

ADDITIONAL PRAISE FOR  
*PHILOSOPHY AND THE CHRISTIAN*

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“Philosophy and the Christian is an accessible and unique text on philosophical theology. Rather than being mired down by all issues in the field (e.g., there is no chapter on the problem of evil), it is selective and chronological in its largely topical approach. The book is self-consciously Christian, Protestant and Evangelical without using any of these qualifiers as excuses to oversimplify or ignore a level of rigor inherent in the philosophical task. The best that can be said is the work demonstrates, through the variety and diversity of its authors and their offerings, an underlying unity of Christian philosophy. That is, it represents its ideas as well as presenting them. Those interested in thinking philosophically about their Christian faith will be aided and challenged by this book.”  
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—*J. V. Fesko, Academic Dean, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Westminster Seminary California.*

“Christians seeking to understand and engage with philosophy benefit greatly from taking the long view, situating this or that local debate within the rich historical tradition of which it is part. The benefit is all the greater when we can discern and evaluate the recurring intellectual patterns that have come to characterise this tradition. This impressive collection of essays brilliantly delivers on both counts: it provides a Reformed overview of the historic breadth of Christian engagements with philosophy from Tertullian and Justin, through the magisterial Reformers to Barth, reformed epistemology and presuppositionalism, and its essays also build a cumulative argument around recurring themes that illuminate not just what but how Christians have thought about philosophy. It is a splendid resource for anyone seeking to understand both the continuities and diversities in this important and ongoing conversation.”

—*Christopher Watkin, Senior Lecturer, Monash University, Melbourne.*

DAVENANT RETRIEVALS seek to exemplify the Davenant Institute's mission of recovering the riches of the Reformation for the contemporary church, offering clear and collaborative expositions of a doctrinal topic key to the Protestant heritage and defending its relevance today.

PHILOSOPHY  
AND THE CHRISTIAN:

*The Quest for Wisdom  
in the  
Light of Christ*

Edited by Joseph Minich

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*For Brad Littlejohn*

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I:  
INTRODUCTION  
ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A PROTESTANT  
EVANGELICAL PHILOSOPHY

Joseph Minich

CHRISTIANS MUST ultimately give a positive account of philosophy because Christians must ultimately give a positive account of the human and of the world. Philosophy is an alert awareness of the world that begins in wonder and ends in cognitive rest, enjoyment, and satisfaction born of insight into the architecture and ornamentation of reality. While it is permissible to be cautious about misleading philosophies, it is not permissible to sever the primal act and final telos of wonder itself. That would abolish the initial movement of many inspired psalms, the cognitive rest achieved by many creeds, and the primitive wonderment of most children.

No path from wonderment to insight can be trodden without guides. For this reason, the bulk of the present volume constitutes a rough survey of the history of Christianity's relationship to philosophy. To catalog this rela-

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tion, however, is not to encourage slavish devotion to precedent. These essays, therefore, are distinctively Protestant in their view of the authority of our fathers. Their example does not carry innate authority, but the authority of any fallible father who attempts to speak with moral gravitas. Nevertheless, as in any discipline, to begin this journey while ignoring their (as it were) markings on the trail would be ungrateful, not to mention foolish. We are not the first Christians who have attempted to understand the relationship between the philosophical journey and the particulars of biblical revelation and Christian dogma. What we find among our spiritual parents, then, are mere men and women once in the exact same position as ourselves. In their own contexts, and with their own concerns, they sought to articulate principles by means of which Christians could forge a godly (and therefore a true) philosophical path. In chronology, they are our fathers. In spirit, they are our brothers. For this reason, our attention to their precedent is not uncritically imitative, but permits exploration into uncharted portions of the philosophical forest, occasional improvements of their trail-markings, but not without moving along the path they have already cleared for us.

And as it turns out, if we are attentive to that groundwork they have laid, if we try to imagine what the ground might have been like before they cultivated it, we will find ourselves impressed by them not for their innate authority, but precisely because of their fine-grained and insightful participation in the most catholic article of all faith: reason. That is to say, these men and women read the world well, traversed reality well; and walking in their shoes as we navigate through the portion of the forest they

have already cleared, we find ourselves persuaded by the authority of their claims as such. This is because their claims comport to the common shared world in which we and they live(d). As such they offer us guidance as we move into uncharted waters.

These essays, therefore, are not offered in a spirit of telling the reader *what* to think. They are offered in the spirit of aiding the reader in *how* to think, how to perform fresh acts of philosophical faithfulness in the murky wood of our own modern context. This is urgent because we can easily get the impression that we have moved into a portion of the jungle that is entirely new and for which the fathers cannot, therefore, be reliable guides. As it turns out, however, our fathers also found themselves in portions of the jungle which were (then) without precedent. While we do detect some discontinuities as we examine these moments in their original context(s), we also discover some principled patterns that show up again and again in different situations. Sufficient attention to these moments can aid us in developing philosophical instincts concerning contemporary claims. For instance, Christians have often found themselves in contexts where the Christian faith was deemed primitive and unreasonable. Christians have often confronted philosophies which supposedly discarded everything that came before it. Christians have often been told that philosophical integrity requires a willy-nilly handling of Scripture. And what we find in the history of Christian witness is not the “shutting of one’s eyes” and a “hoping for the best.” What we find is that Christians have met these challenges with fresh philosophical insight, with incisive philosophical critique, and with a newly

found appreciation for the depth and insight of Scripture when it is mined faithfully for its bottomless wealth.

As we will see in these essays, this insight is not because Christians are wiser than other men. It is rather that, added to their natural capacity for knowing and wonderment is the divine guidance of the Logos speaking through the Scriptures, pulling them forward toward the maturity in Christ which is the destiny of the human species. Their orienting point is not *merely* the markers left by their brethren in the forest (though that is essential), but the light shining through the trees at its other end. The end of all true philosophizing is God Himself.

But this is a problem. Human beings have been exiled from the Garden and are in rebellion against God. Most of them are not particularly inclined to move toward the light, though they dwell in the forest of human reality and can therefore carve somewhat useful paths for penultimate common purposes. But these are inevitably detached from the telos at the other end of the journey. The philosophical journey can accomplish much with the fuel of reason and precedent, but it was never meant (even in Adam) to be divorced from its orientation in divine speech. Willfully severed from the voice of our heavenly Father, humans will inevitably move toward an idol. This movement covers much of the same ground as we cover, and for this reason the history of Christian philosophy is largely a history of plundering the Egyptians. But the end of our movement is the discovery of the God who speaks to us in our disorientation and draws us to Himself through His Spirit. And it is precisely for this reason that Christianity has shown itself to be full of philosophical insight. With compasses oriented to “true north,” we are sometimes

impelled to ask counter-intuitive questions, sometimes have to consider and work on divine utterances which we do not fully understand, etc. What we find, however, is not the constant need to beat the square peg of divine speech into the round hole of general revelation. Rather, we discover that common reality itself is publicly and objectively illuminated in the light of Christ—that the world yields and opens up to His voice.

The goal of this volume, then, is not just to serve as a primer of Christianity and philosophy, but rather to commend an *evangelical* Christian philosophy which neither eschews common reality in favor of a retreat into subjectivity nor lacks confidence in the illumination that comes from divine speech. Christ, through whom we are re-oriented to God, is our Wisdom. Shining upon God and His world, we find that divine speech is no stumbling block, but for those who endure the philosophical quest, that with which our most profound thoughts try desperately to keep up.

The twelve essays that follow are mostly organized chronologically according to their subject matter. First is Andrew Fulford's and David Haines' essay on the manner in which the categories of classical philosophy illuminate Scripture's own statements concerning our world. In this essay, they also helpfully exegete those texts which are often cited as warranting a suspicious disposition toward the philosophical enterprise. This is followed by Blake Adams' thorough treatment of the complicated encounter between Christians and classical philosophy in the first few centuries after Christ. After this, Christopher Cleveland corrects several misunderstandings concerning the relationship between philosophy and Scripture in Medieval theology. Straddling the Medieval and early Reformation periods,

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Andre Gazal goes on to highlight the important work of John Colet, who provides an illuminating case study of how one might negotiate philosophical insight and faithful Christian exegesis of Scripture.

Following are four essays which treat the development of philosophy within the Protestant tradition since the Reformation. First is E. J. Hutchinson's essay on the early Lutheran encounter with classical philosophy, both clarifying Luther's own attitude toward philosophy and particularly highlighting the contributions of Philip Melancthon and Niels Hemmingsen. Immediately following, David Haines demonstrates, contrary to the impression of many, that the appropriation of traditional natural theology was a commonplace among the Reformed scholastics and their successors. Nathan Greeley's essay straddles these by situating Reformed philosophy within the currents that were distinctive to the Early Modern period, and he especially highlights insightful lines of inquiry that emerge from the intersection of classical and (early) contemporary philosophy within the Protestant tradition. Filling out our timeline is Gayle Doornbos' very helpful essay on significant movements within Reformed philosophy in the last century and a half, particularly in the Netherlands and in the United States. This is particularly important because here we encounter what is closest to our own context, and in comparison with the previous essays are afforded the opportunity to evaluate it for significant continuities and discontinuities.

