

## NEH Summer Seminar in Medieval Jewish Philosophy

By Michael Strawser

To what extent are individuals responsible for their characters? What is the most important factor in establishing one's character? How are we to understand the role of will in one's actions and character formation? These are a few of the central questions focused on during the NEH Summer Seminar on "Free Will and Human Perfection in Medieval Jewish Philosophy" that I attended this past summer for five weeks at Colgate University. The seminar was directed by Professor Jonathan Jacobs, The Richard J. and Jean Head Professor of Philosophy, Colgate University, who is author of the recent book *Law, Reason, and Morality in Medieval Jewish Philosophy: Saadia Gaon, Bahya ibn Pakuda, and Moses Maimonides* (Oxford University Press, 2010). While the central focus was on key texts by Saadia, Bahya, and Maimonides, we also devoted significant attention to works by Aristotle, Anselm, and Aquinas.

To deal with such far-reaching questions, Jacobs wisely enlisted the support of Sir Anthony Kenny, one of Britain's most distinguished philosophers who has served as Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, President of the British Academy, and is the author of over forty books, to lecture on St. Thomas Aquinas during the fourth week of the seminar. Also, Menachem Kellner, a distinguished Professor of Jewish Thought at the University of Haifa, and Senior Fellow at the Department of Philosophy, Political Theory, and Religion at the Shalem Center in Jerusalem, visited the seminar during the final week to discuss his book *Maimonides on Human Perfection*.

The fifteen seminar participants represented an exciting mix of research interests, as there were scholars of ancient philosophy, medieval Arabic and Christian philosophy, Talmudists, and experts in Maimonides, as well as a few who, like myself, had interests in modern philosophy, but were seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the medieval background to the modern period. It is noteworthy that despite such diverse interests, a true spirit of collegiality enabled everyone to benefit from the often complicated discussions originating in the seminar classroom and spilling over to enjoyable conversations at various places throughout the charming village of Hamilton, New York.

The seminar was nicely organized; we met three days a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, which left significant time for the participants to take advantage of the Colgate University library and pursue their individual research projects. My current research project is on Spinoza's philosophy of love, and thus the central focus of my research during this seminar was to develop an adequate understanding of medieval Jewish philosophy as background to Spinoza's philosophy.

While in the traditional philosophy classroom it is most common to approach Spinoza through Descartes' philosophy, the research covered in this seminar convinced me that Spinoza is at least equally—if not even more—indebted to the rationalist tradition in medieval Jewish philosophy. After all, Maimonides was most likely the first philosopher Spinoza had read, and the influence of the former is clear in the latter's development of the doctrine of the intellectual love of God as well as in his perfectionism.

The particular research project that I initiated and presented during this seminar dealt with the erotic ideal from Saadia to Spinoza. Both Saadia and Spinoza are careful, systematic Jewish thinkers developing theories in which reason plays a pronounced role in cultivating a virtuous life. Consequently, like other ethicists for whom the virtues are key, both Saadia and Spinoza are intent on expressing the ideal human conduct of the moral exemplar. In just what way does erotic love fit into the ideal human life? It is a view commonly held that within the Jewish rationalist tradition epitomized by Spinoza, the snares of erotic love are something that a rational person would actively seek to avoid. But is love a thing for fools? Is this truly the view of Spinoza and the rationalist tradition in medieval Jewish philosophy that he inherited, or can we find a way to conceive of erotic love that accords with the life of reason? In this research I analyzed primarily Saadia's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* and Spinoza's *Ethics* to show that through a consideration of the points of convergence and divergence between these two thinkers our thinking about the erotic ideal may be significantly illuminated.

Participation in this NEH summer seminar was highly stimulating and beneficial, as it provided the much needed time and space for sustained reading, writing, and intellectual discussion with one's peers. I know that I will jump at the chance to apply to future seminars in my areas of interest, and I strongly encourage my colleagues to do the same. Let us continue to support and promote the National Endowment for the Humanities and the valuable opportunities for professional development that it offers, for when opportunities such as these make it possible for scholar-teachers to live more creatively and reflectively, and they then transmit this possibility to their students, we all benefit in the process.



Michael Strawser is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy and co-editor of *Florida Philosophical Review: The Journal of the Florida Philosophical Association*.



## About CAH Research

### Mission Statement

The College of Arts and Humanities Research Office is dedicated to serving arts and humanities faculty and staff in their research activities. CAH encourages collaborative and interdisciplinary endeavors that expand knowledge, promote cultural literacy, and provide access to the arts and humanities. Our research projects and creative ventures include publications, performances, and conferences that enhance the UCF community, the central Florida region, and the national and international communities.

