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Love, Wisdom and (Christian) Philosophy

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Abstract: Does the practice of Christian philosophy (or should it, at any rate) produce wisdom? This paper considers recent claims about analytic theology and philosophy and their connections to wisdom and love, specifically those made by Michael Rea, Paul Moser and Michael McFall. It argues that the relationship between Christian philosophy or theology and wisdom-rooted love is not well represented by either the Moser-McFall camp or by Rea and is closer to Aaron Preston's account of historical philosophy. The paper concludes by considering the role of irony in doing Christian theology and philosophy.

What is the relationship of wisdom, love and Christian philosophy? Does the practice of Christian philosophy (or should it, at any rate) produce wisdom? We consider some recent claims about analytic philosophy and analytic theology and their connections to wisdom and love, specifically those made by Michael Rea, Paul Moser and Michael McFall. We briefly present some of their views in section I. Section II argues that the relationship between Christian philosophy or theology and wisdom-rooted love is not well represented by either the Moser-McFall camp or by Rea and is closer to Aaron Preston's account of historical philosophy. In the final section we consider some suggestions about the role of irony in doing Christian theology and philosophy.

I

In *Analytic Theology's* "Introduction," Michael Rea responds to objections to analytic theology, an approach to theology using the tools of analytic

philosophy. Analytic philosophy, some say, has lost the goal of wisdom and hence will fail as theological method. Rea responds: “[D]espite the superficial attractiveness of the idea that philosophers and theologians ought to be aiming in the direction of wisdom and moral improvement, Christian philosophers as such, and theologians as well, might in fact have some reason for resisting that idea.”¹ He reports an email asking for suggestions on what philosophy to read in order to become wise. Rea’s response? Don’t read philosophy, read scripture. He continues: “If philosophy as a discipline (or theology) were to aim its efforts at the production of a self-contained body of wisdom, or, at a general theory of right living, it would (I think) be aiming at the production of a *rival* to scripture.”² Instead of taking Christian philosophy (and theology) as wisdom-aimed, Rea says the right theoretical task is the business of clarifying, systematizing, and model-building, just what analytic philosophers do.

In *The Wisdom of the Christian Faith*, Moser and McFall take a different tack. After summarizing Paul’s gospel, they turn to wisdom. They call Christian wisdom “*cruciform*,” and write: “Paul anchored spiritual wisdom not in an abstract principle or Platonic Form, but instead in a personal agent who manifests God’s power without defect. . . . The immediate question is which particular features of the human person Jesus Christ constitute his being the power of God and the wisdom of God.”³ They quote Philippians 2 and report this key feature: “. . . the willing conformity of Jesus to God’s will, even when the result is self-sacrificial death. Paul relied on the idea of Jesus’ *humble obedience* to God to capture the feature in question.”⁴ They add:

Cruciform wisdom is the kind of spiritual wisdom manifested by Jesus in Gethsemane on his path to the cross and his subsequent resurrection. It comes in a person rather than merely a principle, because it inherently involves an engaged person’s will and not just claims about a will. God’s wisdom comes from a personal agent who seeks to engage other personal agents at the level of their wills, where intentional action can emerge. Genuine spiritual wisdom does not reduce to talk about such wisdom, because it includes *power* from God to welcome and to obey

¹ Michael Rea, “Introduction,” in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, eds. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18.

² *Ibid.*, 19

³ Paul Moser and Michael McFall, “Introduction” in *The Wisdom of the Christian Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

God's perfect will. Talk is too cheap and easy to supply this powerful wisdom.⁵

Does cruciform wisdom truck with philosophy? Not really, according to Moser and McFall. Philosophy analyzes and debates concepts and propositions. Cruciform wisdom draws on God's power and conforms one's life to God's will. "The foundation of cruciform wisdom is not a philosophical idea but instead is God's power as exemplified in Jesus Christ."⁶ Practical wisdom's goal is understanding reality and acting on it; cruciform wisdom moves beyond understanding to a transformed experience of God's power in our very being.

The same theme is found in Moser's earlier book, *Jesus and Philosophy* where he writes:

How . . . is Jesus relevant to philosophy as a discipline? Philosophy in its normal mode, without being receptive to an authoritative divine challenge stemming from divine love commands, leaves humans in a discussion mode, short of an obedience mode under divine authority. . . . Hence, the questions of philosophy are, notoriously, perennial. As divinely appointed Lord, in contrast, Jesus commands humans to move, for their own good, to an obedience mode of existence relative to divine love commands. . . . Accordingly, humans need to transcend a normal discussion mode, and thus philosophical discussion itself, to face with sincerity the personal. . . . Philosophical discussion becomes advisable and permissible, under the divine love commands, if and only if it genuinely honors those commands by sincere compliance with them.⁷

To stop the perennial questions of normal philosophy, Christian philosophers must already be submitted to the very thing they try to understand viz., God. The perennial nature of philosophy flows from our lack of willing submission to God—that is, our lack of living the life of cruciform wisdom.⁸

Of *Jesus and Philosophy*, Rea writes:

⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁷ Paul Moser, *Jesus and Philosophy: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 17.

