

DAVID VANDER LAAN
Curriculum Vitae
updated Aug 2022

Office

Department of Philosophy
Westmont College
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Professional Appointments

Westmont College, Professor	2012 to present
Westmont College, Associate Professor	2006-2012
Westmont College, Assistant Professor	2000-2006
University of Notre Dame, Instructor	2000

Education

University of Notre Dame
Ph.D. in Philosophy, Jan. 2000

Calvin University
B.A. in Philosophy and Mathematics, May 1993

Areas of Specialization

Metaphysics
Logic
Philosophy of Religion

Areas of Competence

Epistemology
Ancient Philosophy
Medieval Philosophy
Philosophy of Mind

Dissertation

Title: *Impossible Worlds*
Director: Alvin Plantinga

Articles and Book Chapters

- “Satisfaction in the End without End,” forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*.
- Update of “Creation and Conservation,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/creation-conservation/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/creation-conservation/).
- “The Timing of Divine Conservation: Pushes, Nudges, and Merry-Go-Rounds” in Greg Ganssle, ed., *Philosophical Essays on Divine Causation*, Routledge, 2021.
- “The Paradox of the End without End,” *Faith & Philosophy* 35:2 (April 2018), 157-172.
- “Adverse Consequences,” in Robert Arp, Steve Barbone, and Mike Bruce, eds., *Bad Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Fallacies in Western Philosophy*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2018.
- “Creation and Conservation,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/creation-conservation/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/creation-conservation/).
- “The Concord of Molinism with Modal Voluntarism,” *Analysis Reviews* 2015 75 (2): 259-270.
- “Singular Propositions and Serious Actualism: A Reply to Merricks,” in Kelly James Clark and Michael Rea, eds., *Reason, Metaphysics, and Mind: New Essays on the Philosophy of Alvin Plantinga*, Oxford University Press, 2012.
- “Lewis’s Argument for Possible Worlds,” in Steven Barbone and Michael Bruce, eds., *Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- “A Relevance Constraint on Composition,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88:1 (March 2010), 135-145.
- “The Sanctification Argument for Purgatory,” *Faith & Philosophy* 24:3 (July 2007), 331-339.
- Matthew Davidson, Thomas Crisp, David Vander Laan, eds., *Knowledge and Reality: Essays in Honor of Alvin Plantinga*, Kluwer Academic Press, 2006.
- “Persistence and Divine Conservation,” *Religious Studies* 42 (2006), 159-176.
- “Counterpossibles and Similarity,” in Frank Jackson and Graham Priest, eds., *Lewisian Themes: the Philosophy of David K. Lewis*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- “A Regress Argument for Restrictivism,” *Philosophical Studies* 103:2 (March (II) 2001), 201-215.
- “The Ontology of Impossible Worlds,” *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 38:4 (Fall 1997), 597-620.

Book Reviews

Review of *Who's Afraid of Relativism? Community, Contingency, and Creaturehood* by James K. A. Smith, *Christian Scholar's Review*, XLV:4 (Summer 2016).

Review of *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Alternative to the Soul* by Kevin Corcoran, *Faith & Philosophy*, 25:3 (July 2008).

In Progress

"There is No Highest Attainable Good" gives a novel argument that, on a plausible assumption about possible goods, the mere possibility of the continuation of time is inconsistent with the existence of a highest attainable good.

"The Problem of Motivation in an Everlasting Life" (working title) addresses how the thesis that all human activity is aimed at a highest good (a thesis Aristotle seemed to regard as obvious) can be changed if in fact each good is surpassed by another.

"Whether in the Blessed There is Hope?" takes up one of the objections to Aquinas's negative answer, arguing that Aquinas's own thought supports the position that those who arrive at blessedness continue to desire their future blessedness.

"God's Toxin Puzzle and its Counterfactuals" (working title) is a reply to Pittard's "Evil and God's Toxin Puzzle" that highlights the differences between 'would,' 'might,' and 'would probably' counterfactuals and the significance of those differences for the decision-theoretic solution to the puzzle.

Unity and Persons: An Essay in Ontology (working title) is a book on composition and the ontology of persons. Part I argues that if oneness is an intrinsic feature of what bears it, then either unrestricted composition or mereological nihilism must be correct (though no compelling argument favors one over the other). With plausible assumptions, this disjunction implies that material objects do not gain or lose parts. It thus neatly avoids the Paradox of Increase. It also raises the question what (if anything) we humans might be. Part II defends the view that human persons are immaterial objects. Together with their transient bodies, they form medium-scale ecosystems. These anthroposomatic systems have a high degree of functional unity, but do not have ontological unity. Nonetheless, states of affairs involving them are bearers of value. As a bonus, the view allows a resolution of the otherwise troublesome Problem of the Many.

Invited Presentations

"Necessary Existence and Perfections," American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting, 13 April 2022.

"Ideological Parsimony and Reduction: A Reply to Rubio," 40th Anniversary Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, 14 Sept. 2018.

"Comments on Pittard's 'Evil and God's Toxin Puzzle,'" American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting, 30 March 2016.

