

FAITH AND Philosophy

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"FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING"

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Jesus and Philosophy: New Essays, edited by Paul K. Moser. Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. 236. \$64.00 (cloth), \$25.00 (paper)

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This new collection of essays explores the philosophical relevance of the founder of the Christian movement, Jesus of Nazareth. The book includes contributions from Old and New Testament scholars, theologians, and philosophers. In the introduction, philosopher Paul Moser engages in a substantive discussion of the similarities and differences between the movements born in Jerusalem and Athens. The movement of the disciples of Jesus and the center of Western philosophy share a concern for truth, and seek knowledge of the truth. Moser characterizes Athens as the birthplace of a wisdom movement in which humans are moral and intellectual agents in pursuit of a good life. Jerusalem, on the other hand, through Jesus, Paul, and others, is a *Good News power movement*. This movement offers more than wisdom. It offers power to human beings, the power of comprehensive redemption (spiritual, moral, and physical). Moser takes philosophy to be a kerygmatic discipline, at least when we consider the disciplinary impact of the person of Jesus on it. For the Good News power movement of Jesus, what matters most is love of God and then love of neighbor as ourselves. In light of this, all human projects, including philosophical projects, should contribute to the satisfaction of these love commands. Philosophy should go beyond mere discussion and move into obedience mode. That is, a discussion of the perennial questions of philosophy has value, but philosophers must engage in their discussions in compliance with the divine love commands. Moreover, philosophers and others should not be satisfied with mere discussion, but should be receptive to God's love and in turn motivated to follow and obey God from the heart. The three sections of the book—Jesus in His First Century Thought Context, Jesus in Medieval Philosophy, and Jesus in Contemporary Philosophy—expound on these issues in order to more fully grasp the relevance of Jesus of Nazareth to philosophy as an intellectual discipline.

In the first section of the book, the chapter by Craig Evans includes an analysis of the available sources that contain information about the

historical Jesus. From this analysis, Evans offers an account of what the present day historian can know about how Jesus understood himself and his mission. James Crenshaw considers the understandings of deity and how humans relate to it as communicated in extra-biblical literature, and how these views might have impacted the biblical authors. The chapter by Luke Johnson examines four ways in which Jesus is presented in the canonical Gospels that are philosophically relevant: Jesus as sage, Jesus as moral exemplar, Jesus as a revelation of God, and the story of Jesus as narrative ontology.

Paul Gooch's chapter in the book's first section includes a discussion of the impact of Jesus on philosophy via his impact on Paul. In "Paul, the Mind of Christ, and Philosophy," Gooch addresses some fairly widespread readings of Paul as being opposed to philosophy and dubious about the cognitive abilities of human beings relative to apprehending the existence and nature of God. The former is relevant for anyone who considers themselves to be a Christian and engages in philosophical work. The latter is of particular relevance in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion's debate concerning the *sensus divinitatis*. Related to this issue, Gooch engages in an analysis of Paul's treatment of human wisdom and divine wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1–4. Gooch rightly points out that when reading these chapters, we must remember that Paul's intent is not to delineate the relationship of faith to reason, but rather to deal with specific issues present in the Corinthian church. And one of the central problems present in that church is epistemological hubris. Given this, we need not read Paul as hostile to philosophy, but rather to philosophy in service of self-importance, pride, and concealed knowledge. Neither must we accept the claim that human wisdom is incapable of delivering any knowledge of God whatsoever. The problem could instead be that our epistemological hubris prevents us from properly understanding and accepting the natural knowledge of God that we are able to grasp.

Gooch concludes his chapter by considering the implications for the practice of philosophy from his understanding of the mind of Paul and Paul's understanding of the mind of Christ. Here I will focus on one of these implications. Gooch claims that we ought to engage in kenotic rather than sarkic philosophical practice. Sarkic philosophical practice is philosophy done as an expression of epistemological hubris. It is self-important and focused on winning an argument rather than pursuing wisdom or advancing understanding. Kenotic philosophy, on the other hand, is marked by humility and a self-emptying that creates space for the truth to emerge. In this way, the mind of Christ can be made manifest in both the content and mode of our philosophizing. This is a part of a broader Pauline way of life that embraces and embodies faith, hope, and love in a web of relationships, both human and divine.

The two chapters in the second section of *Jesus and Philosophy* explore the connections between Jesus and the philosophies of Augustine and Aquinas. The focus of both chapters tends to be more on the followers

than the founder, though both demonstrate the central place of Jesus in the thought of Augustine and Aquinas. In his chapter dealing with the ethics of Augustine, Gareth Matthews shows how the inner-life ethics espoused by Augustine reflect the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. There is also an interesting discussion of the ambiguity of ostension, including Augustine's view that in this and other areas of life we benefit from an inner illumination, which can be understood as the activity of Christ as an inner teacher or sage. While most philosophers have thought of language acquisition as a secular issue, Augustine conceives of it as a spiritual and religious matter.

Brian Leftow's chapter begins with one of my favorite lines from the book, when he says that "Jesus was to Aquinas what water is to a fish (p. 124)." Many philosophical issues are considered in this chapter. Here, I will mention two. First, Leftow points out that for Aquinas Christ occupies a central place in philosophy, if philosophy's aim is to seek wisdom via knowledge of the highest causes and ultimate ends of things. Given that according to Christianity Jesus is the divine truth and ultimate source and end of all, it follows that philosophers who seek truth are seeking Jesus, even if they are unaware of this. Second, Leftow points out that Aquinas's philosophy is directed by Christian authorities. For example, Thomas accepts that God is omnipotent on the basis of these authorities, and then gives philosophical arguments to explain and defend this claim. While some philosophers may bristle at constraints being placed on philosophy by some authority, Leftow points out that many contemporary naturalistic philosophers work in much the same way. For them, it is the dictates of evolutionary biologists and physicists that are taken to be authoritative, providing direction and limits to the practice of philosophy.

The final four chapters of the book address the place of Jesus in contemporary philosophy. William Abraham examines some of the life and thought of Jesus in search of epistemological insight, dealing with issues such as the internalism-externalism debate and the relationship between one's moral character and the maturing and operation of the intellect. David Ford explores the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur as a biblical philosophy, and offers some implications of Ricoeur's work for those who want to deal with Jesus in a philosophical manner with an extended discussion of John 1. Charles Talbot compares and contrasts the answers of Christianity, Theravada Buddhism, and secular naturalism with respect to the meaning of life. He also raises some similarities regarding how Christianity, if true, can shape our lives and particular themes in classic Christology that are worth further reflection.

The book's final section also includes a chapter by Nicholas Wolterstorff entitled "Jesus and Forgiveness." Wolterstorff considers the nature and value of forgiveness, and takes it to be an essential component of Jesus's ethic of love. In his explanation of this, Wolterstorff offers some insightful interpretations of some portions of the Sermon on the Mount. Central to these interpretations is the polemical context of the passage. Jesus is arguing

that his ethic of love is not merely about restoring balance between parties when one has harmed the other; rather, it includes the more challenging ideal of extending forgiveness. This involves foregoing the negative emotions that the offended feels toward the offender. It also involves foregoing the doling out of retributive punishment, according to Wolterstorff. Genuine forgiveness and retribution are incompatible, he claims.

The chapters in *Jesus and Philosophy* engage a variety of distinct topics, from issues related to virtue and the ethics of Jesus to the historical, religious, and intellectual context in which Jesus lived and taught. Such breadth can sometimes be problematic, but in the case of this volume it is a virtue. Given that, as Moser points out in the preface, no scholarly book has been produced that explores the relationship between Jesus and philosophy, the range of issues and disciplines represented in the book add to its quality and suggest avenues where further research might proceed not only in philosophy, but in theology and biblical scholarship as well. I highly recommend this book not only for scholars interested in the connections between Jesus and philosophy, but also as a text for courses in religious studies, Christian thought, and philosophy. Philosophers with Christian commitments would do well to reflect on Moser's claims about philosophy as a kerygmatic discipline and the related issues raised by Gooch in his chapter. Whether or not they are correct, Moser and Gooch provide significant food for thought for those who are, in some sense, Christian philosophers.