Australian Catholic University

Centre for Philosophy and Phenomenology of Religion

Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Philosophy

The Centre for Philosophy and Phenomenology of Religion (CPPR), at the Australian Catholic University, announces a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship aimed at supporting the work of a high-achieving early career researcher for a period of up to four years. The Postdoctoral Fellow will conduct research relating to some aspect of the project “New Waves in French Phenomenology,” further details on which are provided below.

The CPPR (www.acu.edu.au/philosophy/cppr) is headed by Professor Kevin Hart (Edwin B. Kyle Chair of Christian Studies at the University of Virginia, and the Eric D’Arcy Chair in Philosophy at the Australian Catholic University), and also includes, as full-time members, Dr. Nick Trakakis, Dr. Jeffrey Hanson and Dr. Chris Hackett. The Centre promotes research into all aspects of philosophy of religion, with special emphasis on phenomenological approaches as pursued in European philosophy from Husserl and Heidegger to contemporary French thought. (Further details on the activities of the Centre are given below.)

Selection Criteria

Applicants must have a PhD in philosophy, or a related discipline (e.g., theology).

Applicants must be within 8 years post PhD (that is, they must have been awarded their PhD by 31 December 2005), and should have a highly competitive track-record relative to opportunity and be developing a strong international standing and research reputation.

Remuneration

The appointment will be made at Academic Level B (AU$85,718 – $101,206), plus standard relocation costs.

Conditions of Award

1. Fellows will become employees of ACU (Australian Catholic University) and are expected to be based full-time at the University for the duration of the Fellowship (other than for periods of approved leave or travel).
2. The duration of the Fellowship shall normally be for a maximum period of four years, with annual reviews.
3. Appointments must commence within six months of receipt of a formal letter of offer, unless approved otherwise by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research).
4. An allowance for relocation will be provided as per the University provisions available.
5. A salary (taxable) will be provided, based on the University’s Academic salary scale. The commencing salaries are based strictly on experience since receiving a doctorate.
6. Fellows are required to actively seek external research funding, including nationally competitive fellowships and grants, to support their research program throughout the term of the Fellowship.

7. Fellows are expected to contribute to the research supervision of Honours and/or higher degree research students either as a principal or co-supervisor, depending on experience.

8. Fellows are expected to actively immerse themselves in the intellectual life of their School and Faculty.

9. Fellows are required to provide an annual report of their research work, including grants awarded, grants applied for and their status, details of student supervision or co-supervision and other teaching-related activities, conference presentations and publications; and details of the intended program for the following year. This should be forwarded to the Research Services Office and be accompanied by an evaluative commentary by the host Research Institute, Research Centre, School or research group Leader by 31 December each year.

10. Fellows are required to provide a final report covering all aspects of the work undertaken prior to the end of their appointment. This Report must be forwarded to the Research Services Office at the completion of the Fellowship, or on termination if earlier. This should be accompanied by an evaluative commentary by the host Research Institute, Research Centre, School or research group Leader.

11. Fellows will be entitled to annual, sickness (personal leave) and parental leave in accordance with the University’s relevant policy for academic staff.

12. Any Fellow considered not to be making satisfactory progress will have the Fellowship reviewed according to the University’s policies.

13. The Fellow will be required to comply with all University policies including the University Intellectual Property Policy.

Application Process

To apply for the Fellowship, please submit the following documents:

- Curriculum Vitae.
- Project proposal (1,000 words), including expected outcomes (e.g., journal papers, books). Please note that your project must align with the research project, “New Waves in French Phenomenology”, detailed below.
- The names and addresses of academic referees.

Applications should be submitted via email to Professor Wayne McKenna, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) at dvc.research@acu.edu.au.

The deadline for applications is **30 November 2013**.

Any queries regarding this position may be directed to Dr. Nick Trakakis:
E: Nick.Trakakis@acu.edu.au   T: +61 3 9953 3263.
Description of Research Project

New Waves in French Phenomenology

The tradition of phenomenology, initiated by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) at the dawn of the twentieth century and advanced by his pupil Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), has proved to be an enduring philosophical method, though it has also been a notoriously flexible one as well. The major figures of phenomenology often do not agree on fundamental principles, and the tradition is more varied than unified. Nowhere is the diversity of phenomenological discussion more obvious than in the area of phenomenology of religion. The most crucial development in this area during the recent past is the publication in 1991 of Dominique Janicaud’s brief but powerfully influential volume *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française*. Janicaud asserted that within the French tradition of phenomenology there had been a shocking and heterodox “turn” toward theological concepts and inspirations. The reason Janicaud regarded this turn as an affront is that phenomenological methodology in its original conception seemed to exclude theological inquiry. Husserl famously suspended the transcendence of God from the field of absolute givenness, and Heidegger similarly insisted that phenomenology had to be methodologically atheistic.

Beginning with Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), however, phenomenologists in the French school spoke more freely of the divine and more broadly of experiences that elude consciousness. This elicited Janicaud’s famous critique. He indicted Levinas for illicitly admitting God (or at least figures of transcendence that played the role of God) into phenomenological discourse. For the same reasons Janicaud targeted Jean-Luc Marion (1946-) and Michel Henry (1922-2002), among others. In the name of phenomenology’s founder (Husserl), Janicaud defended what he took to be phenomenology’s philosophical purity and objectivity; God has no place according to him in phenomenological investigation.