⁸ William Hasker discusses Moser's distinction between the perennial questions of traditional philosophy and Christian philosophy at <http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=150&mode=detail> and <http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=143&mode=detail>.

[I]t looks as if Moser thinks that Jesus' relevance to philosophy boils down to this: In light of Jesus' commands to love God and our neighbor, to the extent that doing philosophy keeps us from "eagerly" serving God and our neighbor, it runs "afoul of the divine love commands" and is not permissible. If this is right, then we philosophers need to take a cold, hard look at what we do every day to put dinner on our tables, and we need to *stop it*, unless we can find some way in which talking philosophy with colleagues and graduate students, attending departmental colloquia and conferences, writing papers about metaphysics and epistemology, and the like either *constitute* eager service toward God and our neighbors or simply fills time that could not sensibly be used in such service. (I assume that the fact that doing philosophy puts dinner on our tables isn't sufficient to make everything we do for our jobs count as "eager service" towards God or our neighbor. If it is, then Moser's advice has no real bite.)⁹

But Moser's view is even stronger. The love commands should have priority over virtually any work. He writes:

We humans . . . have limited resources, in terms of time and energy for pursuing our projects. We thus must *choose* how to spend our time and energy in ways that pursue some projects and exclude others. If we eagerly choose projects that exclude . . . serving the life-sustaining needs of . . . [our] neighbor (when we could have undertaken the latter), we thereby fail to love . . . [our] neighbor. We also thereby fail to obey God's command . . . to give priority to . . . [our] eagerly serving the life-sustaining needs of . . . [our] neighbor (emphasis his).¹⁰

Rea responds:

It is very difficult to see how editing or contributing to a volume like *Jesus and Philosophy* serves the *life-sustaining needs* of anyone. It is, moreover, quite easy to see how time spent on such a project excludes a wide variety of activities—helping out at the local soup-kitchen, for example—that very obviously serve the life-sustaining needs of our neighbors. Thus, if we are to see this passage as *sincerely* written, it seems

⁹ Michael Rea, "Review of *Jesus and Philosophy: New Essays*" in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2009.03.31. Available here: <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23963-jesus-and-philosophy-new-essays/>

¹⁰ Moser, *Jesus and Philosophy*, 15.

that we cannot take it straight up. We must assume that, *whatever* the passage is saying, its author isn't, in the very act of composing it, ironically accusing himself of doing something morally impermissible. Thus we must fill in appropriate qualifications, nuance our understanding of terms like "life-sustaining" and "needs," attend to differences among equally viable ways of describing the same project, and so on. But once we have done all of this, we have no idea what we will be left with. In short, if we take it at face value we can't take it seriously; but unless we take it at face value, there is no reason to think that it supports the austere advice quoted earlier.¹¹

Moser, according to Rea, takes a moral stand that undermines the philosophy underpinning it. Hence we have to interpret Moser as saying something other than what he apparently says, in which case there won't be much left to the claim.

Clear disagreements exist between Moser and McFall, on the one hand, and Rea on the other, yet also substantial agreement. Let's consider Rea's account of analytic philosophy, something Moser and McFall would likely accept. Rea suggests five prescriptions:

- P1.** Write as if philosophical positions and conclusions can be adequately formulated in sentences that can be formalized and logically manipulated.
- P2.** Prioritize precision, clarity and logical coherence.
- P3.** Avoid substantive (non-decorative) use of metaphor and other tropes whose semantic content outstrips their propositional content.
- P4.** Work as much as possible with well-understood primitive concepts and concepts that can be analyzed in terms of those.
- P5.** Treat conceptual analysis (insofar as possible) as a source of evidence.¹²

If this list also describes "traditional" philosophy as Moser understands it, then Moser's claims about traditional philosophy are true. Nothing of conforming the will to one's philosophical findings, let alone to God, is found here. Moser's cruciform wisdom ends perennial philosophy; Christian wisdom knows the answers, and traditional philosophy is not about shaping one's will but is, at best, an intellectual exercise. Of course, Rea rejects the idea that philosophy can

¹¹ Rea, "Review."

¹² Rea, "Introduction," 5, 6.

make one wise, which honor goes to scripture. Rea and Moser/McFall agree: turn directly to the Christian faith for wisdom.

Moser/McFall and Rea agree about philosophy and its ends in at least two ways. First, Rea says one should not turn to philosophy to become wise but to scripture; philosophy is no competitor to scripture.¹³ Moser and McFall, likewise, say one should discover cruciform wisdom from scripture (Jesus and Paul), turning aside from philosophy where it gets in the way. Philosophy will not make us wise whereas scripture can (via God's power, one supposes, for Rea as well as Moser and McFall). Second, they agree that (traditional) philosophy is about propositions and concepts. A difference emerges, however. For Moser and McFall, traditional philosophy cannot bring wisdom whereas a fully developed Christian philosophy can. For Rea, philosophy, Christian or not, never brings wisdom. Moser criticizes traditional philosophy, replacing it with something many would not recognize as philosophy. Rea upholds traditional philosophy but claims that it won't lead to wisdom. Both understand traditional philosophy similarly.