The final four essays help the reader in addressing our contemporary philosophical circumstance considered more broadly. Matthew Stanley engages the Continental philosophical tradition, particularly in the writings of Martin

Heidegger, and suggests a strategy for Christians to wisely appropriate their insights while filtering them through the purifying fire of Christian orthodoxy. Ryan Hurd, then, very helpfully gives us a broad survey of Analytic philosophy as well as its impact in Christian theology—or so-called “Analytic Theology.” Hurd gives us a frame of reference to understand the motivations of this influential trend, and also its different starting point(s) from the classical tradition. Derek Peterson, then, provides a historical survey and some illuminating normative reflections upon how Christians have navigated the relationship between natural philosophy and biblical revelation. Especially controversial in our context, this essay helps to fill out our volume’s continually surfacing theme of the relationship between extra-biblical information and the authority of Scripture. Finally, Peter Escalante and this author conclude the volume with a programmatic recommendation of the ancient view of philosophy as a way of life. We further argue that the urgency of this recovery calls into question the impression that good philosophy is the purview of the Roman Catholic tradition. We aim to show that Protestant first principles contain the resources for a vibrant and wise conversation with our philosophical fathers and brothers for the sake of a faithful and contemporary philosophical journey.

This volume would not have been possible (or as edifying) without the enormous labors of many persons. The authors are to be sincerely thanked for their joyful and faithful labors. We all owe a particular thanks to Ryan Hurd, Onsi Kamel, and Josiah Roberts for their editorial and formatting assistance. And we all owe a special word of thanks to the President of the Davenant Institute, Brad

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Littlejohn, for his enthusiastic support and sponsorship of this passion project—not to mention his practical assistance. Nobody but the Lord and his wife knows all that he does for others. It is fitting, therefore, that this volume be dedicated to him.

II:  
THE METAPHYSICS OF SCRIPTURE

Andrew Fulford & David Haines

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

THINKERS HAVE sometimes stated that the Holy Scriptures are not metaphysical, or that they do not engage in metaphysics.<sup>2</sup> This is obviously correct in one sense: the

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to J. V. Fesko, and others who provided critical comments on an earlier version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Edmond Lab. Cherbonnier, for example, notes that “it is sometimes held that the very phrase itself is a contradiction in terms, that the words ‘Biblical’ and ‘metaphysics’ ‘are mutually exclusive.’” Edmond Lab. Cherbonnier, “Is There a Biblical Metaphysic?,” *Theology Today* 15.4 (1959): 454. Cherbonnier goes on to argue that the fact that the Bible is clearly not Platonist does not entail that there is no biblical metaphysics. His purpose, in this article, is to stimulate the development of a biblical metaphysics. He states that “the Biblical metaphysic is simply the systematic development of one possible answer to the metaphysician’s question, based upon hints and latent assumptions within the Bible.” Cherbonnier, “Is There a Biblical Metaphysic,” 454. What we will attempt to show here is not so much that the Bible is Aristotelian as that Aristotle discovered some metaphysical truths through his examination of the creation of God which are taken for granted by the

writings of the Bible are not generally characterized by philosophical jargon, but, for the most part, use everyday language. However, this statement is false in another sense: the Bible does make statements that rule out some metaphysical ideas, and it seems to imply others.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in the words of Claude Tresmontant, “Biblical theology would not be possible, nor the biblical message of revelation exist, if it were not metaphysically structured. The very existence of this theology, of this revelation, implies a certain metaphysical structure as a prerequisite.”<sup>4</sup> It is, in fact, our conviction, that, as Tresmontant says, “In the Bible we do not find a treatise of metaphysics devoted to being, time, eternity, the one and the many, causality and finality, becoming, the sensible, corporeal existence, freedom, thought and action. . . . Nevertheless, analysis discovers in the Bible a coherent and systematic metaphysics, all along its development, and perfectly conscious of itself, dealing with just those subjects which constitute a metaphysics in the larger sense.”<sup>5</sup> We want to briefly show how this is the case with just a few Aristotelian concepts. This does not

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Bible. The argument is based not only on “hints and latent assumptions within the Bible,” but even on explicit statements.

<sup>3</sup> Scott R. Swain notes, for example, that “students of early Christianity have demonstrated the presence of the language and concepts of causal metaphysics in the apostolic writings.” Scott R. Swain, “On Divine Naming,” in Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen, eds., *Aquinas Among the Protestants* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 211. He goes on in this article to illustrate how the New Testament uses metaphysical concepts and language to describe God and God’s relation with His works. Swain, “On Divine Naming,” in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, 211–15.

<sup>4</sup> Claude Tresmontant and Ronald Koshoshek, trans., “Biblical Metaphysics,” *Cross Currents* 10.3 (Summer, 1960), 229.

<sup>5</sup> Tresmontant and Koshoshek, “Biblical Metaphysics,” 230.

mean that Aristotle has correctly understood and portrayed everything about which he wrote, but, rather, that he rightly latched onto some foundational truths, which we deny at our peril.

This elementary exercise is important because it shows just how basic certain philosophical ideas and concepts are. Modern critics of using “philosophy”—or at least specific kinds of philosophy—in exegesis or theology almost always load the term with specific connotations. It is assumed that “philosophy” must be complicated, founded on many complex assumptions, and overly systematic. Yet when it comes to the basic elements of something like Aristotelian philosophy, this is not the case at all. Mortimer J. Adler notes that philosophy helps everybody “to understand things we already know, understand them better than we now understand them.”<sup>6</sup> Aristotle is important because “his thinking used notions that all of us possess, not because we were taught them in school, but because they are the common stock of human thought about anything and everything.”<sup>7</sup> Philosophy, especially in many ancient and Medieval conceptions, is the consideration of reality or being *qua* being in order to arrive at knowledge. That is, it is what we do when we reflect on our observations and try to understand the causes of what we observe. Aristotle, for example, said, “It is right also that philosophy should be called knowledge of the truth. For the end of theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is

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<sup>6</sup> Mortimer J. Adler, *Aristotle for Everybody: Difficult Thought Made Easy* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), ix.

<sup>7</sup> Adler, *Aristotle for Everybody*, xii.

action.... Now we do not know a truth without its cause.”<sup>8</sup> Josef Pieper said that “to engage in philosophy means to reflect on the totality of things we encounter, in view of their ultimate reasons; and philosophy, thus understood, is a meaningful, even necessary endeavor, with which man, the spiritual being, cannot dispense.”<sup>9</sup>

Philosophy, then, is the desire, pursuit, and acquisition of the truth concerning everything and anything that presents itself to humans in such a way that we can know it, as well as the causes, principles, or reasons for each of these things. Philosophy is an action whose aim is intellectual rest—the mind being satisfied in the acquisition of the truth, and the person living the life of virtue. As will be shown, not only can philosophy help make sense of our common experience, but the Bible appears to assume a number of important concepts which, best explained by early Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, are assumed by most people. This will be shown through a consideration of how the Bible takes for granted an approach to the world which is best described *via* a number of key Aristotelian concepts, such as the four causes, act and potency, and the principle of causality.

Before we engage in this endeavour, we need to consider Colossians 2:8, and ask whether Christians should engage in philosophical reflection or use the works of philosophers as an aid in developing Christian doctrines. We will then consider how the Bible seems to take a number

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<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 993b20–24, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (1984; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1570.

<sup>9</sup> Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy: Classical Wisdom Stands Up to Modern Challenges*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 12.

of Aristotelian concepts for granted. We will conclude with some considerations about the importance of moderate realism for biblical and theological studies.

## **BEWARE OF VAIN PHILOSOPHY**

### **Which Philosophy?**

Paul, in Colossians 2:8, warns the church, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.” This verse is sometimes taken to mean that Christians should neither engage in philosophical reflection nor read the works of the philosophers. Philosophy is seen as a vain practice which, as essentially the thought of man, is contrary to the thought of God.

People arrive at this conclusion because, quite obviously, Paul says we must beware of philosophy! It is at this point that a comment made by C. S. Lewis, in an academic article he wrote about Edmund Spenser, may be helpful. Lewis warns the interpreter of Edmund Spenser of a particular danger, that is, to think that, since a word used by Spenser is familiar to the interpreter, it follows that what the interpreter means by that word is precisely the same as what Spenser meant by this word. Lewis says, “An obstacle may arise from our own preconceptions. We may be so certain in advance what a word or an image ought to mean that we omit to notice what it really does mean in the po-

em.”<sup>10</sup> This dictum is crucial to keep in mind as we read the biblical text.