This charge did not go unanswered in the critical responses. Marion has made extensive replies to Janicaud’s critique, and a host of commentators have crafted a variety of strategies to parry the attack. One could say that contemporary French phenomenology is defined by the original response to Janicaud: the “theological turn” has fundamentally marked French phenomenology today and, through it, Continental Philosophy as a whole. The aim of this project is to advance the conversation on the theological turn in the English-speaking world. Janicaud’s book was published in English in 2000, and the English edition also included representative essays from the thinkers he opposed: Marion, Michel Henry, Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), Jean-François Courtine (1944-), and Jean-Louis Chrétien (1952-). For many English-speaking scholars, this was their first introduction to Henry, Courtine, and Chrétien; Marion and Ricoeur were already more prominent. In the thirteen years since, much progress has been made in understanding these scholars and the issues their work addresses, but much is yet to be done.

First, Henry’s work remains relatively unknown in the English-speaking world, and there is precious little scholarship on Courtine and Chrétien. Other scholars have also arisen and entered into the controversy, intellectuals like Jean-Yves Lacoste (1953-) and Emmanuel Falque (1963-), and their work too is not well known at this stage.

This new generation of French phenomenologists poses questions of its own. Of particular interest to this research proposal is the suggestion by Falque and Lacoste that drawing strict lines of division between phenomenology and theology is both impossible and inadvisable. In this respect they contradict both Janicaud and an older generation; Marion and Ricoeur both upheld a clean separation between phenomenology and theology. What
methodological challenges and promises are entailed by Lacoste and Falque’s innovative argument? Is the rigour or rationality of their argumentation compromised by a frank admission that it borrows from both theology and philosophy? Or do they gain fresh perspectives and new insights as a result of abandoning sterile and artificial categories? Another common strategy in defense of phenomenology’s right to discuss religious experience is to widen the parameters of “appearance”. Phenomenology from its origin has been a science of appearances, which would seem at first to exclude the imperceptible. However, Lacoste, Marion, Levinas, Henry and others have shown either how phenomenology always has tacitly acknowledged some form of the unapparent, or how it must do so in order to be true to its mission to comprehend the whole of experience. Key thematics that are often appealed to in this area are notions that are common both to theological discourse and to analogous but more mundane phenomena like moral responsiveness to other human beings, artistic experience, and language. Are these efforts successful? Can one legitimately analogize between religious experience and aesthetic, linguistic or moral experience? Does accounting for this wide range of appearance mandate substantial alterations in the phenomenological method, or simply a proper appreciation for its original ambitions?

Finally, if phenomenology is sufficiently supple to address religious experience, then what becomes of the classic partner of theology: metaphysics? Traditionally, theology depended on metaphysics for its philosophical conceptuality, but numerous figures in the contemporary scene identify phenomenology as the discipline capable of providing what natural theology or metaphysics had supplied in the past. While some phenomenologists of religion like Marion remain entirely committed to the Heideggerean notion that phenomenology “overcomes” the problematic limitations of metaphysics, and no less a figure than Levinas militated heavily against ontology, others are far more comfortable with a constructive relationship between phenomenology, metaphysics and theology. Do theology and phenomenology still need metaphysics? Or has its traditional place been entirely eclipsed? Can thinking about being be renewed not just by theological speculation but also by a fresh phenomenological approach?

The Centre for Philosophy and Phenomenology of Religion at ACU seeks a Postdoctoral Fellow who can break new ground in exploring the ongoing ramifications of the debates over the so-called theological turn in French phenomenology. The debate has moved in the last decades beyond where it stood for an older generation. The newest voices in this discussion have not yet been fully heard in the Anglophone world, and crucial distinctions and allegiances important to a mid-century generation have become dated and subject to question. The Fellow will undertake research to appraise the value of these developments and contribute to the challenging promises of an ever-changing landscape.

**Research Environment**

The Centre for Philosophy and Phenomenology of Religion has already undertaken a number of significant projects in its brief history (beginning in 2011). While part of the ACU School of Philosophy, the Centre has quickly developed an international profile, drawing honorary affiliations from many of the world’s most distinguished scholars in the philosophy of religion. The Centre has held workshops on the problem of evil and the phenomenology of moral emotions, both of which featured scholars of international standing, including Marilyn McCord Adams and Anthony Steinbock. More recently, in May 2013 the Centre hosted Professor Emmanuel Falque, the Dean of Philosophy at the Institut catholique de Paris, France; and in June 2013 Professor Jeffrey Bloechl of Boston College. The Centre was
instrumental in organising last year the annual meeting of the Australasian Philosophy of Religion Association, which drew approximately 75 participants from Australia and abroad. This year the Centre convened (with Deakin University) the “Kierkegaard in the World” conference, celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Soren Kierkegaard; four prestigious keynote speakers were in attendance: C. Stephen Evans, Daphne Hampson, Charles Guignon, and John Lippitt. Further, the Centre will be hosting in late 2014 the annual conference of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy.