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# Given the Evidence, Natural Theology is Here to Stay!

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**Abstract** Paul K. Moser rejects arguments of natural theology for several reasons. I consider two of them in this paper. First, Moser argues that since Jesus and the Apostle Paul are models for Christian philosophers and since neither used arguments of natural theology, Christian philosophers should follow suit and reject arguments of natural theology. I reject this reasoning on the grounds that there is a more plausible explanation why Jesus, the Apostle Paul and other biblical writers did not have to use arguments of natural theology. Second, Moser claims that one of the reasons why arguments of natural theology fail is because they are not cogent for a wide audience, including shrewd agnostics. I reject this claim on the grounds that there is a better explanation why arguments of natural theology encounter resistance from shrewd skeptics, agnostics and atheists. I conclude with a reflection on Moser's strategy that connects his religious epistemology to his conception of Christian philosophy.

## I. Why Didn't Jesus and the Apostle Paul Use Arguments of Natural Theology?

In various papers<sup>1</sup> in this series of the EPS symposium, Paul Moser has argued that Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul were philosophers and they are models for Christian philosophers and other academics.<sup>2</sup> It is not the purpose of this paper to determine whether Jesus and the Apostle Paul were philosophers; rather, my interest is in whether the way they communicated the

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<sup>1</sup> See Moser's "Christ-Shaped Philosophy" and his exchanges with William Hasker available online at <http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=131>. Hereafter, when I indicate various papers on the EPS website I mean to refer to the link just provided.

<sup>2</sup> As to what it means to say that Jesus and the Apostle Paul were "philosophers", see the exchanges noted in the preceding note and most recent exchanges by Aaron Preston and William Hasker available on the website of the EPS.

Good News or the way they ministered about the Kingdom of God ought to be the only way that Christian philosophers ought to follow. It seems to me that Moser thinks that the way Jesus and the Apostle Paul communicated the Good News ought to be *the* model for Christian philosophers and other academics and that is how Christian philosophers should go about communicating the Good News. I do not deny that Jesus and the Apostle Paul should be models for Christian philosophers and academics. What I suggest is that the way Christian philosophers and other academics should go about presenting, teaching, and defending the Good News should not be limited to the ways Jesus and the Apostle Paul went about presenting, teaching, and defending the Good News. How Christian philosophers and other academics should communicate the Good News need not be the same as the way Jesus and the Apostle Paul communicated the message.

Note that Moser characterizes how Jesus ought to be a model for the way we present, teach, and defend the Good News as follows:

[A]t the key places where he might have introduced an argument of natural theology as a preliminary to his Good News, he [Jesus] does not do so. For instance, he has no place for the argument of natural theology in any of his dealings with the Gentiles he confronts on his way to crucifixion in Jerusalem. There is an important lesson here if Jesus is our model for presenting, teaching, and defending the Good News. (I cannot think of a better model.)<sup>3</sup>

Moser goes on to say,

In addition, we have the following relevant passage in John's Gospel: "[Some skeptical Pharisees] said to him, 'Where is your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also'" (John 8:19, NRSV). Jesus does not respond to skepticism about his divine Father with arguments from philosophy or natural theology, although he *could* have, in principle. Instead, he highlights the importance of *personally knowing him and his Father*, rather than simply knowing *that God exists* even as a preliminary to the former.

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<sup>3</sup> See Moser, "Rejoinder to Angus Menuge on Ramified Personalized Natural Theology," available on the website of the EPS:

<http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=184&mode=detail>

Likewise, in his reply to Nicodemus in John 3:8, Jesus makes no use of an argument from philosophy or natural theology. The best explanation of his behavior is that Jesus trusted the Spirit of God enough *not* to digress to lesser, needless preliminaries, such as argument from natural theology. This fits with Gethsemane epistemology, and it is needed medicine for philosophers and other academics, especially because we often lack the trust in God's Spirit that Jesus exemplifies. We often prefer to make our own way, and the result is at best questionable. Accordingly, many advocates of natural theology are unmoved by the fact that no New Testament writer depends on an argument of natural theology.<sup>4</sup>

Now there are several reasons one could consider in response to Moser's arguments why Jesus and the New Testament writers, including the Apostle Paul, did not have to use philosophical arguments such as the arguments of natural theology.