We must, therefore, stop to ask, “Is Paul really warning us against the study of philosophy?” What is he talking about when he employs the term “philosophy”? To answer this question, we will need to look at the Greek text. The part of this verse which speaks of philosophy, saying, “by philosophy and by an empty deceit,” should be translated “by a vain and false philosophy.” Or, more precisely, “That philosophy which is vain and false/misleading.”<sup>11</sup> This nuance should make it obvious that Paul is not attacking philosophy as such; nor is he saying that there are some philosophies that could be described as vain and misleading. Rather, Paul is referring to a particular philosophy—a particular pursuit of divine wisdom—which was a

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<sup>10</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Edmund Spenser, 1552–99,” in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (1966; repr., Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 142.

<sup>11</sup> In Greek we read, « βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ». This is translated as, “See that you are not trapped by/through the philosophy which is vain and false, according to the traditions of men.” The two Greek words *κενῆς* and *ἀπάτης* seem to be adjectives which qualify the Greek word *τῆς φιλοσοφίας* (note that the article and the adjectives are in the same declension). We could also translate this section as “a vain and false philosophy.” Cf. Henry Alford, *Galatians-Philemon*, vol. 3 of *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, 5th ed. (1871; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 218; Kenneth S. Wuest, *Mark, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and Colossians*, vol. 1 of *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* (1953; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 200; Charles R. Erdman, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1933), 66; John Davenant, *An Exposition of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians*, trans. Josiah Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1831), 1:389; Thomas d'Aquin, *Commentaire sur l'Épître aux Colossiens*, in *Commentaires de Saint Paul sur tous les Épîtres de Paul*, trans. l'Abbé Bralé (Paris: Louis Vives, 1874), 4:453.

threat to the church in Colossae. This is why commentators frequently talk about the Colossian heresy (or, philosophy).<sup>12</sup> Paul is writing to a church that is aware of a new teaching being propagated in their area which is promising access to divine wisdom. This verse, then, could be read as follows: “Make sure you are not trapped by/through that philosophy—the one that is currently infiltrating the church—which is vain and false/misleading, according to the traditions of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ.”

The question we need to ask, therefore, is, “What was the nature of the ‘philosophy’ that Paul warned the Colossians about?” This question is relatively easy to answer: the “philosophy”—the pursuit of divine wisdom—that Paul warned the church about was likely a *Jewish mysticism*. The book of Colossians contains a number of important clues which help us better understand what Paul is aiming at with this warning. It was heresy that was characterized by (1) the pursuit of divine wisdom, which was said to be a mystery that could be discovered by engaging in a number of “spiritual practices.” This is what qualifies it as a form of mysticism. (2) It taught that the way to discover this divine mystery was by (a) a rigid diet of food and drink; (b) Jewish asceticism; (c) the celebration of Jewish holidays, new moons, and sabbaths; (d) the worship of angels; and (e) the pursuit of visions (Col. 2:16–23). Though this may describe a philosophy (taking the Greek word literally: “the love of wisdom”) this is not, as we have seen, the nature of philosophy as such.

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<sup>12</sup> Without the article, this phrase would be translated, “A philosophy that is vain and misleading,” but Paul uses the article, indicating that he is targeting a particular philosophy—a particular system of thought.

## SHOULD CHRISTIANS STUDY PHILOSOPHY?

Regardless, one might respond that it is nevertheless not good for Christians to study philosophy or engage in philosophical reflection. In fact, such a response could not be further from the truth. As we noted above, philosophy is nothing more than the pursuit of wisdom. As John Davenant (1572–1641), a Reformed theologian and one of the most influential delegates at the Synod of Dort, says in his commentary on Colossians 2:8, “For philosophy is the offspring of right reason: and this light of reason is infused into the human mind by God himself.”<sup>13</sup>

Philosophy, then, is not the attempt to replace or to subjugate either the divine thought or the Word of God. It is only the desire, awakened by an experience of wonder, to know the cause of that which awakened our wonder. We sit under the starry sky, overwhelmed by the greatness of the universe, and we say, “Wow!” In that moment, philosophy is born, and the next expression is often, “Whence the immensity of the universe?”; or, “Whence the beauty of the universe?” The philosopher begins to reflect on these questions. This is not contrary to Christianity, but complementary. In fact, Davenant points out that, since philosophy is nothing more than the right use of the faculty of reason, which God has given to mankind, “If, therefore, the Apostle had condemned and rejected philosophy, he would verily have rejected the light of reason, and would have cast great injury upon God, the author of it.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Davenant, *Colossians*, 1:390.

<sup>14</sup> Davenant, *Colossians*, 1:391.

In fact, if we push our thoughts a bit further, we realize that we cannot be Christian without philosophizing. Some, such as Martin Heidegger, propose that philosophy and Christianity are contrary. He says, for example, that “a ‘Christian philosophy’ is a round square and a misunderstanding,” because the philosopher asks a question to which the Christian already has the answer.<sup>15</sup> The philosopher asks, “Whence the beauty, immensity, and order of the universe?” The Christian answers, “From the Creator God.” On this, it is worth our time to bring out a couple of points.

First, *contra* Heidegger, possessing the answer to a question does not stop one from asking the question in order to discover how to arrive at that answer. For example, think of a student who is working on his math exercises. If, while the student is working on these exercises, the teacher comes around to give him the answer to a question that is particularly difficult, has the professor just contradicted or destroyed the possibility of doing mathematics? No, the teacher gives the answer to a difficult question, but the student should always try to understand how to arrive at this answer. That a person already has the answer to a question asked by philosophers does not mean that this person cannot engage in philosophical reflection, or even that this person cannot seek to understand how one rightly arrives at this answer. In fact, a good way to help people understand how to think rightly is to give them the answer and then ask them to find out how to get to this answer (this is called learning *via* reverse engineering). Thus, it is not due to the fact that the Christian already knows the

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 8 [6].

answer to this question that the Christian cannot do philosophy. It follows only that the Christian has an advantage over the non-Christian: He already knows that God exists, and now he must only discover how we can demonstrate that God exists. Christian philosophers, therefore, already know that there must be a flaw in any argument that shows God does not exist.

Furthermore, the student to whom the answer is given possesses the answer to the question, not as knowledge *per se*, but rather as an article of faith based upon a reliable testimony. The student accepts the teacher's word because the teacher is a known authority whose reliability has been verified. If the student is content to rest in the knowledge of the answer he was given, he is not at fault! It is not irrational to accept as true the word of a known authority. Yet most teachers desire and hope that the student will work to understand the answer. It is here that we can speak of "a faith in search of understanding," borrowing the words of Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas. Believing in order to understand is a rational action that we do throughout our lives and in all areas of our lives. It is, in fact, an action which could be considered, according to our definition, as philosophy: the pursuit of wisdom and the desire to understand causes and principles. As such, the Christian engages in philosophical reflection when he seeks to understand his faith. Belief is not the opposite of philosophy, though belief may be the beginning of philosophy. This brings us back to what we said above: we cannot be Christians without philosophizing.

Second, if philosophy is defined as the pursuit of wisdom, the attempt to understand and know the causes of things that amaze us, then everyone who thinks is doing

philosophy (Christian or not). In fact, as Aristotle argued, it is impossible to demonstrate that one should not do philosophy without engaging in philosophical reflection! He says, “If someone were to say that one should not philosophize, then, since to philosophize is both to inquire into the very question whether one should philosophize or not...and also to pursue philosophical contemplation, by showing that each of them is proper for a man we shall wholly refute the view stated.”<sup>16</sup> For a human being therefore, philosophizing is as natural as breathing.

The question is not, “To philosophize or not to philosophize (to breathe or not to breathe)?” Nor even, “Should we do philosophy (should we breathe)?” But, rather, “Do we philosophize well (do we breathe well)?” Those who run a marathon cannot breathe the same way they breathe every day. They must learn to breathe properly in order to succeed in running their marathon. In the same way, Christians should learn to philosophize properly, not to avoid philosophy. C. S. Lewis points out that “if you don’t go on thinking rationally, you will think irrationally.”<sup>17</sup> And, a little later, in a sermon to Christian thinkers which resembles what Irenæus said in his work *Against Heresies* about the pastoral responsibility to protect the flock against wolves, Lewis says, “To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander, *Commentarius in Topica* 149.11–15, in Aristotle, *Complete Works*, 2:2404.

<sup>17</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Learning in War-Time,” in *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 581.

defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.”<sup>18</sup> Commenting on Colossians 2:8 and explaining what philosophy is, Davenant said, “They, therefore, who desire philosophy itself to be exploded from the schools of Christians, are either altogether ignorant, and have it in view to hide their ignorance among the common ignorance of all; or they are wicked, and desire to expose us stripped of all advantage from learning, untaught and defenseless, to artful and armed enemies.”<sup>19</sup> It seems, then, that not only is it important for Christians to study philosophy, but, in fact, they cannot stop themselves from engaging in philosophical reflection. Yet, we might still ask the following questions: is philosophy useful? What’s the point of it?

