Theistic Foundations of Morality

David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls Interview with Joseph E. Gorra

In much of the contemporary philosophical literature about the "theistic foundations of morality," it is common for professional philosophers to write on this topic as though it were mostly a specialized area of moral epistemology in philosophy of religion discussions. But in your book, *Good God***, there is more than just that important area at play. For readers are also treated to discussions in moral apologetics, the relevance Christian soteriological concepts regarding our views of God and humankind, the problem of evil, the moral apologetics significance of the incarnation, resurrection, and the afterlife. What are you trying to achieve with this more enlarged and topically diverse discussion of theistic ethics?**

Baggett and Walls: We aimed at a broader discussion in an effort to provide a discussion rich enough for this topic of vital importance. Moral arguments for God's existence begin the book; as such, ours is an effort at natural theology. But if someone argues that God best explains objective morality, then someone else is entitled to ask what form such explanatory dependence takes, and how one might reply to standard objections to such ethics, which moves the discussion to the contours of and nuanced defense of theistic ethics. Part of explaining the connection between God and morality, for at least Christians, invariably invites considerations of how people actually become ethical and what the connection is between such transformation and issues of salvation. Evidence that a good God exists often elicits the counterpoint that some evidence we find in this world would point to there being no God, or at least no good God, so something has to be said of the problem of evil. And as the discussion nears its end and we get into distinctively Christian contributions to the discussion, the great truths of the faith—incarnation, resurrection, eschatology—could hardly be excluded from the discussion. To the contrary, we argue that the full array of theological resources at our disposal as Christian theists is what enables the discussion to be completed and the last objections to theistic ethics answered effectively. In a nutshell our aim is to show that the God of classical theism and orthodox Christianity is reasonably thought to make best sense of moral truths that most everyone—theists and atheists alike—claim to believe in.

Can you describe for us how you envision the intent and scope of that *apologia***?**

Baggett and Walls: The book is unapologetically apologetic. We happen to think that moral arguments for God's existence are powerful, particularly when combined together and then further combined with other evidence like the cosmological, teleological, and historical arguments. Moral arguments, in our estimation, haven't received the attention

they deserve. Thanks to guys like Paul Copan, Robert Adams, J. P. Moreland, and William Lane Craig, they've had more of a hearing in recent years, and ours is an effort to consolidate these gains into a coherent treatment and advance the discussion. It's our sincere hope that the book can contribute to a continuing resurgence of interest in moral apologetics.

I sense some real convergence of enthusiasm, thought and energy in this book. How did this book project come about? What was it like to co-author this book in light of your friendship?

Baggett: Ours has been a very fruitful collaboration for a number of years. Jerry was my professor at Asbury Seminary back in 1989 and gave us an assignment to write on the Euthyphro Dilemma, a topic that had already captured my interest in college. Truth be told, I never stopped thinking about the topic after that paper, and by the time I went to work on my doctorate I knew I wanted to write on it in my dissertation. After I did, I approached Jerry, with whom I'd continued to be in dialogue on these issues since '89, about the prospect of our collaborating on a fuller treatment of the topic. We read a joint paper together at an Oxford conference in 2003, and continued working on ideas together. We've always had a way of working well together, and between Jerry's interest in eschatology and mine in ethics we've had a tendency to generate fruitful dialogue that brings together an assortment of interrelated insights. We share a passionate belief that God's character is holy love in which there's no shadow of turning, and, perhaps in part owing to our Wesleyan theological tradition, the moral argument for God's existence has always struck us both as among the most personally persuasive pieces of natural theology. Working together has been a delightful experience and drawn us closer as friends and brothers in Christ, and we hope to keep collaborating on further projects.

The writing tone and style has an ease to it. It is lucid. In most cases, it doesn't feel clunky to me or overly-burdened by professional "philosopher speak," even though you do attend to and are aware of some conceptually challenging issues. How hard did you have to work at the writing? Any writing models or examples come to mind as you reflect upon your presentation in this book?