*First*, let us begin with a contrast of the context (such as intellectual, cultural, religious, etc.) in which Jesus and the New Testament writers presented, taught, and defended the Good News and our own context. In this connection, a key point to note is that the philosophical and theological or religious context of the times of Jesus and his disciples and that of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century are vastly different. Certainly, the human spiritual condition, apart from God's intervention, is one and the same, it is one constant that has not changed, but the intellectual/philosophical and religious (or lack thereof) views that pervade our contemporary context are by no means isomorphic with those of the first century or the second century. To recognize and appreciate these differences between the biblical times and our own contemporary context is to be sensitive to the various intellectual or philosophical or religious (or lack thereof) influences in the context in which the Good News is presented, taught, and defended. Jesus and his contemporaries and his disciples in the early period of presenting, teaching, and defending the Good News did not have to deal with the influence of, say, logical positivism, philosophical naturalism, Darwinian evolutionary theory wedded to philosophical naturalism, scientism, religious pluralism in the age of global village as the world has come to be, the question about the existence of God in the face of the problem of evil in the post-Holocaust world, the new wave of militant atheism of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Dawkins and his company, and so on and so forth. Of course, Jesus and his disciples had faced their own challenges from wayward humans, but those challenges are not identical to our challenges despite the fact that the Good News is one and the same, then and now. *Consequently, context matters and also context calls for context-sensitive presentation, teaching, and defense of the Good News.*

It would be helpful to illustrate the preceding point by pointing out that even in our own time context makes a crucial difference as to how the Gospel should be presented, taught, and defended. Take the African continent as a context for presenting, teaching, and defending the Gospel. Note that for those who already believe in God or gods [polytheists] there is no need to use philosophical arguments to show that God exists or gods exist. When Western missionaries who have been trained in Theology and Philosophy and have been exposed to theistic arguments minister in Africa, they do not need to use theistic arguments, in the majority of cases, since most people in Africa believe in one supernatural being or another.<sup>5</sup> One of the problems or challenges Western Christian missionaries face in Africa is belief in many gods, not lack of belief in any god. William Dryness remarks,

The first element in any defense of Christianity is the context in which the challenger lives. A friend of mine recently recounted an experience he had while teaching apologetics in Africa. He had spent several sessions on arguments for the existence of God when he was approached after class by one of his students. After some hemming and hawing the student finally had the courage to say, 'Nobody here really needs to know these arguments for the existence of God. Very few people here doubt that God exists; in fact, they believe in many gods. The question is which god should be obeyed.'<sup>6</sup>

Dyrness' example illustrates the need for context in teaching and practicing apologetics, but the lesson is essentially the same when it is applied to presenting, teaching, and defending the Good News by Christian philosophers and other academics. In contexts such as Africa, especially for those who have never encountered the Western secular influence, presentation

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<sup>5</sup> We can set aside mostly the urban population in Africa who encountered secularism from their exposure to the Western world by way of education or nowadays by way of the internet and other social media.

<sup>6</sup> William Dyrness, *Christian Apologetics in a World Community* (Intervarsity Press, 1983), p.13.

of theistic arguments in the course of teaching, and defending the Good News is of little or no use. I submit that the context of biblical writers was not much different than the context in Africa in our own time. Consequently, there was no reason for biblical writers to use theistic arguments when they were not dealing with atheists, agnostics, and skeptics the way Christian philosophers and academics are dealing with today. Therefore, making the way biblical writers communicated their message normative for contemporary Christian philosophers and other academics is questionable at best. We may conclude that doing away with natural theology, as Moser recommends, based on, among other reasons<sup>7</sup>, the claim that Jesus and the New Testament writers did not use arguments of natural theology is unjustified.<sup>8</sup>

*Second*, consider the following case: Take the doctrine of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Christology. These foundational Christian doctrines were not developed by biblical writers in the manner they were developed later by Christian theologians and philosophers. Since the biblical writers did not engage in the development of these doctrines, following Moser's reasoning, we should conclude that developing these doctrines was unnecessary and is on a par with engaging in natural theology. But, I think, this reasoning is unacceptable. As I have argued above, the way Jesus and the New Testament writers presented, taught, and defended the Good News was a reflection or function of the context in which the Good News was communicated. I think it is reasonable to think that systematically and coherently developing, presenting, and defending the doctrine of the Trinity, among other Christian doctrines, requires a significant conceptual resource that philosophy as a discipline provides. But it is entirely unclear, given Moser's reasoning, how one can present, teach, and defend the doctrine of the Trinity without any benefit from the systematic development, presentation, and defense of this doctrine by Christians who were not or are not the New Testament writers themselves. Obviously, the Bible is not a book of systematic theology, but the development of various core Christian doctrines requires, in some cases, making use of conceptual resources in philosophy, and such conceptual resources were not developed by biblical writers. I think it is plausible to suggest that Jesus left this task for his disciples and some of his disciples are philosophers and theologians and others in other academic disciplines. Consequently, I submit that it is

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<sup>7</sup> I consider below another reason Moser offers to recommend rejection of arguments of natural theology.

<sup>8</sup> For a biblical justification of the project of natural theology see my, "Must Christian Philosophy be Directly about Christ? Reply to Davis," available on the website of the EPS: <http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=180&mode=detail>.

proper and commendable that disciples of Jesus of Nazareth are diligently and faithfully, though imperfectly, using their intellectual gifts as philosophers and other academics to the advancement of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus himself had ushered in and commissioned his disciples to advance.<sup>9</sup>

*Third*, recall that Moser claims that the best explanation why Jesus did not use argument of natural theology was because "...Jesus trusted the Spirit of God enough *not* to digress to lesser, needless preliminaries, such as argument from natural theology." Needless to say that compared to his disciples, including Christian philosophers who use theistic arguments when contexts call for such uses, Jesus' obedience to God his Father and his reliance on and trust in the Spirit of God is matchless and a model for everyone else. But is this the best explanation why Jesus and the Apostle Paul and other New Testament writers did not use arguments of natural theology? I have already provided what I think is a more plausible, and hence a better explanation for the absence of evidence, in the Bible, for the use of arguments of natural theology.

Furthermore, it does not seem controversial to say that it is compatible for a Christian philosopher and apologist to trust in the Spirit of God to use *all* available evidence, including arguments of natural theology, when a Christian philosopher engages in the presentation, teaching, and defense of the Good News when the context calls for the use of philosophical arguments. No doubt that the Spirit of God does not need philosophical arguments at all, but some of those to whom the Good News is presented often present philosophical objections against the existence of God and the veracity of the Good News. It is for the need to address such objections from philosophers and others that Christian philosophers develop arguments for God's existence and responses to objections against the existence of God.

Developing and using philosophical arguments *need not exclude* trust in the Spirit of God. Why would that be the case? Why would not a Christian philosopher seek guidance and insight from the Spirit of God while working on philosophical projects and also presenting, teaching, and defending the Good News? No claim is being made here that *all* Christian philosophers seek guidance and insight from the Spirit of God when they work on philosophical projects, including the project of natural theology. I think that it is plausible to claim that there is no reason to believe that the very activity of constructing theistic arguments for the advancement of the Kingdom of God, when that

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth reading one recent article (July 1, 2013) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, which was devoted to reflect on the recent headway Christian philosophers have made featuring William L. Craig as an example (<http://chronicle.com/article/The-New-Theist/140019/>).

*actually* is the goal, is a consequence of lack of enough trust in the Spirit of God. Besides, it does not seem right to claim that rejection of any formulation of theistic arguments automatically amounts to the reality that one is committed to trust in the Spirit of God. If rejection of arguments is a precondition for trusting in the Spirit of God, *fideism* would be a view that is more conducive for trusting in the Spirit of God than other views that value reason-giving for religious beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

I think it is plausible to believe that Christian philosophers are keenly aware that philosophical arguments, in themselves, do not possess redemptive power, but they can draw some to redemption if and when the Spirit of God awakens in seekers of the truth about God and a desire to be reconciled with God. The Holy Spirit can draw wayward humans to reconciliation with God without any use of philosophical arguments (that indeed is the case for the majority of those who come to embrace the Good News). But it does not follow from this that no one ever has been drawn to the truth about God when philosophical arguments were presented and hence a person has embraced the Good News.<sup>11</sup> I have provided several reasons why the fact that Jesus and the biblical writers did not use arguments of natural theology does not require that Christian philosophers should reject natural theology. Therefore, Moser's rejection of arguments of natural theology, especially when his rejection of natural theology is based on the reasons discussed above, should be rejected.

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<sup>10</sup> Since Moser is an evidentialist and rejects fideism (see his *The Evidence for God* [CUP, 2010]), it does not seem right to suggest that Moser's commitment to evidentialism undermines his trust in the Spirit of God. I suggest that his commitment to evidentialism is compatible with trusting enough in the Spirit of God. I submit that is true for a natural theologian who is also an evidentialist in her own right. It has to be noted, however, that what counts as evidence for a natural theologian is not the same as what counts as evidence in Moser's account of religious epistemology. But to determine which account of evidence is a more plausible account for a religious epistemology need not be tied to the question whether a proponent of these competing views trusts enough in the Spirit of God, which neither view can show merely based on the respective accounts of evidence.

<sup>11</sup> See, in this EPS series, Angus Menuge's papers, "Ramified Personalized Natural Theology: A Third Way" (<http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=173>) and "The Golden Cord and God's Economy: Reply to Moser" (<http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=183>). For the record, Moser does not deny that God can use arguments of natural theology. See his rejoinder to Menuge mentioned in the next note, pp. 4-5. Note that Moser claims that arguments of natural theology could have some "positive psychological value" for some people and "God uses this feature of an argument to lead the person into new life" (page 5). I disagree with Moser's suggestion that the value of arguments of natural theology is psychological, but now there is no need to digress to develop a detailed response---that is a project for another day.

But Moser provides other reasons why natural theology should be rejected and I consider one of them below.

## II. Theistic Arguments Rarely Convince Skeptics, So Why Care about Them?

In various papers<sup>12</sup> in this EPS series Moser provides additional challenges to those who engage in natural theology. He writes,

Atheists, agnostics, and many theists (myself included) do not find the familiar arguments of natural theology to be cogent, given our evidence. So, a neglected question arises for advocates of natural theology: *what is the best available explanation of the impasse between philosophical theists and unconvinced inquirers who are atheists, agnostics, or theists?* Does this explanation involve an alleged deficit of rationality or intellect in those of us unconvinced by the arguments? If so, what exactly is this deficit, and how can it be removed, if it can? *Here* is where the natural theologian should direct attention, at a level where we are probing foundational issues, and not just endorsing quick arguments without reflection on the goals of those arguments and their inadequacies regarding cogency. Finally, advocates of natural theology should avoid insulting the intelligence or the rationality of the many theorists – whether atheist, agnostic, or theist—who are unconvinced by the arguments in question. Instead, they should focus on why their arguments fail to convince a wide range of rationally capable inquirers. My own approach to Christian philosophy is, happily, not burdened with that unhappy duty.<sup>13</sup> [Italics mine]

One can consider several responses to the challenge Moser issued to those who engage in arguments of natural theology and I consider some below. *First*, anyone familiar with philosophical debates, impasses and dead-ends would not be surprised to see familiar impasses and dead-ends when it comes

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<sup>12</sup> Moser, “On Traditional Philosophy and Natural Theology: A Rejoinder,” (<http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=169>) and “Rejoinder to Angus Menuge on Ramified Personalized Natural Theology,” (<http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=184>) both are available on the website of the EPS.

<sup>13</sup> Moser, “On Traditional Philosophy and Natural Theology,” p. 9.

to philosophical arguments involving God's existence. Presumably, more impasses and dead-ends should be expected regarding the question of God's existence since intellectual inquiries about God have far-reaching consequences than ordinary philosophical debates whose implications for life could be minimal or remotely relevant to how one's life should be lived. Consider the mind-body problem, the special composition question or debates involving the definition of knowledge, especially since the classic paper by Edmund Gettier, internalism vis-à-vis externalism in epistemology, etc. Solutions for some philosophical debates have, if any, much less relevance as to how one should go about reorienting one's life in light of the (purported) answers to those philosophical questions.