### Services

The CAH Research Office provides the following services to our faculty and staff:

#### Proposal Development

- Identifying funding sources
- Partnership building – internal, interdisciplinary, and external
- Proposal editing
- Budget development
- ARGIS PTF creation

#### Award Administration

- Process financial paperwork
- Track grant spending
- Help resolve issues with grant administration and closeout
- Retain financial records per award guidelines
- Assist with effort certification (ECRT)



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## Research Training

### CAH Spring 2011 Workshops

Thank you to all our faculty and staff who attended our workshop series this spring. We have one workshop left for this semester.

#### CAH Research Process

March 30, 2011 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.  
March 31, 2011 11 a.m. – noon  
Location: CAH Training Room, Trailer 541

This workshop provides an overview of the research process in the College of Arts and Humanities from finding funding to grant closeouts, explains CAH procedures, and identifies resources for researchers.

## Interactive Expeditions (INTX) Lab

By Alex Katsaros (INTX) and Stella Sung (Director, CREATE)

A group of multi-disciplinary faculty and student researchers at the University of Central Florida "INTX Lab" seek to answer the question whether a real-time, two-way, mobile remote webcasting network can have special, integrated properties for supporting collaborative learning that is different from traditional distance learning platforms. Based on a series of pilot studies, Lab Director Phil Peters (Associate Professor, Digital Media) hypothesizes that the INTX Synchronous Online Media Network Integration (SOMNI) model applied to distributed learning can augment the traditional classroom by providing experiential access and interaction with authentic data, content, people, and real-world contexts. The Lab's local Orlando-based corporate research partner, Cobham Satcom Land Systems, has provided the mobile broadband satellite technology and grant funding to help UCF make this research possible.

Beginning in 2007, the INTX Lab initiative succeeded in its maiden voyage to the deserts of the American Southwest for an online course, "Cowboys with Cameras," which was based on the history of the Western film genre. In this first iteration, while students were viewing the live video feed, they were limited to participating via text-based inputs to an online conversation queue. The next iteration began during the summer of 2008, enabling full two-way audio and video between in-field teacher and a single classroom venue. For this expedition, INTX partnered with the Cambrian Foundation to deliver interactive marine biology education direct from the underwater caves of Bermuda to groups of students at Science Center venues in Orlando and Texas. Then, in summer 2009, INTX partnered with UCF's Department of Biology and delivered a transect dedicated to the study of botany, including real-time, remote webcasts over a two-week period from Delhi to Rishikesh, India. This India-based iteration of the technology allowed any web-connected student worldwide to transmit video-enhanced questions and comments into the Conversation Queue using their own webcam and microphone. Thanks to additional funding from Cobham in 2010, INTX is now completing its testing of a hand-held tablet computer running custom software which enables the in-field professor to trigger relevant, on-the-fly instructional events on the students' media portal and dynamically facilitate the telepresence of each participant as they enter the collaborative space.



In the most recent pilot test of the integrated INTX network during Fall 2010, students who were enrolled in two online undergraduate UCF courses explored South Africa via a "Cultural Transect," which we define as a contemporary method for recording and observing occurrences of cultural phenomena through regions and across borders of cultural systems around the world. The Transect route extended from Johannesburg and through Swaziland, and all the way down the coast to Cape Town. Along the way, UCF-CREATE (Stella Sung, Director), in coordination with INTX, hosted a real-time collaborative session for the Downtown Orlando Nap Ford Charter School and its



Above: Phil Peters, broadcasting live.

"African Drumming Troupe" students. The group of UCF professors on the remote end in South Africa, led by Prof. Peters, and in collaboration with Drs. Bruce Janz and Roslyn Howard, facilitated this cultural exchange with an African drummer/teacher, "Lucky" Paliso, who demonstrated the instrument and played for the children of the Nap Ford School, followed by a real-time, musical exchange of drumming in which both parties were able to see and hear each other via the INTX network. A short film by film-maker Aaron Hosé (UCF's OIR) was made of the event, and can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/WeAreOirVideo>.