## THE USE OF PHILOSOPHY IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

In concluding this section, we will briefly enumerate a number of ways in which philosophy can be helpful to Christian thought. They could be summarized by the following statement: philosophy is useful to better defend, understand, and articulate Christian doctrines. Consider some examples:

1. Philosophy, as we have already seen through the comments of Lewis and Davenant, is useful for defending Christianity by demonstrating that the objects of faith (i.e., the incarnation of Jesus, the Trinity, etc.) are not incoher-

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis, “Learning in War-Time,” in *Essay Collection*, 584.

<sup>19</sup> Davenant, *Colossians*, 1:390.

ent or contradictory, even though we may not be able to provide a strict demonstration of the fact that they are true or fully understand them.<sup>20</sup> Philosophy can also present arguments that demonstrate what has often been called the “preambles of the faith,” that is, that God exists; that God is eternal, immutable, perfect, good, all-knowing, all-powerful, transcendent, and immanent in His creation; that the human being is composed of matter and soul; that there are moral standards which must be respected; that the fact that there is evil in the world does not prove that God does not exist; etc.<sup>21</sup>

2. Philosophical apologetics is also useful to demonstrate that other religions, worldviews, philosophies, etc., are in error, incoherent, or self-contradictory.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, on this point, says that philosophy can be used in theology “by throwing light on the content of faith by analogies.” Thomas Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I–IV of His Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: PIMS, 1987), 49.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Davenant, *Colossians*, 1:397. He writes, “The knowledge of philosophy is necessary, as well for the instruction of those who have not yet enrolled themselves under Christ, as for resistance, if they should obstinately oppose our Religion.” On the following page, Davenant writes of philosophy, “For it is like a trench and a rampart against their [those who attack Christianity’s] inroads; it is a sword wherewith to thrust them: which, although it renders the truth in no ways more powerful, yet it is very useful in this respect, that it repels sophistry, and weakens its force against it.” Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, says, “Accordingly we can use philosophy in sacred doctrine in three ways. First, in order to demonstrate the preambles of faith, which we must necessarily know in [the act of] faith. Such are the truths about God that are proved by natural reason, for example, that God exists, that he is one, and other truths of this sort about God or creatures proved in philosophy and presupposed by faith.” Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> This seems to be what Aquinas is getting at when he says that philosophy can be used in theology “in order to refute assertions

3. Philosophy helps us to better understand the Word of God by giving the interpreter those tools of logic that allow him to better analyze the written words of the Bible. This is the first benefit of philosophy mentioned by Davenant, who says, “The knowledge of philosophy is useful, nay, necessary to the clear understanding and perspicuous elucidation of many passages which everywhere occur in the sacred Scriptures.”<sup>23</sup> He continues by giving plenty of concrete examples. He concludes that “there is no part of philosophy, or of human learning, which may not at times, be called in to his aid, by the interpreter of sacred literature, in order to contribute what falls within its province.”<sup>24</sup>

4. Finally, the arts of rhetoric and logic, which are sub-branches of philosophy, are not necessary only for the proper understanding of the Word of God, but also for the proper articulation and expression of Christian doctrine. Davenant notes, “Philosophy, especially that which teaches the rules and the art of reasoning rightly, is particularly necessary, and to be employed by all, in discriminating between, and treating all controversies relating to religion.”<sup>25</sup> Davenant pointed out there are several verses in the Word of God that encourage believers to reason and think well.

It seems, then, that not only is there no biblical reason to avoid philosophy, but there are plenty of biblical reasons to engage in philosophical reflection. With this

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contrary to the faith, either by showing them to be false or lacking in necessity.” Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Davenant, *Colossians*, 1:395.

<sup>24</sup> Davenant, *Colossians*, 1:396.

<sup>25</sup> Davenant, *Colossians*, 1:396.

introduction, we turn to our analysis of some of those philosophical concepts which the Bible seems to take for granted.

## ARISTOTELIAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE BIBLE

In this section we will consider a number of ways in which Aristotle sought to explain the causes and principles which are common to all human experience, beginning with his so-called “four causes,” i.e., material, formal, efficient, and final. Henry B. Veatch explains that Aristotle’s four causes come from normal, everyday convictions that “any change must be the change of something (material cause) from something (privation) to something else (formal cause), the change being necessarily effected by some agent (efficient cause) whose action may be presumed to be of a characteristic sort and productive of a characteristic result (final cause).”<sup>26</sup> We see the four causes used and assumed within the first book of Scripture, Genesis, and continuously throughout the rest of Scripture.

### Material Cause

The material cause of an object is the stuff out of which it is made, that which makes a concrete object concrete. Aristotle describes the material cause as “that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists.”<sup>27</sup> In Genesis 1:2,

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<sup>26</sup> Henry B. Veatch, *Aristotle* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974), 49.

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, bk. 2, ch. 3, 194b24–26, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye (New York: Random House, 1941), 240.

we see the statement: “The earth was without form and void.” By saying “the earth was,” Moses conveys that there was a concretely existing thing, the earth. There was not simply an abstract idea of an earth, but an actual material earth.<sup>28</sup> The Bible is filled with references to what Aristotle

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to note here that every composed and contingent being was created *ex nihilo* by God. This raises some interesting questions about that out of which (the material cause) God created the universe, and that out of which everything in the universe was created. To answer these questions we need to distinguish between what we might call *designated matter* and *prime matter*. For the latter, cf. Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer, 2nd ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1968), 36–37. Here Aquinas says, “The matter which is the principle of individuation is not just any matter, but only designated matter. By designated matter I mean that which is considered under determined dimensions.” It refers to the matter of the particular body of this person. For the former, *prime matter*, cf. Edward Feser, who states that “prime matter is matter lacking any substantial form, and indeed any form at all since accidental form presupposes substantial form. It is matter that is not yet any particular thing or other. It is indeterminate, the pure potency for form.” Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Neunkirchen-Seelscheid, Germany: Editiones Scholasticae, 2014), 171. It is important to note, so that we don’t get the wrong idea here, that prime matter is not a “thing” existing in mind-independent reality. It is, as Feser notes, “a real feature of the world,” but it does not possess extra-mental existence unless it is informed. “Prime matter can only exist together with substantial form.” Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, 172.

With these two concepts in hand we can say, therefore, both (1) that God created the world *ex nihilo*—out of no previously existing thing or previously existing matter (designated matter)—and (2) that God brought the world into existence out of a formless matter (prime matter), which does not exist prior (temporally) to the creation of the material universe. This seems to be what Thomas Aquinas is saying in the *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 66, a. 1, when he says, “If the formlessness of matter be taken as referring to the condition of primary matter, which in itself is formless, this formlessness did not precede in time its formation or distinction, but only in origin and nature, as Augustine says; in the same way as potentiality is prior to act, and the part to the whole.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1948), 329.

would call the material cause. When God tells Moses that he should make garments for the priests, He says, “They shall make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and of fine twined linen, skillfully worked” (Ex. 28:6). The rest of this chapter is filled with clear descriptions of the materials out of which the priests’ robes would be made—that is, the different material causes of the various articles of the priests’ clothing. Another example might be the building of Solomon’s temple, where we are told that Solomon “lined the walls of the house [of the Lord] on the inside with boards of cedar. From the floor of the house to the walls of ceiling, he covered them on the inside with wood, and he covered the floor of the house with boards of cypress” (1 Kings 6:16).

## Formal Cause

The formal cause of an object is the pattern that makes it the type of thing that it is—that is, its nature or essence. By virtue of having this same pattern of features, multiple individuals are considered “the same kind of thing.” Aristotle describes the formal cause as “the form or the archetype, i.e., the statement of the essence, and its genera...and the parts in the definition.”<sup>29</sup> Edward Feser states that “an essence is something that can be common to many particulars.”<sup>30</sup> Thomas Aquinas, in his well-known work *De Ente et Essentia*, after discussing the different ways in which being and essence can be predicated, goes on to discuss the use of the term “essence” in relation to composite substances. Here he notes that, in composite substances at

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<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, 194b27–28.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, 223.

least, the essence is neither the matter nor the form alone, but the composition of form and matter—that is, the essence includes both the matter and the form of the thing in question. He concludes, “It is evident from what has been said that the essence is what is signified through the definition of a thing.”<sup>31</sup> Joseph Bobik, in his commentary on Aquinas’ *De Ente et Essentia*, notes that essence is “that in real beings in virtue of which they can be grasped by the intellect, i.e., in virtue of which they are intelligible.... Essence is thus something in a real being which is of itself intelligible to the human intellect.”<sup>32</sup> Bobik goes on to note that “the word ‘essence’ also has this meaning: that in real beings by virtue of which they can be differentiated from one another and can be placed into one or other of the ten categories.”<sup>33</sup> The essence, therefore, (1) picks out what X is, in distinction from other beings; (2) is common to every particular being that is X; and (3) is intelligible to human knowers. Much more could be said, but this should be sufficient to make our point.

That there are essences or natures is taken for granted not only by the Bible itself, but also by the attempt to articulate coherently the teachings of the Bible. That is, first of all, in the Scriptures we see the use not only of terms referring to common natures and essences, but also the use of the Greek word *phusis* to refer to the nature or essence of various things. An example of the former can be found in Genesis 1:21, which tells us, “God created the great sea

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<sup>31</sup> Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 34.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (1965; repr., Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 67.

<sup>33</sup> Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 68.

creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.” There are multiple individual creatures of the same “kind,” or form.<sup>34</sup> As an

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<sup>34</sup> Most modern commentaries on these verses in Genesis do not draw attention to the clause “according to their kind,” seemingly taking for granted, along with the author of Genesis, that God is the Creator of all kinds, “classes,” or “categories” of animals. Those who do comment on the classifications of animals do not comment on the clause “according to their kind,” but rather, on the broad categories which are mentioned by the author of Genesis. Cf. John D. Currid, *Genesis 1:1—25:18*, vol. 1 of *A Study Commentary on Genesis* (2003; repr., Holywell, UK: Evangelical Press books, 2015), 77–82; John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 127; John H. Walton, *Genesis*, in *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 of *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 20–21; John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in *Genesis—Leviticus*, vol. 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, revised ed., ed. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 67, 69. Some older, but no less important, commentaries, however, do draw attention to the clause “according to their kind,” noting that this refers to “a peculiar and definite limitation, which all those understand best who have seen how the ‘kind’ sets limitations upon all who would mix kinds and cross them.” H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 1:67–68. Leupold later states that this clause allows “for no transmutation of species” (1:80). Leupold seems to understand the clause “according to their kind” to imply the notion of fixed natures, and understands this as a refutation of evolution—whether or not this is the case, we wish to note that Leupold seems to understand this clause to be referring to essences or natures (1:84). Augustine notes that this phrase is used appropriately, indicating that “the likeness of those being born preserves the likeness of the one passing away.” Augustine, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, in *St. Augustine On Genesis*, trans. Roland J. Teske (1991; repr., Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2001), 170. That Augustine assumes that the created things propagated according to distinct natures or essences can be seen from the following comment: “There is more need to distinguish the nature of these things that are propagated by the transmission of seed since they come to be and pass away” (171). One might also note his comment in his first book on Genesis against the Manichees, to the effect that “God arranged the forms of all things by ordering and distinguishing them in their places and ranks.” Augustine, *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees*, in *St. Augustine On Genesis*, 53. Correlatively,

example of the latter, we could consider Galatians 4:8, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature (*phusis*) are not gods.” Note that this verse is using the word “nature” in precisely the way that Aristotle used it when he elaborated the notion of formal causality—to refer to the “that which something is.” Paul is saying that, prior to becoming Christians, the Galatians had worshipped things which were not, by nature, God.

Secondly, not only is communication itself (which is not the “nature” of Scriptures, but which is also found in them) made possible by the existence of formal causes (or essences), but the types of communication which are found in Scripture (dialogue, poetry, prophecy, preaching, etc.) are possible only because of essences which undergird the words we use.

Finally, the development of Christian doctrine has traditionally been grounded on the claim, often associated with Plato or Aristotle, that there are real natures and essences. Take, for example, Francis Turretin’s discussion of these terms in his articulation of the Trinity, where he says, “First, here occurs the word *ousias* or ‘essence’ and ‘nature’ which denotes the whatness (*quidditatem*) of a thing and is often met with in Scripture, not only in the concrete when God is called *ho on* (Ex. 3:14; Rev. 1:4), but also in the abstract when deity (*theotes*, Col. 2:9), nature (*phusis*, Gal. 4:8), divine nature (*theia phusis*, 2 Pet. 1:4) is attributed to God. The Hebrew word *tvshyb* applies here; it designates the real

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James 3:7 makes reference to “every kind” of animal and uses the same Greek word *phusis* or “nature” to do so.

essence (*ten ontos ousian*, Job 12:16).<sup>35</sup> The formal cause of something, its nature or essence, is one of the key philosophical doctrines for *metaphysical realism*—that there are real essences. It seems, then, that the Bible takes metaphysical realism for granted.<sup>36</sup>

## Essential and Accidental Properties of Substances

While we are on the subject of formal causality, there is another important distinction. In Genesis 4:15, we read, “And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.” Genesis tells us Cain received a mark that he didn’t have previously. This implies that Cain could receive a “mark” of some kind without ceasing to be the same individual he was before. He could either have the mark or not have it, and still be Cain.

On the other hand, Genesis 6:17 says, “For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven.” Insofar as the flood is the agent of destruction in this story, the natural understanding of the text is that God kills (besides human beings) all animals by drowning them. This kind of death, however, does not immediately vaporize the body. What it does is cut off the capacity of the body to breathe, and thereby eventually stop the body from functioning as a living organism. It is this cessation that Genesis describes as “destroying,” which is another way of saying “bringing

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<sup>35</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:253.

<sup>36</sup> For more on this, consult David Haines & Andrew A. Fulford, *Natural Law: A Brief Introduction and Biblical Defense* (Lincoln, NE: The Davenant Press, 2017).

an end to existence.” An animal can be wounded and continue to be the same animal; but an animal that ceases to be animated no longer exists.

What these two stories require us to say is that there are different kinds of features (i.e., “properties”) that an individual thing (i.e., a “substance”) can have, kinds of features that have been conventionally labeled “accidental” and “essential.” The first are types of features a thing can have or not have while remaining the same thing; and then there are types of features without which a thing would cease to exist. A person can remain a person with or without “a mark”; but an animal cannot cease living without being destroyed. The cessation of organic functioning, either by violence or otherwise, destroys it, making it other than what it was previously.

It is important to note that the identity of a person or substance through a process of change implies the existence of an essence, that is, of a substantial form (for Aristotle, a substantial form that actually exists is a substance). If there were no such essence, and the identity of a thing remained fixed only if it never changed properties or relations of any kind, then any change whatsoever would mean that one substance ceased to exist and another came into existence in its place. It would not be possible to speak, as human beings normally do, of people being born, growing up, doing various kinds of activities, acquiring and losing properties and features, or any such things. All such changes would not, in fact, be changes at all; instead, they would be the destruction of one being and the creation of another. But the Bible manifestly does speak in the common-sense manner.

One further point needs explicit emphasis. This is the distinction between substance and accidents. For Aristotle, a substance is a thing capable of possessing properties, whereas an accident is something that exists only in a substance. These categories basically correspond to the linguistic distinction between subject and predicate, and as such correspond to obvious truths of reality. Some things exist in themselves, others only exist as features of other things. For example, “whiteness,” an accident possessed by many things (e.g., snow, robes), does not exist on its own, whereas an individual (e.g., a specific tree, a specific sword, King David) exists on its own rather than as an accident inhering in another thing. A clear example of this distinction can be seen in the biblical account of Gideon’s attempt to test God’s will. In Judges 6:36–40, we see a clear distinction between the fleece (substance) as dry (accident) and waterlogged (accident).

### Efficient Cause

The next cause is the “efficient cause,” which denotes what causes a change to occur. The efficient cause, as described by Aristotle, is “the primary source of the change or coming to rest...generally what makes of what is made and what causes change of what is changed.”<sup>37</sup> W. Norris Clarke describes the efficient cause as “that which contributes positively to the being of another by its action: it is the agent that makes something to be, brings it into being, in

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<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, 194b29–31.

whole or in part.”<sup>38</sup> This appears in Genesis 1:1, which states that God created the heavens and the earth. In other words, God is the one who (efficiently) caused the world to be. Colossians 1:16 states that all things were created by Jesus. We see the use of efficient causality, once again, in Genesis 5:14, where God commands Noah to make an ark. Later in Exodus 15:6, Moses speaks in his song, “Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.” We could also point to Jesus Christ as the efficient cause of the miracles that are attributed to Him. For example, Jesus turns water into wine (John 2:1–12); heals the son of an official (4:46–54); heals the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1–16); multiplies the loaves and fish to feed five thousand (6:1–14); and so on. In 2 Timothy 3:16, we are told that God is the primary efficient cause of all the Scriptures: “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” Finally, Peter writes that God is the efficient cause casting the fallen angels into hell to be kept till judgment (2 Peter 2:4). God is He who sent the flood to judge the world, but saved Noah and his family (v. 5); who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, but saved Lot (vv. 6–7); who will “rescue the godly from trials” and “keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment” (v. 9).