On the other hand, when it comes to an inquiry about God there is much more at stake and as a result much more resistance to evidence for God's existence can be characteristic of the debate about God, leading to more dead-ends than in other academic debates. Also, human inquirers can and do often handle evidence for God's existence in a way that could allow stability in their current life (cognitive or moral) by avoiding yielding their will to God so that they do not have to reorient their lives. Pointing out dead-ends about arguments involving God's existence can serve as an excuse for one to live one's life as if God does not exist and this I suggest can better explain why philosophical arguments about God face persistent resistance from wayward humans. This is a more plausible explanation, I submit, than Moser's explanation that theistic arguments are unconvincing for many theorists, including theists because they are not cogent. Obviously, the growing body of literature on peer-disagreement or the epistemology of disagreement does not involve any kind of deficit of rationality or intellect by those who are unconvinced by arguments proposed by others. Why would arguments involving God's existence involve any kind of deficit of rationality or intellect by those who are not convinced by theistic arguments?<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it is a widely known fact that arguments for many philosophical claims are unconvincing to many philosophers and that is evidence why we have a legion of philosophical theories about so many questions in philosophy. I submit that

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<sup>14</sup> Obviously, Christians do also *disagree* about the goal of natural theology, or how good arguments of natural theology are, etc., but their in-house disagreements are consequences of different views they hold about the goal of theistic arguments, among other things. The differences could also be due to theological or philosophical commitments. When, for example, a Calvinist is unconvinced by an Armenian, or vice versa, I do not think this disagreement should raise an issue of insulting the intelligence of anyone.

there is nothing unique to arguments of natural theology that makes them defective since they are also philosophical arguments, warts and all.

*Second*, another explanation why many shrewd skeptics, agnostics, and atheists do not move closer to theism or embrace the Good News is not because, as I take it, the arguments of natural theology are defective in some unique way but because the question of God's existence is not a purely intellectual issue and shrewd skeptics could reject God on non-intellectual grounds. Moser is among the most prominent proponents of the view that evidence for God's reality is volition-sensitive in the sense that volition plays a decisive role in a person's coming to redemptively embrace the Good News. I strongly agree with him on this point.<sup>15</sup> A skeptic can subject theistic arguments to an unusually high standard that a skeptic would not apply to any other philosophical question or dispute and afterwards could declare that theistic arguments suffer from some unique defect. I think, it is not controversial to add that this often is the case. But, if this is the case with some skeptics, then this does not show that there is some unique defect in theistic arguments; rather, it is possible that rejection of theistic arguments could be explained by a defective way of evaluating theistic arguments that fails to take into account the role of volition in seeking and evaluating all available relevant evidence for God's reality.

*Third*, it is important to note that Moser is not against providing arguments for God's existence. He, indeed, provides an argument for God's existence that is clearly different from the extant arguments of natural theology. After providing a definition for "transformative gift"<sup>16</sup> Moser proposes the following argument for a reality of an authoritative perfectly loving God, let us call it volitional-transformation argument, or VTA:

1. Necessarily, if a human person is offered, and unselfishly receives, the transformative gift, then this is the result of the authoritative leading and sustaining power of a divine X of

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<sup>15</sup> See his, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge U. Press, 2008) and *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined* (Cambridge U. Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> "The transformative gift=*df.* via conscience, a person's (a) being authoritatively convicted and forgiven by X of all that person's wrongdoing and (b) thereby being authoritatively called and led by X both into noncoerced volitional fellowship with X in perfect love and into rightful worship toward X as worthy of worship and, on that basis, transformed by X from (i) that person's previous tendencies to selfishness and despair to (ii) a new volitional center with a default position of unselfish love and forgiveness toward all people and of hope in the ultimate triumph of good over evil by X", *The Elusive God*, pp. 134-135.

