

## The Chancellor Jackman Research Fellowships in the Humanities, 2021-2022 12-month appointments

*Research Fellows hold an office on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the Jackman Humanities Building and are central members of the Circle of Fellows. They are University of Toronto tenured faculty members by the time of their fellowship, chosen for their distinction in achievements relative to their career stage, the excellence of their proposed project, and its relation to the annual theme for 2021-2022, Pleasure.*

<https://humanities.utoronto.ca/announcements/12-month-jhi-faculty-research-fellows-2021-2022>

### 2021-2022 Annual Theme: Pleasure

Whether understood as light amusement or passionate pursuit, as pure enjoyment, sensual gratification, bliss or hedonism, pleasure may be the most agreeable motivator. Yet pleasure has been described as “curious and appalling,” one of modern civilization’s most deadly poisons. Through its diverse manifestations – as intellectual satisfaction and the pleasures of knowledge, across studies of media audiences, addiction, virtual sex – when, and how, has pleasure become divorced from ideology, politics, and power? Uneasiness concerning pleasure resonates readily with humanists’ tendencies to formulate our subjects of study as constellations of problems, but is there space in our discourses for unironic joy?

### George Boys-Stones, FAS Classics and Philosophy

George Boys-Stones (D.Phil. 1995, University of Oxford) is Professor of Classics and Philosophy. A leading scholar of Ancient Philosophy with wide-ranging interests, George has a special interest in the philosophical movements of the post-Hellenistic period. He is the author or co-author of six books, most recently the first complete edition and translation of the Stoic L. Annaeus Cornutus (SBL Press, 2018) and a source book for ‘Middle Platonism’ (CUP, 2018). In addition, he has co-edited four collaborative volumes (2003-2013).



### *Pleasure and Personal Identity in Greek and Roman Thought: Rethinking Ancient Eudaimonism*

Are racial, sexual or gender identities parts of personal identity? Ideally not, according to the prevalent view of Greek and Roman ethical thought. But the prevalent view, I argue, is wrong. This becomes most apparent once we see how badly it handles the evidence we have for discussions of pleasure in relation to personal identity. Foregrounding these discussions raises new questions about ancient ethics – and opens up new possibilities for contemporary and interdisciplinary engagement with the philosophers of antiquity on a wider range of issues concerning embodied experience.

**Linda Rui Feng, FAS East Asian Studies**

Linda Rui Feng (Ph.D. 2008, Columbia University) is Associate Professor of East Asian Studies, and the author of *City of Marvel and Transformation: Chang'an and Narratives of Experience in Tang Dynasty China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), which explores the conception of spatial knowledge and its role in the collective imagination. A cultural historian working frequently with materials ranging from maps and geographical treatises to collections of anecdotes and topical narratives, she is interested in the interconnections among cultural technologies, knowledge, writing, and the various senses. Recent forays into the history of food in East Asia has led her to focus on the sense of smell—often called the “mute sense”—as a modality of thinking about cultural history. Committed to the humanities as an interdisciplinary endeavor, she is also a fiction writer and the author of a forthcoming novel, *Swimming Back to Trout River*.



***Concocting the “Heavenly Scent”: A Cultural History of Aromatics in late Medieval China***

Compared to other senses, the sense of smell is particularly challenging to capture or represent linguistically, and yet is undeniably powerful in its own way. This project aims to enhance our understanding of scent and its conferring of pleasure, by considering scents that were products of design, concoction, and curation. Focusing on late medieval China (ninth to twelfth centuries), I investigate how aromatics (*xiang*)—historically tied to both pleasure and health—were created and deployed as part of socially rooted sensory experiences. I am especially interested in how such experiences involving aromatics may have taken into account their volatile mobility and transportive potential: scents could waft across visual and physical barriers, transect hierarchies, and enable traveling between forms of existence such as the mundane and celestial/spectral.

**Mohan Matthen, UTM Philosophy**

Mohan Matthen (Ph.D. Stanford University, 1976) is Professor of Philosophy. His research interests include the philosophy of mind, especially perception, and the philosophy of biology. For the last few years, he has been writing about perception as directed activity we undertake in order to find out about the world. His recent publications include (among many others) *Perception and its Modalities* (co-edited with Stephen Biggs and Dustin Stokes; Oxford UP, 2014), *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Perception* (ed.; Oxford UP, 2015), and *Seeing, Doing, and Knowing: A Philosophical Theory of Sense Perception* (Oxford UP, 2005). He held a twelve-month JHI Faculty Research Fellowship in 2010-2011.



***Place, Taste, and the Pleasure of Art***

How do cultures construct the value of art (including music, visual and performing art, literature, etc.)? In particular, how are we to understand cultural difference? Why are the forms and tropes of one artistic milieu incomprehensible in others? My project makes hedonism the key to answering these questions: every artistic genre seeks to create pleasure in its own distinctive way. Hedonism has largely been discredited in philosophy. Here, I seek to reconstruct its foundations in a way that allows it to be applied to art. I start with a novel and original account of aesthetic pleasure itself,

and draw on theoretical resources from philosophy, psychology, and social science to understand cultural construction and the emergence of cultural difference.

**Shafique Virani**, UTM Historical Studies

Shafique Virani (Ph.D. Harvard University, 2001) is Professor of Islamic Studies and was founding Director of the Centre for South Asian Civilizations. His scholarly interests include Sufism, Ithna-‘ashari and Ismaili Shiism, Quranic studies, Islamic history and philosophy, and Muslim literatures in Arabic, Persian and South Asian languages. His scholarly work include books, a documentary film, multimedia productions, a registered invention, a proposal to the Unicode Consortium, entries in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and the *Encyclopaedia of Religion* and numerous peer reviewed articles. His most recent book, *In Search of Salvation (Dar justuju-yi rastagari)*, was published in Persian in 2020. Translated into over 20 languages, he has received awards and recognition from the American Academy of Religion, the Middle East Studies Association, the Foundation for Iranian Studies, Farabi International, the British Society for Middle East Studies, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and two Iranian presidents. An avid volunteer around the world, he has consulted for projects by Cirque du Soleil, the History Channel, Lord Cultural Resources, Google, and numerous governmental and other organizations. Describing him as “a visionary,” UNESCO honored him for dedicating his efforts “to the cause of extending the frontiers of knowledge and the welfare of humankind.”



***Sensual and Spiritual: Pleasure in the Thought of Nasir-I Khusraw***

This project is an examination of the philosophy of pleasure and happiness in the works of Nāsir-i Khusraw, and those of his Fatimid peers. He famous traveller, poet and thinker, who lived a millennium ago in the Near East, led an intemperate life his first forty years in dissipation until a dream vision called him to seek pleasure in the pursuit of knowledge. For the remainder of his life he wrote extensively about sensual and intellectual pleasure (*lazzat-i ḥissī* and *lazzat-i ‘aqlī*), elaborating an extensive philosophy couched in Neoplatonic vocabulary of how the Universal Soul’s quest for pleasure will eventually lead it to the eternal happiness and beatitude that transpires when it reunites with the Universal Intellect.