Though efficient causality is primarily associated with personal agents, impersonal agents may also be efficient causes. For example, a lion may be the efficient cause of the substantial change which is produced when the lion kills a gazelle, or, the roots of a growing tree may be the

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<sup>38</sup> W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (2001; repr., Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187.

efficient cause of the cracks in the sidewalk. The Bible also refers to impersonal agents as efficient causes, such as the locusts that “ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left” (Ex. 10:15); the ostrich who lays its eggs on the ground (Job 39:13–15) or that flees from the horse and rider (v. 18); the soaring hawk (v. 26) or the eagle nesting high in the rocks (vv. 27–28). A particularly interesting example is found in the account of the two female bears that came out of the forest and killed the forty-two young men who were mocking the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2:23–25). Though there is obviously something miraculous about this event, the bears are described as the efficient causes of the deaths of the young men. This example allows us to introduce another important distinction in relation to efficient causality: primary and secondary efficient causality. Thomas Aquinas distinguished between the primary cause (God) and all other efficient causes which may be called secondary causes. Brian Davies notes that, according to Aquinas,

God operates through secondary causes which are real causes. According to him, God is the first cause of all being and change. He is, therefore, the primary cause of everything that happens in the world. But Aquinas also thinks that God sometimes brings about events by arranging for them to be the effects of causes distinct from himself (though not independent of his causal activity). These

causes are what Aquinas calls secondary causes.<sup>39</sup>

Davies is referring to distinctions that Aquinas makes in his *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*, where he says that “God works in every natural thing not as though the natural thing were altogether inert, but because God works in both nature and will when they work.”<sup>40</sup> Thomas goes on to explain four ways in which “one thing may be the cause of another’s action,”<sup>41</sup> for both natural things and subsistent agents. He concludes that “God is the cause of everything’s action inasmuch as he gives everything the power to act, and preserves it in being and applies it to action, and inasmuch as by his power every other power acts.”<sup>42</sup> Every efficient cause that is not God, therefore, is a secondary efficient cause, and thus, as George Klubertanz notes, is entirely dependent “for both their being and their causality” on the primary cause.<sup>43</sup>

Klubertanz goes on to make an important distinction between secondary causes and instrumental causes:

In the relationship of the principal to the instrumental cause we find this distinguishing trait: that the very causing of the instrument is received, not as a nature, not as a permanent

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<sup>39</sup> Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (1992; repr., Oxford: OUP, 1993), 163.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, trans. the English Dominican Fathers (1932; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 1:130.

<sup>41</sup> Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, 130–32.

<sup>42</sup> Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, 133.

<sup>43</sup> George P. Klubertanz, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), 126.

possession (that is, by way of an inherent form), but as an essentially transient influence. The secondary cause, on the contrary, although it does depend on other causes so that without them it cannot cause, has a causality all its own and has a proper and positive influence.<sup>44</sup>

Returning to the event described in 2 Kings 2, the bears would technically be described as secondary efficient causes, but they could also be described, in a sense, as instrumental causes. Female bears are known to attack anything that comes between them and their babies. But that they attacked the young men immediately after Elisha cursed the young men points toward instrumental causality—they were used by God to punish the young men. Some very clear examples of instrumental causality can be found in any story involving a weapon, such as the jawbone with which Samson killed one thousand Philistines (Judg. 15:15–17), or the oxgoad with which Shamgar killed six hundred Philistines (3:31). In these examples, one might say that the jawbone or oxgoad was the cause of the death of the Philistines; however, these unconventional weapons did not kill the Philistines by their own power but as used by Samson and Shamgar. They are, therefore, instrumental causes, and not efficient causes.

These distinctions keep us from giving in to the temptation to go on and attribute efficient causality to inanimate objects. Clarke warns that “when we get down to the inanimate world, however, we must be more cautious in assigning the responsible causes, since it is no longer so

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<sup>44</sup> Klubertanz, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, 130.

easy to isolate clearly one single cause that is the decisive initiator of an event as we can do more easily in the case of animals or humans.”<sup>45</sup> It seems better, therefore, to classify inanimate objects as instrumental causes, for they have no causality of their own, but are used by efficient causes to obtain some end. The Bible appears, therefore, to refer to and use each of the different types of causality that we have mentioned above.

### Final Cause

The last cause is, appropriately, the “final cause.” It is the purpose or aim of something. Aristotle describes it as “‘that for the sake of which’ a thing is done.”<sup>46</sup> According to Aristotle, this “aimed” aspect of reality is evident everywhere in the world, not simply in conscious human beings. Rather, even unconscious beings demonstrate final causality, since they are aimed at a certain end proper to them. They show they have an intrinsic tendency to act a certain way by regularly doing so. This phenomenon appears, for example, in Genesis 1:12: “The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind.” Of course, the narrator is giving an etiology of plants and trees, assuming our knowledge that plants and trees continue to behave this way. But the repeated reproductive behavior of vegetation

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<sup>45</sup> Clarke, *One and the Many*, 189.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, 194b32–34. Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, bk. 2, ch. 11, 94a20–24, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. G. R. G. Mure (New York: Random House, 1941), 170.

displays “directedness,” that is, it displays the intrinsic tendency that these things have to behave in a certain manner (to reproduce).

In the Gospels, Jesus actually argued according to precisely this logic:

Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Matthew 7:16–20)

Final causality is also seen in the purpose of some action or event—it is that which ultimately motivates the action or event, bringing into being. Some clear examples of this type of final causality can be seen in the two following passages. Colossians 1:16b: “All things were created through him and for him”—a clear statement that the final cause of all of creation is none other than Jesus Christ. Second Thessalonians 2:13b–14: “God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Note the final cause of our salvation is that we might obtain the glory of Jesus Christ.

## **Act and Potency**

Two other concepts that are known for their Aristotelian provenance, and which also seem to be presupposed in the

Scriptures, are act and potency. *Act*, or actuality, denotes the existence of things. It is the term that refers to the *existing* of what *is*, the *being* of what *exists*. Genesis affirms this in the first verse, when it tells us that God created the world. At that point in history, then, the world existed, or was actual. *Potency* is Aristotle's term for the idea of possibility. That is, potency refers to the fact that some things (whether substances, properties, modes of existence, etc.) which could exist are presently not actual. We find the notion of potency implied in Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Here God commands human beings to multiply. This denotes bringing further human beings into existence who did not exist at that point. It entails that such a state of affairs could be made actual, though it wasn't at that point actual. This, for Aristotle, is just another way of saying that the first human couple had the potency of multiplying, though that potency had not yet been actualized. Once one understands what act and potency refer to, one realizes that they undergird every single change recorded in Scriptures, whether the Scriptures refer to local movement (e.g., Paul travels with Barnabas to Iconium and enters a synagogue [Acts 14:1]); accidental change (change of color, quantity, etc.); or substantial change (the death of a living being, whether it be an animal or a person, as in the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:56–60). In each of these types of change, a potency for X is made actual.

## The Principle of Causality

Aristotle affirmed the basic idea that is now known as the principle of causality. This principle states that no potency can be made actual except by something already actual. This principle also states that anything which does not have in its own being that which sufficiently explains the totality of its existence must receive its existence from another (an efficient cause) that exists by, and for, itself.<sup>47</sup> Briefly put, this principle maintains that nothing comes from nothing, or that “every being that begins to exist needs a cause.”<sup>48</sup> To deny this principle would be to claim either that it is possible for a thing to be the cause of its own existence, or that things can come into being without cause. Both of these claims are conceptually incoherent and demonstrably impossible.

The principle of causality is assumed throughout Scripture, notably in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. In Genesis 1:1, we read, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” In Colossians 1:16, Paul says, “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* depends for its truth on the principle of causality.

It could be argued that every single miracle in the Scriptures takes this principle for granted. Miracles are of-

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<sup>47</sup> Clarke, *One and the Many*, 180. Clarke also notes the important difference between Aquinas’ construal of the principle of causality and that given by the empiricist tradition from Hume to recent times, as well as Leibniz’s construal of this principle. Clarke, *One and the Many*, 180–81.

<sup>48</sup> Clarke, *One and the Many*, 180–81.

ten portrayed as events which are brought about, but not due to those causes which normally, or naturally, precede the effect. A couple of examples will help to illustrate this point. When Mary was found to be pregnant with Jesus, Joseph immediately suspected the most obvious cause for the pregnancy and sought to separate from Mary (Matt. 1:18–19). When the angel told Joseph that Mary was impregnated miraculously by the Holy Spirit, the angel was not saying that the pregnancy was uncaused, but that it was caused by God (vv. 20–21). In the Gospel of John, we find the story of the death of Lazarus. Jesus travels to Bethany to the tomb of Lazarus. Now, it goes without saying that there is no known natural cause which can bring a person three-days dead back to life. We also know that dead people don't spontaneously come back to life. So when the author of the Gospel of John tells us that when Jesus cried out, "Lazarus, come out" (11:43), and, "The man who had died came out" (v. 44), we understand that he intends to communicate not that Lazarus spontaneously came back to life without cause, but that it was due to the divine authority of Jesus that Lazarus came to life. The absence of the natural cause does not imply the absence of any cause, but the presence of a supernatural cause.