- thoroughgoing forgiveness, fellowship in perfect love, worthiness of worship, and triumphant hope (namely, God).
2. I have been offered, and have willingly unselfishly received, the transformative gift.
  3. Therefore, God exists.<sup>17</sup>

Now it is absolutely important to bear in mind that Moser's argument for God's existence is clearly different from standard arguments of natural theology. This argument essentially involves a person's will and hence it is robustly volition-involving, which is not a feature for arguments of natural theology. Moser's argument, to his credit, does not leave a room for a purely intellectual entertainment of a proposition about God or God's existence. The relevant redemptive evidence for God's reality that Moser argues for does involve a person's volitional and moral transformation in volitional interaction with a perfectly loving God. I strongly agree with Moser's claim that the question of God's existence should go beyond belief that God exists (a mere intellectual assent to a proposition that God exists) to a volitional commitment that underwrites a personal relationship with God.<sup>18</sup> Having said that, now I turn to raise a concern about Moser's view about arguments for God's existence that they should meet at least the following criterion, call it **Moser's Criterion (MC)**:

**MC:** Arguments for God's existence should be not only logically sound, but also cogent for a wide audience, including shrewd agnostics.

I think Moser is committed to MC based on his view about arguments of natural theology that, according to him, fail to meet MC. He writes,

The relevant question is whether the arguments of natural theology are not only logically sound, but also *cogent for a wide audience*, including shrewd agnostics. I have argued elsewhere (in *The Evidence for God*, for instance) that the arguments in question

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. This argument can also be found in Moser, *The Evidence for God*, Chapter 4.

<sup>18</sup> Moser's argument for God's existence rests on his conception of evidence for God's existence that I do not intend to discuss in this paper. Readers are strongly recommended to read his books mentioned above for a complete understanding of Moser's religious epistemology within that context the above argument is situated. For a critical discussion of Moser's argument, see Harold Netland's paper, "If 'Personifying Evidence' is the Answer, What is the Question?" *Philosophia Christi*, 14:2 (Winter 2012): 291-304.

do not yield a personal God worthy of worship, even if they yield a lesser god. As a result, these arguments fall short of the Christian God, whatever value they may have in other connections.<sup>19</sup>

One can consider several concerns about MC and below I discuss some. *First*, I argued above that arguments of natural theology do not have a unique defect they suffer from that separates them from other philosophical arguments. The reason why theistic arguments fail to convince a wide audience that includes shrewd agnostics does not have to be because they lack cogency. It could well be for the same reason that many philosophical arguments are unconvincing to a wide audience of equally competent and rational interlocutors.

*Second*, one would wonder whether Moser's argument, VTA, meets Moser's criterion in the same sense he requires the arguments of natural theology need to. That is, is his argument not only logically sound, but also cogent for a wide audience, including shrewd agnostics? Though it remains to be seen whether VTA meets MC, I submit that being a philosophical argument for God's existence it will most likely meet the usual resistance from shrewd skeptics. One would want to know what feature VTA has that arguments of natural theology lack, both being philosophical arguments, which would make it cogent for a wide audience including shrewd agnostics, skeptics, and atheists.

*Third*, it has to be noted that one of the reasons Moser thinks that arguments of natural theology fail is based on his claim that they do not yield a personal God worthy of worship or "these arguments fall short of the Christian God." There are, at least, a couple ways to respond to Moser's claims. First, as I argued elsewhere<sup>20</sup>, it is crucial to identify the goal of the project of natural theology. Many practitioners of natural theology think that the goal of natural theology is to establish that generic theism is true, or generic theism is more probably true than its denial. Richard Swinburne is a case in point. Moser's objection can succeed only if he targets a practitioner of natural theology who claims that natural theology is a project to prove the existence of the Christian God in the sense Moser claims. The forthcoming Winter 2013 issue of

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<sup>19</sup> See Moser, "Rejoinder to Angus Menuge on Ramified Personalized Natural Theology," p. 5, available on the website of the EPS: <http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=184>.

<sup>20</sup> "Must Christian Philosophy be Directly about Christ: Reply to Richard Davis" in this EPS series available on the website of the EPS (<http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=180&mode=detail>).