One further expositional comment, viz., Moser is less explicit about "traditional" philosophy than Rea is about "analytic" philosophy. Nevertheless, "traditional" philosophy could be called "intellectual philosophy." Intellectual philosophy only thinks about reality but does not attempt to shape the philosopher's will. Consider the (brief) Moser-McFall discussion of Socratic-Platonic philosophy. They write: "Wisdom, according to Socrates, leads to happiness. but requires a kind of human 'purification' . . . because it provides an escape from evil."¹⁴ Wisdom is rooted in God, stands against evil, contributes to human happiness and provides salvation. Contemporary philosophers reject such views because "most . . . aim to avoid reliance on God in their philosophical explanations."¹⁵ Moser and McFall say Plato's view merits comparison to a Christian approach yet provide only a brief one. They write: "The foundation of human transformation from death to life is the divine power manifested in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and now available to receptive humans. This lesson is at the center of Paul's message of salvation for humans, and it contrasts with the primarily intellectual message of

¹³A case could be made that philosophy as Rea describes it is not likely to generate an alternative wisdom-deposit to compete with scripture. Many humans (although arguably not all) catch wisdom through story and metaphor rather than through theoretical discussions. Philosophy as Socrates/Plato practiced it has a better chance since their philosophies are full of story.

¹⁴ Moser-McFall, "Introduction", 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2.

salvation offered by Socrates and Plato.”¹⁶ So Moser and McFall reject Socratic-Platonic philosophy as falling short of cruciform wisdom not simply because of content but because it remains too intellectual. Cruciform wisdom can’t ever be reached by “normal” philosophy, even that of a Socratic-salvific approach. But if that is true of Socrates and Plato, surely the point is writ larger for analytic philosophy. Scripture, rooted in God’s self-disclosure, is the (only) source of wisdom. Traditional philosophy ignores wisdom because it leaves out the will (Moser) or runs the risk of generating an alternative “deposit” of wisdom (Rea).

II

We’re puzzled. While strange to see philosophy, especially Christian philosophy, aiming at anything but wisdom, stranger still is to see Christian theology, the very study of God, aiming at anything but wisdom. In the medieval period, theology was taken as the queen of the sciences with philosophy as her handmaiden. Even more germane, theology, which it was believed couldn’t be done without philosophy, was thought to lead to prayer and worship. Arguably most contemporary theology and philosophy doesn’t explicitly aim at worship. It’s much the poorer for not. But it’s not clear why a Christian philosopher should think of philosophy as not aiming at worship, since all that we do is to be done to the glory of God. Rea’s disconnection of theology from wisdom seems odd on those grounds. Shouldn’t he be urging something better for theology and the philosophy underpinning it? That is what Moser presents. Unfortunately, Moser’s view loses philosophy (as most understand it) along the way. Of course, the explicit *aim* of much contemporary theology and philosophy is not wisdom. Nevertheless, wisdom might emerge out of the two disciplines (and other disciplines as well) even though wisdom is no longer their explicit aim, and surely one could practice philosophy, and in particular Christian philosophy, with the aim of becoming wise.

Relevant here are comments from Aaron Preston on the exchange between William Hasker and Moser. Preston writes:

In Moser’s exchange with William Hasker, it came out that CSP [Christ-Shaped Philosophy] is philosophy in the broad, traditional sense of “the love of wisdom,” over against philosophy in the sense of the current “professionalized” academic discipline. Hasker proposes that these are two discrete senses of the term “philosophy,” and that there are two correspondingly discrete senses of “wisdom,” spiritual and philosophical.

¹⁶ Ibid, 11.

He allows that Moser does well to advocate for spiritual wisdom, as it is, of course, an important good. But he errs, Hasker thinks, in turning this into a call for disciplinary reform, for this conflates the two senses of “philosophy” and the two corresponding senses of “wisdom.”¹⁷

Preston goes on to argue against the “two-wisdoms” approach but the point to which we want to call attention is this.

. . . Hasker takes Moser’s prophetic call for disciplinary reform to be wrongheaded insofar as it assumes that philosophy *as an academic discipline* has some special connection to, or responsibility for, spiritual wisdom. Hasker’s view seems to be that philosophy is responsible for philosophical wisdom only, not spiritual wisdom. But this position is quite inconsistent with the “great tradition” in philosophy. If we were to put Socrates (or Plato, or Aristotle, or Boethius, or Aquinas, or . . . almost any other major philosophical figure up to and including, say, T.H. Green) alongside Paul (the Apostle) and Saul (Kripke), I suspect that they would take *something like* Pauline wisdom to be the *telos* of Sauline philosophy; indeed, I think they would not want to classify the products – the particular insights – of Sauline philosophy as “wisdom” at all except insofar as they were integrated with a broader picture of reality ordered to a moral and/or spiritual end.¹⁸

We think Preston is right on this matter. More on that below.

But we want to note that we are puzzled in another way too. Rea’s suggestion seems to turn scripture reading into magic. He needs to say more. To start, what’s the Holy Spirit’s role in becoming wise? Surely the Holy Spirit works through our abilities. So even with the Holy Spirit’s contribution, reading scripture requires doing theology or philosophy. Thinking about scriptural teaching involves judgments about the text’s meaning. Sophisticated theology and philosophy it might not always be, but theology and philosophy it is nonetheless. Scripture is not self-interpreting.

Yet it can be sophisticated theology. Consider what may be the best example of using philosophy to understand scripture, a case where philosophy

¹⁷ Aaron Preston “Two Wisdoms: The Unity of Truth, The Spirit of the (Academic) Disciplines, and the Norms of Academic Philosophy”. Available here: [http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-Preston%20\(The%20Spirit%20of%20the%20Academic%20Disciplines\)_Edited_AP.pdf](http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-Preston%20(The%20Spirit%20of%20the%20Academic%20Disciplines)_Edited_AP.pdf)

¹⁸ Ibid.

led to both wisdom and worship: the doctrine of the Trinity. The Church councils made sense of the Trinity by using the philosophical notions of essence and person without which the Trinity would seem a blatant contradiction. Through understanding the Trinity we came to better know the God we love, and we learned to emulate God by replicating the divine community in our own. Indeed, many of Moser's claims make little sense apart from the Trinitarian notion of God.

Furthermore, if one's aim is wisdom, one must act on what one learns. The Church did that on the basis of Nicaea. Behind both Rea's and Moser's claims is (perhaps) a certain Protestant inclination to think of scripture as a stand-alone set of truths that the Holy Spirit guides one to directly without having to reason. (Luther had no such thing in mind, but some contemporary Protestantisms have watered down Luther.) While a central role exists for God's spirit to enliven our understanding of scripture, surely God's using human minds to discover (even wisdom-loaded) truth isn't precluded.

Finally, Rea's suggestion—that scripture is the source of wisdom whereas philosophy creates an alternative—is ambiguous. This treats wisdom as a deposit. Yet becoming wise is not the simple reception of wisdom-data. Here Moser's claims seem closer to the mark: becoming wise involves shaping one's will to the scriptural deposit and hence to God. Of course, the latter shaping depends in significant ways on how one reads scripture (with one's philosophical and theological eyes).

Some distinctions may help. Let's separate wisdom as a deposit (such as in the Bible, the Upanishads, or Pascal's *Pensees*) from wisdom's appropriation.¹⁹ Appropriation involves shaping one's will to the deposit. Call the former the "deposit" and the latter the "appropriation." Let's also separate "understanding" and "discovery." The former is one's thinking about or evaluation of the deposit, and the latter the initial (means of) discovery of the deposit. By "initial" we mean the first time any human or group thereof discovers or invents the deposit (the writers of scripture, the *Upanishads* or the *Pensees*). In the case of the writing (speaking, etc.) of the deposit, some human first thought of the content and recorded it. The discovery comes through human thought even when guided by a revelatory act of God.²⁰ Such human thought (even guided by God) involves theology and philosophy. Otherwise,

¹⁹ Robert C. Roberts distinguishes between wisdom as deposit, as the power of explaining and as the power of living. Our distinctions overlap with his. See his "Unconditional Love and Spiritual Values" in *The Wisdom of the Christian Faith*.

²⁰ The Hindu scriptures are thought to be eternal and hence were never discovered as we use the term. No one created them, an interesting but far afield discussion.

we wouldn't be able to speak of the various theologies of Paul, John, Mark, or Jesus.²¹

So one can have a deposit, come to understand it, and then appropriate it. But the deposit is also discovered. The discovery itself involves human thought and reason. Plausibly, some overlap between understanding a deposit and its appropriation will exist, even for the discoverer of a deposit. In short, we're proposing a continuum of the use of reason and thought (philosophical and theological) from discovery to understanding to appropriation. This is no less true for Jesus than for anyone.

Consider an extra-biblical case (and here we return to pick up the theme introduced above through Preston's suggestions). Socrates was granted access by the Oracle to information (the deposit) he spent his life understanding. Socrates thought that to know the good is to do the good. He probably, in understanding the deposit, actually came to appropriate it. By attempting to show the Oracle's claim false, he eventually understood the deposit and, in the end, shaped his will to it. It was his divine mission. This parallels Moser's suggestion for the Christian philosopher. God grants her access to scripture. She then spends her life understanding and shaping her will to the wisdom—her divine mission. Both Socrates and the Christian use reason, including analytic tools, to understand the message. The deposit of wisdom each receives comes through human agency (the writer of scripture or the Oracle) and is already human-thought mediated. Even hesitating to call such mediation "philosophy," it nevertheless requires choosing the best way to state the wisdom. Stating the deposit can use wisdom as well, if the discoverer believes the deposit is wisdom. Perhaps wisdom from God doesn't always involve human reasoning (Balaam's ass spoke God's word) but it always comes in language and is shaped, therefore, by humans.