Two other examples can be found in the Gospel of John. In John 5:36, Jesus says, "But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me." Jesus is teaching that His works "bear witness," and they do this by being effects that demand a divine cause as their only sufficient explanation. As Nicodemus says earlier in John 3:2, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher

come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

This kind of reasoning to the necessity of a specific type of cause from a specific kind of effect would not be natural for Nicodemus or for us unless we assumed that every effect must have a cause with sufficient reality and power to explain the effect, that every possibility that is made real (like a miraculous effect) must be made real by something already actual. Otherwise, for example, people could come back to life from the dead without any explanation, or with a causally insufficient one, which amounts to the same thing.

## MODERATE REALISM, THE BIBLE, AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

In our discussion of formal causality, we noted that the Bible seems to take metaphysical realism for granted. In *Natural Law*, written by these authors, we note, “To say that Moderate Realism is the foundation of natural law is to say that natural law is based upon two principles: (1) created essences exist, and (2) essences can be known.”<sup>49</sup> These two principles are, in fact, the two foundational claims of Moderate Realism. These are the principles of Metaphysical Realism. To them we might add that these two principles bring us to the conclusion that “it is, therefore, being which is the condition of knowing, and not

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<sup>49</sup> Haines and Fulford, *Natural Law*, 23. Moderate Realism, for those who are unfamiliar with the term, refers to that form of Realism which argues that there are no uninstantiated essences that have real, extramental existence. In other words, all existing essences are either instantiated or beings of reason.

God in faith, the love of wisdom is truly a whole way of life.

Philosophical ideology lends itself to manualism, and ironically is very much contrary to the spirit of the scholastics in whose name much of this is done. Manualism just takes it for granted that the world can be apprehended in a purely dianoetic way through memorization of abstract concepts presented schematically, and not the world directly, but rather the world as apprehended by the “mind of the church.” In this way, manualism was, despite itself, an instance of positivism, where “the mind of the church” functions like Rorty’s “mirror of nature.” As Verene notes:

Richard Rorty is correct that the conception of the mind as the “mirror of nature” has been the guide for the creation of the modern philosopher. As modern philosophy is built the mind is disconnected from human wisdom, and it is disconnected from the divine in order that it be fully connected to the object. The mind ceases to be nous or the soul and becomes the Understanding. The concern of the Understanding is not with itself but with the object.<sup>45</sup>

But Thomas himself would reject this completely and say that you have to get your own concepts through experience, which is closer to *Bildung* than to mere passive sensation. Further, Thomas as much as Hegel would say this experience of things and finally of the whole isn’t separable from the arc of personal individuation, the journey

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<sup>45</sup> Donald Philip Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 132.

toward God, which is also at the same time the journey toward self-actualization. In other words, things have to be known experientially, which is always a little journey in itself; but these episodes are framed by and make sense within a bigger story, the story of one's life, one's walk. Not only is man not incidental to the world, he is in fact central to it. The mind of man isn't inanimate photographic film, to be simply exposed to things in their brute presence, such that the getting of wisdom is no different from the operation of a CCTV camera. As Aristotle says, the soul is potentially the world, but this potency is inseparable from the soul's own nature as *imago dei*, and from the person's particular created constitution and the soul's own dynamism in time; inseparable from passions, imagination, temperament, and one's particular way through the world directed by special Providence; in other words, from one's personality and history. The world itself has a narrative semiotic structure corresponding in principle to the directionality of the heart, which gives intelligible order to time; the world is a stage for human life.

Manualism wanted to subtract this personal element entirely. It is a prefabricated worldview meant to rule subject minds: "here, this is what we think, and you'd better stick to it," except that not much real thinking is going on there, although an illusion of knowledge can be created through by a false sense of "getting it" due to the correspondence of the map of plausible, abstract conjecture to the confusedly known contours of the world. But this sense of "making sense" is a completely specious certitude. This is part of the reason why manualist Thomism, already beginning to markedly diversify internally simply because of the genuine intellectuality and intellectual curiosity of its

better exponents, collapsed almost overnight after the 60s; there was no there there. There was a reaction against manualism early on, even within neo-Thomism; and it took different forms, just as ancient Thomism itself did. Once that choreographed parade was no longer papally commanded, it was over. It was a much more formally rigorous and more materially correct version of the same thing we see in the Reformed world with weaponized “worldview.”

Bringing our point full circle, if the great texts are antique maps, the question is whether they are read by explorers or collectors. Modern Roman philosophy, as a lay activity, is all too often a collector’s obsession rather than an explorer’s adventure, though certainly it happens that minds of people in the Roman conglomerate are genuinely set aflame in wonder by reading Thomas or Pieper or whomever, leading them to embark on a life of disciplined insight under the tutelage of Catholic masters (more about these in a moment). But in the eyes of the Ignatius Reillys of Roman laymandom and their high church Protestant doppelgangers, philosophy itself becomes part of the “discarded image,” something that primarily happened in the idealized past, for which one is wistfully nostalgic; not the awakening in wonder required to see the living order of the world with the aid of the old discarded maps. It is valued then as “vintage,” a sign of an imagined, lost, ideal antiquity—the projection of an inner reverie rather than a sign of present reality. This signification of a romanticized fantasy world by vintage collectibles is very likely the actual meaning of the endless talk of “sacramentality.” This is roughly akin to collecting travel posters depicting a country one has never visited and isn’t likely to.

One of course also sees among Roman Catholics philosophy in the purely academic sense—rigorous doxography and proposed solutions to conundra—a great deal of it still, but as a way of life it looks no different at all really than that of their secular counterparts; the difference is accidental. Their dissertations are written on Wojtyła’s phenomenology or on some ethical doctrine regarded comparatively in the text of Irenaeus and Von Balthasar, instead of on Quine’s logic, but the praxis is the same: professorial. There is no shame in this, especially when done very well, and its products are often useful, but there is also nothing exceptional.

This is not all Rome can be said to have, of course. Rome fosters within itself some remarkable Christian philosophers, not just mere collectors of maps or mere historians, who are devout Catholics; one would be an idiot to disregard Yves de Paris, or John Poinot, or Thomas Gilby, or Julian Marias, or Josef Pieper. This is entirely to be expected; Christian philosophy isn’t and cannot be limited to denomination. But again, their relation of the truth of their vision to Roman principle seems to us accidental, because such men implicitly refuse the role of philosopher as commissar; at the level of principle and in its practice when consistent, Rome is inimical to philosophy in the fullest sense, as a way of life.<sup>46</sup> To evangelical eyes, these

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<sup>46</sup> Despite the remarkable exposition in *Fides et Ratio*, in which one finds a profoundly thoughtful sketch of Christian philosophy, mixed with an almost disingenuous account of the role of the Roman magisterium and Rome’s actual history regarding its philosophers and philosophy generally. But its admission, made almost in passing, that Rome’s relation to Christian reason after Vatican II is “genuinely novel” signals the truth. Genuinely novel indeed. Further, one notes the studious omission of philosophers from among the “separated brethren” (with the exception of Kierkegaard) though the author is very obviously the

philosophers can live within the Roman obedience by way of ignoring or personally redefining, unwittingly or wittingly, those aspects of Roman doctrine which militate against the pursuit of wisdom, or just choosing to live with a contradiction in the name of paradox. But be that as it may; in any case, Rome most certainly doesn't have any kind of monopoly on Christian philosophy. The Catholic philosophers aren't in any essential way emanations of the Roman Church. Further, the old Roman apologetic instinct to lay claim to truth wherever it is, which allows it to regard whatever it likes in evangelical circles as its own lost property, depends upon falsities for its plausibility. It might be far easier for evangelical Christians to plausibly claim genuinely philosophical Roman Catholics as "mere Christians," and sometimes the agreement at least seems to go farther than that. Remi Brague, for instance, lays out what appears to be an essentially evangelical understanding of law at the end of his work *The Law of God*.<sup>47</sup> Thus the Roman polemical commonplace that any human product they like "tends toward," "points toward," "naturally belongs to" Rome is usually a rationally warrantless wishful thinking, whereas the opposite claim, that real philosophers within the Roman federation are essentially "mere Christian," has real rational force.

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debtor of evangelical philosophy's long tradition; his work *The Acting Person* is unthinkable without it.

<sup>47</sup> Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. It certainly strikes a very different note from the official view of the *munus gubernandi* and real juridical power of the hierarchy.