“The Bearing of Theism on Modal Theory: Comments on Sullivan’s ‘Modal Ecumenism,’” American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting, 16 April 2014

“Emergence, Resurrection, and Souls: Comments on O’Connor’s ‘Do Souls Matter for Christian Theology?’” Logos Workshop, University of Notre Dame, 5 May 2012

“Singular Propositions and Serious Actualism: A Reply to Merricks,” Alvin Plantinga Retirement Celebration, 21 May 2010

“Reply to Steinhart’s ‘Stage Theory and Resurrection Replicas,’” American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting, 7 April 2007

“Counterpossibles and Impossible Worlds,” Philosophy Symposium, California State University at San Bernadino, 16 Nov. 2001

“Reply to Yandell” (response to “Being Immortal and Being a Person”), Wheaton Philosophy Conference, 27 Oct. 2001

“Impossible Worlds and Counterfactuals,” Philosophy Department Colloquium, University of California at Santa Barbara, 23 Feb. 2001

“Impossible Worlds and Counterfactual Semantics,” Philosophy Department Colloquium, University of Notre Dame, 4 Dec. 1998

Other Selected Presentations

“Coherence in a Life of Everlasting Growth,” Midwest Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, 9 Oct. 2021.

“Christian Hope and the End without End,” Paul C. Wilt Phi Kappa Phi Faculty Lecture, Westmont College, 30 Sept. 2019.

“The Paradox of the End without End,” Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, 21 Oct. 2016.

“The Paradox of the End without End,” Pacific Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, 18 March 2016.

“Is Composition an Intrinsic Relation?” Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, 18 March 2011.

“Bodies as Ecosystems,” Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, 18 April 2008.

“Evolution and the Fall,” The “Nature” of Belief: Evolutionary Explanation, Biological Function, and Divine Purpose, Calvin College, 4 Nov. 2005.

“How to Wiggle Out of Purgatory,” Pacific Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, 26 Feb. 2004.

“Divine Conservation and Persistence through Time,” Paul C. Wilt Phi Kappa Phi Faculty Lecture, Westmont College, 21 Oct. 2002.

“Persistence and Divine Conservation,” Midwest Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, Indiana University, 13 Sept. 2002.

“Materialism and Persistence,” panel discussion, “Dust of the Ground or Souls in Earthly Tents?” Westmont College, 16 Feb. 2002.

“A Regress Argument for Restrictive Incompatibilism,” Pittsburgh Graduate Philosophy Conference, March 2000.

“Impossible Worlds and the Dependence of Abstracta on God,” Pacific Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, 31 Jan. 1998.

Research Interests

I have broad interests in metaphysics, but my chief interests lie in three areas:

- *Ontology*. I am interested in a collection of interrelated questions about identity, material (and other) composition, time and persistence through it, causation, and vagueness, among other things. I am also interested in the ontology of abstract objects like propositions, properties, and possible and (I'd say) impossible worlds.
- *Metaphysical issues in philosophical theology*, especially issues about divine agency, as in theories of providence (e.g., Molinism and its ongoing debate with “open theism”), conservation (see above), and creation (e.g., whether abstracta are created, so that one necessary existent may depend on another).
- *The borderland of metaphysics and logic*, especially where it overlaps the areas mentioned above. This includes modal and counterfactual logic (and the metaphysical questions they raise, such as those about the nature of possible worlds and the grounding of counterfactuals of freedom), many-valued logic, relative identity, and the like.

Classes Taught (at Westmont College unless noted)

Ancient Philosophy
Classical and Non-Classical Logics
Critical Reasoning and Logic
Introduction to Philosophy
Introduction to Philosophy (Honors)
Formal Logic
Logic and Metaphysics of Modality
Mathematics and Philosophy in Western Culture
Medieval Philosophy
Metaphysics
Philosophical Perspectives
Philosophical Perspectives (Honors)
Philosophical Theology
Philosophy of Religion
Senior Seminar: Free Will and Its Significance
Death and the Meaning of Life (Notre Dame)
First-Year Composition (Notre Dame)
University Seminar in Philosophy (Notre Dame)

Selected Professional and Service Activities

- served on the Board of Editorial Consultants of *Faith and Philosophy*, 2012-present
- was a member of the Mellon Philosophy as a Way of Life Network, 2018-present
- served on the Society of Christian Philosophers Pacific-Mountain Regional Committee, 2017-2019
- helped plan and host 2012 Society of Christian Philosophers Pacific Regional meeting at Westmont College
- attended the conference *Changing Faces: Cultural Competency, Diversity, and Reconciliation* at Trinity Christian College, Sept. 2011
- served as consultant to Russell Howell and James Bradley, editors of *Mathematics through the Eyes of Faith*, fall 2010
- served as a referee for the journals below
 - *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*
 - *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*
 - *Dialectica*
 - *Erkenntnis*
 - *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy*
 - *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*
 - *Faith & Philosophy*
 - *Proceedings of the Association of Christians in the Mathematical Sciences*
 - *Journal of Analytic Theology*
 - *Journal of Philosophy*
 - *Religious Studies*
 - *Philosophical Quarterly*
 - *Philosophical Studies*
 - *Philosophy Compass*
 - *Southwest Philosophy Review*
 - *Synthese*
- chaired the Freedom and Determinism colloquium at the Pacific Division meeting of the 2010 American Philosophical Association
- organized the Society of Christian Philosophers session at the 2006 Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association
- chaired the Society of Christian Philosophers session at the Eastern Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association, 29 Dec. 2005
- co-organized an interdisciplinary colloquium on the mind/body problem, “Dust of the Ground or Souls in Earthly Tents?” with Thomas Fikes, Feb. 11-16, 2002
- served on the Society of Christian Philosophers Pacific Regional Committee, 2000-2003
- helped plan and host 2001 Society of Christian Philosophers Pacific Regional meeting at Westmont College
- served as faculty advisor for the California Iota (Westmont College) chapter of the Phi Sigma Tau honor society, 2001-2006
- participated in the Santa Barbarians (UCSB philosophy discussion group), 2000-present