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Paul Moser, Graham Oppy, and the Philosophical Dignity of Christian Faith

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Abstract: This paper offers two main reflections. *First*, I intend to highlight that (and why) the philosopher, when focuses on reality, may treat his object from a merely intellectual point of view, hoping to find *pro et contra* reasons; but when he focuses on God as well as on every other thing in relation to God, he needs to develop his arguments *within a loving relationship with the Lord*. *Secondly*, it is my intention to treat one more question raised by Oppy's objections to Moser: the idea that philosophy must start only from what everybody knows. I intend to show that, in the light of such an idea, *Christian philosophy seems to be paradoxically less inconsistent than philosophy alone*.

In his acute reflection on the fascinating proposal advanced by Paul Moser, Graham Oppy rightly raises a few decisive questions, although in my opinion he does not give them adequate treatment. I am persuaded that, from his point of view, he cannot do better, because an adequate answer can only be provided by referring to the very nature of Christian faith and its bearing on philosophy. Moser has already replied with good arguments. Nevertheless, I believe his reply can be developed further.

1. Oppy claims that the expression "Christian philosophy" is ambiguous, since "on the one hand, it can be taken to refer to the distinctive content of certain philosophical theories; on the other hand, it can be taken to refer to a distinctive mode of engagement in philosophical discussion" (1). In addition, "the MOST that Moser [and his "Christ-Shaped Philosophy"] should want to claim is that there is a distinctive *mode of engagement* in philosophical discussion that is *consistent with Christian doctrine*" (3). As far as I can see, this means that "Christ-Shaped Philosophy" *cannot* be taken "to refer to the distinctive content of certain philosophical theories". Why? Let us consider a mode of engagement that is particularly consistent with Christian doctrine: the philosopher who focuses on God, as well as on every other thing in relation to God, develops his ideas *within a loving relationship with the Lord*. If God is *the principle and the end of all things*, he is also *the Good*. As a consequence, in order to know him, it is necessary to take

part in the good that he himself is; it is necessary *to be good*, to make progress from the point of view of *virtue*, in short, becoming better to understand more. But this depends precisely on the fact that God is considered the principle and the end of all things (one needs to become better in order to understand more only if the object of knowledge is at the same time the Good, that is, the principle and the end of all things). And the knowledge of the principle and the end of all things should enable the philosopher to develop *philosophical theories*.

2. Of course, Oppy could object that what I have just highlighted (God is the Good, the principle as well as the end of all things) enjoys only a kind of *internal* coherence, while a *philosophical* process looks for the consistency with the larger body of knowledge (a kind of *external* coherence). It is precisely the object of the second question raised by Oppy. He says that Moser's remarks also manifest an ambiguity between "the following two claims: (A) CONSISTENCY: Christian philosophy must *be consistent with* Christian doctrine; (B) ENTAILMENT: Christian philosophy must *entail* Christian doctrine" (1). It seems to me that Oppy distinguishes a kind of "pure philosophy" from a philosophy that implies Christian doctrine. The former can find itself consistent with Christian doctrine once its job *is done*, the latter can *start* not only from universally accepted truths but also from Christian beliefs. Oppy seems to claim that philosophy must start only from *what everybody knows*, and explicitly says that it is part of "the common intellectual heritage of all people" (3-4). Again, why believe this? If we focus on our question (whether or not philosophy can start also from Christian theism), we see that in the light of the idea that philosophy must start only from what everybody knows, *Christian philosophy seems to be paradoxically less inconsistent than philosophy alone*. Suppose that Christian philosophy starts from the idea that God is the omnipotent and omniscient Creator, that He is the Good itself, who intervenes in support of our investigation to facilitate our success, and helps us know and love him. Needless to say, such a perspective cannot be drawn from the idea that philosophy must start from what everybody knows. But what must be noticed is that *there is no contradiction*, because such a Christian thought can follow, *as a hypothesis*, from the complex of propositions that are known to all (if the world has been made by an omnipotent, omniscient and totally good creator, that creator is able to grant to whomever he wants the possibility of knowing him as well as every other thing in relation to him). On the contrary, a pure philosophy starts from the conviction that first it must be *proved* that God exists, namely it must be made clear that he exists on the basis of logical processes whose points of departure coincide with *what everyone knows*. Well, it is not usually considered that this idea is affected by a very relevant prejudice, and

manifestly *falls into a contradiction* with the criterion on which it is based (to start only from what everybody knows). In fact, such idea implies a conviction that *is not universally accepted*: that human reason can determine whether or not a God who could be infinitely superior to human rational faculties has manifested himself to man; in other words, that it is not previously acceptable the possibility that a God like that could decide to contact man by acting in the interior human dimension and not by waiting for the activity of human reason.

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