## ON THE POSSIBILITY AND ACTUALITY OF "EVANGELICAL" PHILOSOPHY

What then does Protestantism have to offer philosophy? A more precise form of the question would be this: what does revelation mean for Christian pursuit of wisdom? We can take our point of reference from our discussion of the early Christians above. Over against the temptation to sectarian philosophy and its inevitable termination in "implicit faith" in a mediator or institution, evangelical faith, following Luther, has as its first point of emphasis man *coram deo*. In Christ, Who restores man to God, the Christian's philosophical path starts in communion with the God who is also the end of philosophy. The philosophical way of life is had—consciously or unconsciously—by all who believe in the promises of God and follow after the Wisdom of God, who is Jesus Christ. Artful philosophical inquiry and discourse is a secondary mode of this more fundamental way of life.<sup>48</sup>

One might say, then, that in its emphasis on the development of the heart, Protestantism makes philosophy "normative" for the ordinary believer. How so? Because it enjoins a man to walk one's own journey before the face of God, through encounters with all of God's masks and mummeries. You are never a mere layman, ancillary to bishops and priests and abbots and plaster saints, on the sidelines of the real action. The Christian life is ideally a

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<sup>48</sup> To this extent, the Christian's philosophical journey is one of peace. Any moral urgency or culture war is accidental to a more fundamental orientation that our basic needs are taken care of, that God is our Father, that history is going to be alright, and that God is bottomlessly good and generous. We live out of peace with Him and toward His renown.

conscious, mature rhyming of the whole story in relation to the part which is ourselves and our story, in order to grow ever close to the Author. And that is irreducibly philosophical.

But crucially, this way of life out of and toward communion with God is achieved in the world itself through which we know Him. Luther's idea that God is ever present in masks and mummeries surrounding us on all sides rules out any attempt by man to narrow down reality to manageable proportions; God is everywhere, and vocation—calling—is arriving from every direction and in all sorts of ways.

Luther's insight that spirituality is not a part-to-part opposition within man, but rather a relation to God such that whatever created good of man's being and life is in living faith is spiritual, and whatever isn't, is flesh (humanity *incurvatus in se*), recovered a fully Biblical catholicity of life. Because all roles are equally holy and all believers equally priests, it has opened the way for Protestants to see the simplest things as spiritual exercises, whose lessons apply analogically to the way of wisdom. One thinks of Walton on angling, and Ascham on archery; even motorcycle maintenance might be such a practice.<sup>49</sup> Some signal examples of early modern "secular" painting in Protestant countries are in fact profound evangelical adaptations of the medieval meditative-devotional painting, inviting the viewer into an itinerary at once through the world of the painting and thereby through his own soul.<sup>50</sup> Barbara Kief-

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<sup>49</sup> See Matthew Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> See Eddy de Jongh, *Questions of Meaning in Dutch Art of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

er Lewalski's consideration of 17th-century Protestant poetics<sup>51</sup> testifies to a profoundly contemplative practice of rigorous philology and poetic invention inspired by the sacred text. And the Protestant *ars moriendi* literature of the 16th and 17th century is nothing if not a spiritual exercise. We might also think of the Protestant practice of early natural science as in which an asceticism of mind and a rigorous craft served philosophical and theological purposes.

What is more, the Protestant heritage did not just give to philosophy a task clarified and purified of idolatry, but also a social vision (at least *in nuce*) which tends to maximize precisely the infinity of God manifest in the diversity of creation and of Christian lives. Luther could write that the Christian is the master of all and the servant of all. In this sense, he affirmed not only the priesthood but also the kingship of all believers, though a servant kingship which abdicates all pretense of self-obsessive rule, and rather lives for the neighbor, traveling in rags alongside him. In its insistence on the particularity of the human soul and its relation to God, the Protestant tradition both laid the foundation for an individual philosophical journey, and tended to emphasize the limitation of civic authority in its infraction and limitation of the free person inhabiting their journey before God. Christian philosophy has always been inherently ecumenical and non-sectarian. But the Protestant tradition brought what was largely a latent and tacit element of Christianity to self-aware clarity.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> In *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

<sup>52</sup> See, in conjunction, Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard Belknap, 2014) and W.

Concerning Protestantism and the mind, then, we can distinguish what our principles can and have led to from particular historical instances. In principle, Protestant faith gives a heart of proleptically participated Heaven to common wisdom, not a prosthetic intellect, an artificial megamagister, like the statue of Nebuchadnezzar before which the mind must bow down. And its gift to the philosophical enterprise, beyond the generally corrected pattern of clarifying philosophy's impetus and ends, is the inclusion of the person as image of God in the philosophical picture. While we might want to criticize evangelical experientialism in unprincipled forms, we must never divorce the practical and particular following after Jesus from the philosophical enterprise. To follow after Him is to be in immediate contact with the Logos in the context of a particular life, history, situation, family, nation, decade, marriage, and so on—the adventure of tracking with an intelligible but incomprehensible Providence in His abiding presence. And to live artfully in that particular and unique context, according to the general structures of reality which are possessed in common, is to live a Christian philosophical life.<sup>53</sup>

And this means to live a life of conversation which illuminates the common world in which our neighbors walk their own particular path alongside us. Our path is not

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Bradford Littlejohn, *The Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty: Richard Hooker, the Puritans, and Protestant Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Though he has only received brief mention in this volume, Herman Bavinck is perhaps one of the great Protestant philosophers of “the particular” in the last two centuries. There is much in him still left to discover on this front.

theirs sans its particulars and plus a few articles of implicit faith.

Ours is rather precisely theirs, but in a way aligned with the telos they distortedly pursue. For this reason, the well-lived Christian life is always full of public gravitas. It is a whole-personed (body and soul) pursuit of the good precisely in the ordinary life afforded to us in creation. The goal of such a way of life, and the goal of this volume as a motivation toward it, is not to commend the uncritical appropriation of its contents, but to commend the wise and critical conversation of guides who help us to live a mature, adult, and fully conscious life before the face of God in Christ.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the revival of the older idea of philosophy—the search for wisdom, knowledge of the big picture, through experience of life, disciplined practice, and conversation with the wise—is one reflective Christians ought to earnestly welcome. Insofar as they have been students of Lewis, they likely already do. But there are two ditches on either side of the high road.

The first involves the misuse of ancient philosophy as a mere palliative, where philosophical praxis has as its goal the self's staying in shape, so to speak. The self is at the center, and the aim of philosophy is to arrive at and maintain a comfortable *modus vivendi* between the self and the outside world, knowledge of which remains touristic. "Classics" are skimmed for maxims, and the good life is one of cautious, careful pleasure. This is philosophy as

lifestyle, an artful management of the human resources of the consumer soul; philosophy as therapy of the self.

The second involves a perversion of the idea of dialogue with the minds of the sages who have left books behind, such that the library or canon is first oversimplified into a facile “Great Tradition,” then quasi-personified, and often, as a final step, identified with the Roman Church as a sort of giant philosopher, whose “mind” is a supposed system of readymade answers, and to “whom” one imagines one can apprentice in perpetual subjection. This is to be the abject victim of a metaphor, and takes one off the road to wisdom. The “good life” here is an imaginary one of security, protection, the comfort of belonging to a collective; the aim here is also therapeutic in the modern sense, but social more than personal. The concerns Hadot and Strauss had about Christian philosophy are warranted with regard to this kind of problem, but “mere Christian philosophy” is something quite different, and escapes the criticism.

What we seek in the offerings of this volume is, then, a conversation with the past for the sake of a renewal of Christian wisdom. And as it turns out, precisely in a creative openness to reality, we bear ourselves toward the world in precisely the same ways that our ancestors did—accounting for the insight that they still pass onto us. That is to say, at one point, most of our forebears were radical and had detractors. But what is common among them was a firm commitment to the reality of Jesus Christ as Lord of this world, to the supreme authority of divine discourse (God’s Word) as supremely authoritative and insightful in knowing the story of God, of ourselves, and of the world—and finally a courageous wonderment and curiosi-

ty about the world in itself. Christian philosophy is the rational commitment, a well-rewarded trust, that the God of the Bible, the Christ of our salvation, and the structures of history and reality in themselves cohere in a splendid unity (which unity is the supreme object of philosophical insight). This personal trust in God (and in the rationality of His world) is well-founded in the history of the world and of God's acts, in the world as it is manifest before us, and is therefore warranted when we engage in further inquiry. What we see in the history of Christian thought—right up to our own time—are men and women who moved in this simple and reasonable faith, in particular philosophical projects in their particular time. And in doing so, they helped to calibrate us into an ever greater comportment to that unity which is the pursuit of all philosophy. And it is that unity we pursue still as their conversation partners, as particular historical actors, and as servants of Christ—the Word made flesh in Whom and for Whom all things are.



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