which one sees an image is just as important as the image itself. Unlike many other academics, Tiala said, she “intuits” things based on her own observations; she visualizes and does not verbalize. This can make her feel like an outsider in the university community, she noted, because her work does not necessarily come across as “academic” to those in other disciplines.