Can reason generate the appropriate will response? Moser says the Christian wisdom deposit distinctly calls for the shaping of the will, a point with which we agree. While certainly Christianity's content is unique and Socrates did not believe it, surely Socrates wouldn't be happy saying: "I understood the Oracle's message but don't need to respond willfully." Shaping his will to the Oracle's deposit was part of his goal. Arguably, he was quite

²¹ Here complications abound. Paul has a gloss on the gospel. But we can talk about Jesus' theology. Jesus' theology, however, is mediated by the gospel writers and Paul. Paul's version of Jesus' theology comes before the recorded Gospels. Is one of these a "better" take on Jesus's own thought? Is Paul's "better" because it is earlier? Or, assuming that Matthew, Mark, Luke or John wrote the Gospels (itself a complicated issue) are their "eye-witness" accounts the better ones? By the time one sorts out the complexities, a variety of layers of reason and thought would be involved.

successful. So Moser's challenge is not unique in regard to the will. Any person (philosophers included) worth her salt acts on her wisdom (as she takes it) and doesn't simply sit at the coffee shop thinking. Moser, apparently, says not many philosophers are worth their salt. Philosophy in "discussion mode" is not enough. But is that philosophy's fault or the philosopher's?

Moser suggests that (analytic or traditional) philosophy falls short of appropriation. Philosophical *thinking* never gets one to shape the will, the will being, presumably, distinct from the intellect. On those terms, it's less a problem for the philosopher *qua* philosopher and more a problem for the Christian *qua* Christian or the Hindu *qua* Hindu or Pascalian *qua* Pascalian. We can know the truth and fail to do it. Christianity calls it "sin," and if not always sin, perhaps "foolishness." Nothing unique turns up here about the failure of the human will to live by wisdom's light.

Moser speaks as well about the propositional nature of traditional philosophy. Propositions are true, not persons. Is that why philosophy is "intellectual?" Perhaps. Truth as a property of propositions is somewhat barren. Maybe, however, the truly Christian philosopher (who sees philosophy as wisdom-generating) takes truth to flow from God's person and to be more than merely propositional. Hence Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Hildegard, and Teresa would count as Christian philosophers but not others (even Christians) who've not made the commitment to deep spiritual maturity—the obedience demanded by worship.

But in saying that Jesus' truth is personal we do well to recognize that Jesus *embodies* truth. The truth is not just rooted in God's person but embodied in a particular human person, Jesus. And human persons are embodied and not Platonically disembodied souls. Given this, perhaps Moser's claim implies that the content of the Christian faith involves the enlivening of the will *through the body* so one cannot understand the content without (at least to some degree) acting on it. Belief is no mere propositional attitude, any more than (Christian) truth is merely propositional. Perhaps to (truly) understand cruciform wisdom's content is actually to respond with a commitment to God's power and Christian maturity and, in fact, the *actual* spiritual maturation process. One becomes a *Christian* philosopher (fully) when one actually conforms one's will to God's. What then of Muslim or Socratic philosophy, both coming close to the person-of-God account of truth? Socrates responds both to true propositions and a divine mission. Of course, he doesn't understand God's will through Jesus, the human embodiment of truth. Had he known Jesus, however, perhaps he would have embraced him, just as any Hebrew-Bible saint would have, a point recognized by Justin Martyr's claim that Socrates and Plato were "Christians before Christ."

St. Augustine said, “I believe in order to understand.” This sort of belief may, indeed, involve the will. Medieval philosophy often engaged the claim that virtue is necessary for knowledge. The demons believe and tremble, but do they believe in the fullest sense? Believing without works is, according to James, dead. Can one have the truth without living it? Consider the rich young ruler’s question: “What must I do to be saved?” and Jesus’ (eventual) demanding reply: “Sell all that you have and come follow me.” Wisdom as God’s power cannot, apparently, come without positive human volition. Moser takes this sort of command—sell all that you have, give it to the poor, and come follow me—to be a command of love. Love commands demand high levels of willing obedience. But for Moser they conflict with philosophizing “in the normal mode.” Presumably the normal mode lets the philosopher off the hook because, after all, a mere proposition makes the demand, not a person. Perhaps true Christian philosophy is embodied in genuine commitment to drawing on God’s power in our lives. Actually understanding truth (and hence gaining cruciform wisdom power) commits one to Christ and Christian maturity. If one isn’t so committed, then one is neither a Christian philosopher nor does one understand the truth. “Normal” or “traditional” philosophy doesn’t count as wisdom or even, perhaps, as having the truth.

We think that is too strong a result. Surely one can believe the truth without doing the truth. But perhaps one doesn’t have the strongest sort of belief when one fails to act on it. Even so, we can recognize a continuum of belief/faith that can help us with Moser’s account of Jesus’ demands. Separating the intellect and the will too far traps many philosophers, but not all. Marx took the point of philosophy to be not just to describe but to change the world. Surely his ideas did. Many feminist philosophers argue that Western philosophy divides the intellect from praxis. Christian faith and its philosophy, properly understood, agree. Here Moser and McFall seem on the right track. God made humans embodied, contextual, and social. To separate thinking about God from worshipping God or serving one’s neighbor is perhaps the fundamental mistake of Christian philosophy *as it is often practiced*. Here we agree with Moser. We disagree, nevertheless, with Moser’s contrast between the intellect and the will when he writes of normal philosophy and with the contrast between normal and Christian philosophy. Recall Rea’s concern: if we take Moser seriously, we must stop doing philosophy and take up soup ladles. This is a problem for philosophers. Must Christian philosophers only be concerned about materially loving their neighbors? Isn’t there some place for theory or other non-material acts?