There is immense potential to enhance and transform future educational opportunities with this network platform. Through rigorous assessment of current educational applications and related technological performance characteristics, INTX will further demonstrate how the Interactive Cultural Transect model can apply to numerous educational programs as well as scale-up to multi-national collaborative learning models. Science and technology courses could also adopt this approach. And consider the possibility of using this technology in an archaeology course where in-field students could both conduct research and help to train other students at home. Consider an engineering course that travels to diverse locations and explores labs, examines large-scale engineering projects, or addresses specific conditions where some engineering solution is needed. Consider medical training where students could travel to different places to observe conditions and procedures that are rare or non-existent in the U.S. In the new global economy, U.S. students must compete at the highest level—hence the need to bring a global education right to their desktops.

UCF-CREATE and Interactive Expeditions hosted a session in Jan. 2011, for the NAP Ford Charter School and its "African Drumming" students in a real-time, live, satellite broadcast from Capetown, South Africa. The team along with Drs. Bruce Janz and Roslyn Howard, lead a broadcast with African drummer, "Lucky" Paliso, who played for the children of the Nap Ford School. The students and Mr. Paliso also participated in a real-time musical exchange of drumming where both parties were able to see and hear their musical exchange via satellite streaming.

## Current CAH Research Awards

Congratulations to faculty with current awards! CAH faculty have been hard at work this fiscal year. Our faculty have been involved in over \$7,000,000.00 worth of proposal submissions.

**Per Danielsson**, Music, Sound Recording of Original Jazz Compositions and Interpretations of Other Composer's Works, ORC, \$7,500.00

**Mark Kamrath**, English, The Letters of Charles Brockden Brown, National Endowment for Humanities, \$170,000.00

**Peter Larson**, History, From Reformation to Restoration in Northern England: Three Villages in Durham, 1399-1660, ORC, \$4,410.00

**Robb Lindgren**, Digital Media, Physiological Effects of Interactive Digital Media and Consequence for Learning, ORC, \$7,500.00

**Kevin Meehan**, English, Assessment of Current and Potential Uses of Mobile Technology for Haitian Relief and Development Effort, Nation-

al Science Foundation, \$39,975.00

**Moshe Pelli**, Judaic Studies, "Haskalah and Modernism: The Reception of Early Haskalah at the End of the Enlightenment Period," Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, \$6,000.00

**Phil Peters**, Digital Media, Development of Mobile, Remote, Tablet-Enabled Global Collaboration Software, Cobham SATCOM, \$131,425.00

**Phil Peters**, Digital Media/CREATE, Real-Time, Remote Mobility Characteristics of a Distributed Learning Software Platform and its Impact on Immersive Instructional Technology Requirements, Delivery and Access, UCF/I-4, \$40,000.00

**Eldadio Scharron**, Music, Completion of Series with Recording of Manuel M. Ponce Complete Works for Guitar, Volume IV, ORC, \$7,500.00

## RESEARCH FACTS: What is "Overhead"?

Overhead, also called "indirect costs," "facilities and administrative costs," and "F&A," are common costs incurred for operational activities that are not attributable to a particular sponsored project, instructional activity, or other institutional activity. Overhead is calculated using UCF's projected expense for facilities and administrative costs, hence "F&A." Facilities expenses include buildings and improvement, interest, equipment, operations and maintenance, and the library. Administrative cost is salary for college, ORC, student services, and general administrative staff.

UCF negotiates our federal rate with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). UCF's current F&A rates are:

- On campus research - 45%;
- On campus instruction - 51.3%;
- On campus other sponsored activity - 29%;
- And all off campus activity - 26%.

UCF's actual F&A cost to support research is 51%.

When preparing a grant budget you must use UCF's negotiated F&A rate unless it is limited by the sponsoring agency or a service fee form is approved by ORC. Apply the F&A rate to the modified total direct costs (MTDC). Calculate MTDC by subtracting the following from total direct costs (TDC):

- Equipment costing \$1,000 or more with a useful life of at least 1 year (UCF taggable property)
- Student tuition

- Participant support costs
- Subcontract costs in excess of the first \$25,000
- Capital expenditures
- Patient care costs
- Rental/maintenance of off-site activities

Overhead collected by ORC provides administrative support for research, funds in-house awards, and supplies matching funds. Forty-five percent of a project's earned overhead (pending any special conditions and co-PIs) is returned to CAH based on a two-year rolling average. CAH returns 10% of the earned overhead (22.2% of CAH's portion) to the PI's individual overhead account for their use. CAH returns 5% of the earned overhead to the department to help offset administrative costs such as copies and supplies used by PIs. This transfer is done quarterly one year in arrears. In FY2010 ORC returned \$8 million in overhead to UCF colleges and centers.

**Overhead costs are used to support your research and the research activities of others in your department and college**