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Reply to Oppy

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***Abstract:** In this paper, I reply to specific claims about ambiguity raised by Graham Oppy. I also suggest that Christ-Shaped Philosophy does not settle for broad goals that are identical with the goals of the natural sciences, even if it is broadly continuous with reliable science. If it did settle thus, it would offer nothing distinctive. Instead, it offers a philosophical approach that goes beyond mere truth-seeking and understanding to redemption by God in Christ. Anything short of this will fail to be Christ-Shaped Philosophy. It thereby will fail to incorporate the distinctive kind of wisdom or philosophy recommended by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:6-7. “Christ-Shaped Philosophy” aims precisely to restore attention to that kind of philosophy.*

1. Graham Oppy notes that, according to “Christ-Shaped Philosophy,” Christian philosophy entails certain things regarding Christ. For instance, my paper opens, in its first paragraph, with this remark: “A philosophy can be theistic or deistic without being Christian, because it can acknowledge that ‘God’ is authoritative without affirming that Jesus is Lord.” The plain sense of this remark is, by clear implication, that a Christian philosophy affirms that Jesus is Lord. It follows straightaway that a Christian philosophy is not *merely* consistent with the claim that Jesus is Lord. So, the opening paragraph of the paper removes the alleged ambiguity.

2. The paper offers the following: “Gethsemane union with Christ as Lord is no mere correct belief that something about Christ is true. Instead, it calls for volitional cooperation and companionship with Christ, who empowers and guides *how* we think, not just *what* we think. (The divine fruit of the Spirit of Christ – love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and so on – should apply even to Christian thinking and thinkers.)” In offering Christian philosophy as a model for other disciplines, the paper offers this portrait of *how* Christian theorists conduct themselves as extending to disciplines beyond philosophy. It does not follow, of course, that a Christian doing physics, chemistry, or biology must dissent from the *content* of our best physics,

chemistry, or biology. Nowhere does the paper suggest that the *content* of such scientific disciplines must incorporate Christian doctrine. In fact, I have rejected such a suggestion in my treatment of design arguments and Darwin in *The Evidence for God*.

3. Oppy proposes that “the ‘Christ-Shaped Philosophy’ that [Moser] advocates has no interest in understanding alternative views, or in comparing the costs and benefits of adopting alternative views.” There’s a serious ambiguity here. Taken literally, the claim involves a category mistake: *People* may have an interest in understanding alternative views, but a *philosophy*, strictly speaking, does not, will not, and cannot. A philosophy, strictly speaking, does not “understand” anything, or have an “interest” in understanding a view. One can only wonder why Oppy thinks otherwise. Maybe, however, he doesn’t.

Maybe he actually meant that *I*, as a personal agent who advocates Christ-Shaped Philosophy, have “no interest in understanding alternative views, or in comparing the costs and benefits of adopting alternative views.” Now, those sound like fighting words when leveled against one who spends most of his life assessing philosophical views, in connection with epistemology and the problems of skepticism. In any case, I do not see how Oppy could reasonably venture that charge against me as a personal agent. I have never told him or anyone else that I do not have the interest in question; nor does anything I have written imply that I have no such interest. On the contrary, my writings are loaded with assessments of competing positions in philosophy and theology, including natural theology.

Perhaps what Oppy really meant to say was that he does not like the way I have failed to treat many alternatives to Christ-Shaped Philosophy in this paper. Well, I, too, regret that I had very limited space available to me in the paper, and could not repeat some of my challenges to alternatives, as found in *The Elusive God*, *The Evidence for God*, and *The Severity of God*. I have to refer readers to these works for my genuine interest in comparing and assessing some alternatives.

4. Oppy seems not to disagree completely with Christ-Shaped Philosophy. He remarks: “I agree that merely showing off one’s intellectual skills is not a proper motive for philosophy, let alone for Christian philosophy.” So far, so good, but big trouble then emerges. Oppy adds: “[U]nderstanding and truth just are the proper goals of philosophy: we engage in philosophical inquiry when we do not know where the truth lies, or where we feel that our understanding is weak....” This cannot be right. It fails to distinguish the “proper goals of philosophy” from the proper goals of physics, chemistry, biology, and every other scientific discipline. It would be a

category mistake to propose that the proper goals of philosophy are *no different* from the proper goals of the natural sciences. Even a proponent of “naturalized epistemology” such as Quine identified a difference in relative generality. I have to suspect, then, that Oppy does not actually mean what he wrote.

Christ-Shaped Philosophy does not settle for broad goals that are identical with the goals of the natural sciences, even if it is broadly continuous with reliable science. If it did settle thus, it would offer nothing distinctive. Instead, it offers a philosophical approach that goes beyond mere truth-seeking and understanding to redemption by God in Christ. Anything short of this will fail to be *Christ-Shaped* Philosophy. It thereby will fail to incorporate the distinctive kind of wisdom or philosophy recommended by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:6-7. “Christ-Shaped Philosophy” aims precisely to restore attention to that kind of philosophy.

My larger project, represented most recently in *The Severity of God*, seeks to restore the distinctive philosophy in question without begging important questions against skeptics. It identifies a distinctive kind of foundational evidence that can serve Christ-Shaped Philosophy, and take us beyond the shortcomings of alternative approaches to philosophy. It offers, in particular, an evidential basis for redemption, via faith in God, that is omitted by the competing alternatives. The evidence can be elusive for humans, for reasons to be expected, but evidence it is. I recommend careful attention to it, even for philosophers of alternative positions.

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