Rea’s claims about analytic theology and philosophy should bother us too. That theology and philosophy should be distanced from wisdom is exactly

what Moser and McFall find problematic. Yet a number of philosophers (including Rea) note that Moser has spent a good deal of his life doing what looks mightily like “normal” philosophy.²² Indeed, Moser does struggle to bring together the will-shaping call of Christ with an intellectual activity oft-times quite disembodied and lacking in praxis. But hasn’t St. Paul used philosophical and theological tools to present the very message of willful obedience to love’s call? It certainly seems possible to be a Christian philosopher or theologian whose will is conformed to Christ’s mind.

Indeed, conforming the will to one’s beliefs is not merely a Christian possibility. Once again, Socrates shaped his will according to the use of reason via which he appropriated the received deposit of wisdom. While not having cruciform wisdom, he surely lived a life in which philosophical reasoning led him to believe certain things about himself and others and to act on those beliefs. We are surprised that Moser and McFall wrote off Socrates’s wisdom in a single sentence. Socrates’s work was “too intellectual” to suit cruciform wisdom. Is the point just that Socrates wasn’t a Christian or that Socrates *qua* philosopher couldn’t conform his will to God’s? The Moser-McFall essay virtually rules out anyone *qua* philosopher reaching the kind of existentially authentic life lived according to God’s will. Moser’s claims bear this out when he says philosophy could (and presumably regularly does) interfere with the love demands of faithfully following Jesus. But if Socrates had come under the influence of Jesus, would he not have taken on cruciform wisdom? It seems Socrates *qua* philosopher might very well have died for Jesus instead of dying “merely” for the good of Athens. If the shaping of one’s will to God’s is the core of Christian wisdom, why think Socrates’s will too detached from his intellectual work? For Plato the Good is the highest form, the source of growth and light. In the Christian faith, God is both good and the good. The goodness of love woos us toward God. Perhaps Moser thinks the problem is that (normal) philosophy doesn’t require love. Clearly sometimes philosophy (when detached from living well) takes one away from following Christ. But why think philosophy must be practiced in its typical way or that philosophers move away from God of necessity?

Moser, McFall and Rea seem to us to have a failure in imagination when it comes to the nature of Christian philosophy, or perhaps they suffer from historical amnesia. Further, perhaps each takes on the professional philosophical attitude handed to us via seriously flawed assumptions. In contrast to the professional philosopher’s model, a number of historical philosophers see that living the Christian life results *from* philosophy. Among

²² See, for example, <http://epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=131&mode=detail>

them are the early apologists and theologians: Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal and Kierkegaard. Anselm's ontological argument, for example, is deeply embedded in prayer. What of Teresa or Hildegard? The latter are no less philosophers or theologians for not having written scholastic-style treatises. Much earlier Christian philosophy was done in the very context (in monasteries) of spiritual growth and community outreach to the poor.

Christian philosophy properly understood is a search for and love of wisdom. When Justin Martyr wondered if Socrates and Plato were Christians before Christ, he had vision we've lost: an integrative sense of the whole person and a deep sense of God's ability to work in many venues. Here's what we mean. In regard to the integrative sense of the whole person, scripture does not separate the intellect from the spiritual, or the emotional from the conative, or any of these from the volitional. God's saying "come, now, and let us reason together" is not decorative metaphor. It is integrally related to the rest of the verse: "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool'" (Isa. 1:18). Reasoning with the Lord leads to conversion, redemption, salvation. What Rea rejects and Moser (and McFall) point toward but seem skeptical of (the use of reason to make one wise) seems to be exactly what scripture teaches. The problem is not the use of reason *but too narrow a sense of what reason is*. Our philosophical culture, we propose, has been led into the wilderness of a Cartesian individualism where the mind is a disembodied "thinking thing." But reasoning, as we see it, is not in fact detached from the body, the will, or the emotions, and truth is not merely concerned with abstract propositions but embodied people.

Humans are the image of God. Typically Christians say that human emotional, volitional, intellectual, conative and creative abilities make up the image. Sometimes a spiritual component is added as well (although perhaps the spiritual just is these various things together). When Christians cordon these off from one another, the human person dis-integrates. But the list is too short. God made bodies too. We do not live either now or after death as disembodied souls but as embodied beings. Our other aspects come to fruition in our bodies. It is an error to forget that our "spiritual" aspects are always and forever integrally connected to a body in space and time. We are historical, concrete people.