*Philosophia Christi* is devoted to the topic called *Ramified Natural Theology* (RNT). Co-editor Angus Menuge writes about RNT thus: “Here the standard evidence for the existence of deity is supplemented with evidence decisively favoring the claim that Christ is the authentic revelation of who that deity is.”<sup>21</sup> Those who argue for RNT are not claiming that the traditional arguments of natural theology, by themselves, establish the existence of the Christian God. That, hence, is the rationale for Ramified Natural Theology to make a case for the Christian God. I am not suggesting that RNT establishes the Christian God. I am pointing out this in order to make a point that it is important to be clear about the goal of natural theology in order to show problems with the project of natural theology.

*Fourth*, one can provide a different response to Moser’s claim that natural theology falls short of the Christian God. What does he mean by “the Christian God”? I take it that Moser is committed to a Triune God of Christianity.<sup>22</sup> If this the case, then the question becomes: Do practitioners of natural theology *typically* argue to show that the Christian God as Triune exists? That does not seem to be the case. I take it that the goal of arguments of natural theology is to establish that God *qua* Creator exists, which does not require establishing the existence of God *qua* Redeemer though orthodox Christianity is committed to the view that God *qua* Creator is God *qua* Redeemer. I take it that to construct an argument to show that God *qua* Creator exists is sufficient for the project of natural theology in the face of detractors who deny the existence of any transcendent supernatural being that is identical to God *qua* Creator. The Triune nature of God goes beyond general revelation, which is the focus of natural theology, and requires special revelation such as in the Bible and the Incarnation. Furthermore, Christians maintain that salvific or redemptive evidence is provided by God *qua* Redeemer (who is God *qua* Creator as well). Since the project of natural theology is not about salvific or redemptive evidence, which according to Christianity only God *qua* Redeemer can and does provide, to fault the project of natural theology for a goal that it is not committed to is a mistake. I am not convinced by Moser’s case against natural theology for the reasons I provided so far. In the next section I provide a reason that captures my main disagreement with Moser’s view which connects his religious epistemology to his conception of Christian philosophy.

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<sup>21</sup> Angus Menuge, “The Golden Cord and God’s Economy: Reply to Moser”, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> See page 3 above.

### III. Concluding Remarks

A reader who has managed to read this far could see that I strongly agree with some aspects of Moser's views but have expressed concerns with other aspects of his views on religious epistemology and its connection to his proposed conception of Christian philosophy. Below I clarify my disagreement with Moser's strategy in developing his overall views. I distinguish Moser's positive project from his negative project. By a "positive project" I refer to his distinctive views on religious epistemology and Christian philosophy as "Christ-shaped philosophy." By his "negative project" I refer to his view on the project of natural theology, which is obviously unduly negative.

I agree with Moser about his distinctive contribution to religious epistemology which could stand alone on its own virtues without a commitment to rejection of the project of natural theology. It is true that Moser thinks of the project of natural theology as a competing view to his conception of religious epistemology which does not have a need for natural theology as he characterizes the project of natural theology. But I argued above that his characterization of the *goal* of natural theology is not without problems.<sup>23</sup>

Moser's positive project is coherent or consistent, but I find his negative project implausible. I think one main reason for the implausibility of his negative project stems from a strategy by which he develops a religious epistemology and a conception of Christian philosophy that is based more on a rejection of arguments of natural theology than the positive virtues of his own views. It is interesting to come up with an entirely new theory that does better than a competing view, but it is problematic when the new theory becomes implausible because of a needless rejection of some virtues of the view being rejected. In private communication Bill Hasker shares my concern: "When proposing a new approach to knowledge -- especially, perhaps, religious knowledge -- it is not necessary, and often not appropriate, to think that one's approach has to be promoted by discrediting previously existing ideas. Why shouldn't there be multiple ways to learn about God? Reformed epistemology, in its early days, had some harsh things to say about natural theology, but more recently this stance has been greatly moderated, for instance by Plantinga." I think the virtues of Moser's religious epistemology and his conception of Christian philosophy as Christ-shaped philosophy can plausibly stand alone

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<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere, i.e., in my dissertation on religious epistemology, I provide a unified account of knowledge of God from natural theology *and* Moser's distinct account of religious epistemology.

without the needless rejection of the project of natural theology. In light of the evidence that natural theology has been undergoing a revival and it is flourishing, it seems reasonable to claim that natural theology is here to stay!<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> I'd like to thank Bill Hasker for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.