What, then, is the connection between one's use of reason and the shaping of one's will? A difficult question, surely. We have no detailed answer. We only note that Rea's, Moser's, and McFall's struggles rest in this neighborhood. We can say, however, that the vision of the human in God's image is a vision of truly integrated human experiencing (bodily via reason,

emotion, and desire) what is good, true and beautiful. Thereby she lives her existentially embodied life accordingly. Or least that possibility is open. To draw some sort of distinction among these various “components” of the human person is simply to short-change the integrated vision of the faith. Here perhaps analytic philosophy’s emphasis on *analysis* has taken us astray from anything close to a biblical image of the human person as well as what a Christian philosophy should look like.²³

III

In this final section, we return directly to the Rea/Moser exchange to tie the paper together. Rea argues that Moser’s philosophical work stands against his claim that we, in conforming our will to God’s, cannot engage in “normal” philosophy. Rea adds that we must interpret Moser’s project in a manner different from the way it seems. Moser’s claim is left in the following circumstance, says Rea: “. . .if we take [Moser’s claim] at face value we can’t take it seriously; but unless we take it at face value, there is no reason to think that it supports [his] austere advice. . . .”²⁴ We’ll make two brief comments and one longer one. These first two comments show how Moser is mistaken to think of the “love commandments” too narrowly but also provide ways to do exactly what Rea suggests: understand the love commands in such a way that the contrast between them and doing philosophy is less problematic.

First, Moser states that if we do not “love our neighbor” we fail morally. This overlooks important aspects of Christian thought and practice. Take the witness of the desert hermits. They did nothing material for their neighbors while they prayed to God without ceasing. While that doesn’t seem loving, the mistake is to forget that since loving one’s neighbor is loving God, loving God is *also* loving one’s neighbor. Moser’s view of loving one’s neighbor reduces love to material provision. Second, G.F. Handel’s composition of *Messiah* arguably does little to provide for material needs, yet it fills the lives of millions with both beauty and a deeper sense of God’s wonder. Philosophy is greatly beneficial to humankind when we see humans as more than mere animals needing subsistence.

Here we add that caution is always needed in one’s own life in understanding theorizing in a way that entirely lets us off the moral hook for the material needs of our neighbors. The balancing act of being so heavenly minded that one is no earthly good and caring only about one’s neighbors’

²³ We have another paper in the works that will attempt to deal with this issue.

²⁴ Rea, “Review.”

material needs at the expense of their intellectual and spiritual needs has never been easy. We would encourage Christian philosophers and other theorists to rethink how we embed philosophy in our lives. How does the pursuit of spiritual growth, the development of an active prayer life, and the feeding of the poor work in *my* life? Instead of beginning our research by reading Quine, we should begin with prayer. And perhaps that will lead us to work out our theories by teaching in a prison or developing more public venues for doing philosophy.²⁵

Our third point is this. Moser, on Rea's reading, is either not saying anything of import or is suggesting that we Christian philosophers should leave the profession. We think Rea provides, but then overlooks, a perfectly good reading of Moser's claim. Rea says Moser is, in writing his very words, ironically proposing that the act itself is morally impermissible. Rea says we mustn't assume that, however. But why not? Has irony no place in philosophy, especially Christian philosophy?

Perhaps Rea thinks irony *should* be avoided unless merely decorative. Perhaps, in fact, no superior (analytic) philosopher *would* be ironic in any substantive way. Hence he presses the alternative: Moser can't be taken seriously. Nevertheless, we think Christian philosophy (and theology, for that matter) will not only be ironic but full of metaphor and other tropes, and substantive ones at that. If our goal, besides worshiping God, is to venerate the truth, and if truth is always and ultimately illuminated from the divine side, can we hope to get the divine wrapped into non-metaphorical propositions? Jesus surely did not. Instead, God's desire is for our valuing of truth to lead beyond mere propositions to humble worship. Normal-mode philosophy is not, therefore, bad, misleading, or useless. Insofar as one grasps toward the truth, one grasps toward Jesus. Yet we never completely grasp Jesus on the propositional level. Here the mystical encounter with Christ—what Moser calls a “mysterious *inward* union,”²⁶—is needed.

Do we ever fully become like Christ—spiritually mature enough to know Christ directly and fully? Perhaps not this side of the full beatific vision. Enter irony. The Christian walk includes the seemingly impossible task of becoming like Jesus while living in a fallen world. Christians must recognize both truths: fallen yet perfectible. Philosophical writing—especially Christian philosophical writing—thus calls for irony. Moser could see himself in this very light. Furthermore, we could connect certain *tu quoque* arguments to irony.

²⁵ See <http://commons.pacificu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1493&context=eip> for some thoughts on Christian apologetics as public philosophy.

²⁶ See Moser, “Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Wisdom and Spirit United,” at www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-Moser, 3.

It is tempting to use a *tu quoque* against Moser. Rea carefully avoids it, preferring instead to say Moser's argument says nothing of import. Yet we see a problem with doing philosophy one way while saying one's deepest commitments lead to another. Isn't that just hypocrisy? Only if one doesn't admit it. But one can admit it, one supposes, by using irony. Perhaps indeed by writing philosophy about Christian love or wisdom, Moser *does* rule out living a truly dedicated Christian life in the very writing. If Rea isn't able to say it, perhaps it still needs saying. When a person holds us to a very high standard and yet doesn't live by that standard, the standard is just too high *because of a moral failure. Tu quoque.*

Logic 101 teaches that *tu quoque* arguments are fallacious. Yet a different reading of the *tu quoque* exists, especially for Christians. That reading suggests an alternative way of thinking of philosophy and the will. Examples of *tu quoque* pretty typically take the form S says x but S does not act on x and therefore x need not be taken as true. In this case x is typically some moral or practical advice. In Christianity, one ought not separate moral concerns from the core truths of the faith. The whole worldview—indeed, the whole Christian life—is x . “Normal” philosophers evaluate Christian claims in terms of their truth, understanding truth to be an abstract sort of matching (typically) between some proposition and reality. So far, so good. Yet God's will is personified in the Christian faith. Having heard the truth, we are called to conform our will to it. Truth is no mere agreement of proposition to reality. Truth sets one free, but the freedom is not merely some post-Enlightenment notion of self-determination or autonomy. Rather it is the freedom to live in love, bound forever to God and to others. As such, the truths of Christianity are not evaluable simply by “normal” philosophy. They are not just propositions to be thought about but embodied realities to be lived. The universe is value-oriented to the core. Perhaps, therefore, one should reject taking *tu quoque* challenges as fallacious. Jesus consistently points out the wayward errors of those around him (largely religious “professionals”—might they today include Christian philosophers?). Their interpretation of the law and prophets is not accurate *because the religious leaders don't do justice or love their neighbors.*

More complications arise. *Tu quoque* says “you are a hypocrite” and therefore we shouldn't believe what you say. The “believe” component is ambiguous. Is it that what you say isn't true, or that one shouldn't believe it or follow its advice because the speaker is hypocritical? When government leaders say, “spend your money at home” but they head for some other venue, aren't we right not to accept their advice? And not because it isn't true but because advice given has to be advice lived in order to be acceptable? “Do as I say, not as I do” is an unsuccessful way to lead a community, to parent, or to mentor.

Perhaps we could accept the Moser platform if, in fact, he lived up to it. Yet Moser appears not to, for in writing philosophy he fails to feed the poor. Yet we all know that failing to do what one says one ought to do doesn't make the original claim false. But it remains difficult to take the advice seriously. Indeed, hypocrisy can harm us. When a father says to his growing teenage son "Don't get involved with pornography, it will ruin your soul" and then is caught viewing pornography by the son, it is the father's moral failure that is likely to ruin the son's soul. The son has little motivation to follow the father's advice, even if the advice is itself true.

Yet if the father were honest with his son, noting his own failings, he might avoid hypocrisy and both could work together to avoid viewing pornography. Here we should recall our earlier suggestion that, *pace* Rea, Moser *is being ironic* in pointing out a moral standard that, by pointing it out, shows that the standard isn't being reached. Irony in the Christian life may be, indeed, quite central. The Christian life, fully lived, requires us to be perfect yet also to recognize our fallenness. Perhaps Moser is pushing "be perfect" and needs to speak more openly about our "fallenness."

Can a Christian theologian or philosopher, *qua* theologian or philosopher, love her neighbor? Let's cast this problem not in terms of neighbor, but in terms of God. Is there a conflict between doing philosophy—about anything—and worshipping God? Just as the love commandments (that seem inconsistent with editing APQ) tug at Moser's heart, so worship in church (that seems inconsistent with attending seminars on freewill) should tug at ours. But are these pairs of activities internally inconsistent? "Worship" hardly has a single, clear definition. Worship is everything from the practice of the liturgy to doing everything unto God to giving the Lord our bodies as living sacrifices. Neither the scriptures nor tradition are much help in identifying *the* act of worship. Perhaps that is the point. Everything done for God is a means of worshipping while there are times set aside as "central" acts of worship.²⁷

Consider the following:

- 1.) The essential unity of our lives in Christ and as human persons.
- 2.) The love commands are not separable from the love of God.
- 3.) All creation is God's creation.
- 4.) Jesus is the truth but also goodness and beauty.

²⁷ Answers to these questions fall along denominational lines. Quakers give a quite different (although in some ways overlapping) answer from Roman Catholics. The account of worship in Mass is quite different from what a Baptist would say about church and communion. Nowadays, worship in evangelical circles is often "reduced" to praise songs.

- 5.) The love commands—indeed, the love of God,—are much wider than simply meeting the material needs of others.

Given these points, philosophy (and for that matter, any other good human pursuit—carpentry, dish-washing, etc.) can be worship of God. If philosophers have issues in becoming true lovers of Christ it has little to do with philosophy.²⁸ The work we do is, in the end, about wisdom. If we choose not to love because we are more comfortable in our offices cogitating, perhaps we need to value the truth more. We need to know the beloved to love the beloved. To love the beloved requires the attribution to the beloved of goodness, beauty, and truth. Fuller knowledge allows fuller love, because the goodness, beauty, and truth of the beloved are more clearly seen. An excellent love poem doesn't merely proclaim the lover's love, but details the various attributes the lover admires. To better know God through God's works requires doing philosophy, science, mathematics, etc., and to better know God enables us to better love God.

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²⁸Although it may have to do with *philosophers*. Perhaps we are psychologically drawn to this heady stuff. As such, we may live too much in our heads and not enough in our existential situations.