Baggett and Walls: We set out very intentionally in this book to avoid writing in a style that would lose most of our audience. The issues at stake are just too important. So we gladly but assiduously did draft after draft to work the prose into accessible language. At times we couldn't avoid getting a bit more technical—like little forays into counterfactuals and counteressentials—but usually we tried relegating such things to footnotes or an appendix. Philosophers often get criticized for using too much jargon and writing just for other philosophers. Sometimes this is unavoidable, and we're not averse to doing it if necessary; but whenever we could avoid that here, we did. If the work of philosophy, however technical it gets, gets around to reaching the broader

public, some folks have to do the hard work of making it more accessible—which always carries the risk of being charged with dumbing down. We didn't do that, but we did try to write for more than just philosophers, and we're proud of that. We firmly desired, especially in light of the importance of the topic, to try our hand at writing as accessibly as the material allowed. We don't pretend to have achieved our goal on the level of an Emerson or C. S. Lewis or William James or Tom Morris, but we gave it our best shot.

Good God pulls together various loose strands (from various perspectives, questions, approaches, thought-influencers) in order to do some work regarding the "theistic foundations of morality." Whether from older or newer sources, who has provided formidable influence on your thinking in this area?

Baggett and Walls: This is a great question. There's no doubt but that our work was only made possible by our standing on the shoulders of giants in the field of philosophy. All sorts of classical philosophers could be mentioned whose influence should be obvious, from Plato to Scotus to Descartes to Kant; but allow us to mention some of the more contemporary thinkers whose work has had a huge impact. Robert Adams exerted a formidable influence with his seminal _Finite and Infinite Goods_ and his work on Leibniz. Al Plantinga and Tom Morris immediately come to mind for work they did in the metaphysics of modality and implications of Anselmianism. Phil Quinn, John Hare, and Alasdair MacIntyre leap to mind for their ground-breaking work in ethics. Those are some of the most important thinkers without whose work ours would not have been written.

The two major opponents of your moral apologetics seem to be naturalists and also "radical voluntarists" or "Ockhamists." Is that right? If so, why these opponents? How are they similar and different in their objections?

Baggett and Walls: Well, we're certainly attempting to persuade both of these camps that they're missing something. The radical voluntarists—here we largely defer to tradition by casting them as "Ockhamists"—fall prey to the horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma that would render morality arbitrary and vacuous, a matter of divine caprice. We reject the universal possibilism that such a view entails. Some things God can't do; the Bible itself says so. God can't commit suicide, deny himself, lie, or, so we argue, make the torture of children for fun morally right. Such constraints on God are internal to his character and signs of his perfection, not liabilities or threats to his sovereignty. So the voluntarists, we think, are wrong here, because by saying it's the divine will that ultimately determines moral truth, they lose the capacity to rule some things out by pointing to the perfection of God's character. In this way we resonate more with Thomists than radical divine command theorists. But we are very open to a properly nuanced variant of divine command ethics that avoids such radical voluntarism.

Naturalists, on the other hand, deny God altogether; but speaking hypothetically, they would likely insist that, if God existed, he would still be irrelevant to ethics because his commands would, at most, clue us in as to what morality says or threaten wrongdoing or promise rewards for good behavior, rather than determining its contents in any sense at all. God might be relevant to ethics epistemologically or prudentially, in other words, but not ontologically. Such categorical nonvoluntarism strikes us, as classical Christians, as fundamentally wrongheaded, because if God exists surely he's more relevant to ethics than that. Indeed, we argue at length that the evidence would suggest that theism makes considerably better sense of such moral commitments as moral freedom, responsibility, duties, and rights than naturalism can. When atheists insist they believe in these moral facts, we immediately share with them common ground and can generate a good discussion about what best explains such moral truths. This is the beauty of moral arguments for God's existence: at their best they start with what most people already claim to believe strongly.

Prominent Christian philosophers have argued that atheism leads to moral nihilism. But you say that such an argument is unlikely to be persuasive. Can you briefly explain why you think that is the case?

Baggett and Walls: We can't promise to be brief, but we'll try to explain. We resonate with this argument in certain respects. We think that Nietzsche should be taken more seriously than he is by atheists who claim that God can be painlessly excluded from the moral picture. If God doesn't exist, that has simply huge implications; likewise if God *does* exist! But our point is about the relative persuasiveness of argument(s) to the effect that atheism leads to nihilism. Although there's an inexorable logical rigor and tightness to such arguments, we think they will largely prove unpersuasive to most atheists, at least for a while, and for understandable reasons.

Here's why. If we're right as Anselmians, or if Thomists are right, then we couldn't have a world like this—or any world at all, in fact—if God doesn't exist. God is the ground of being without whom nothing else could exist. He's not just one more garden-variety item in the inventory of reality. So if we look around at this world with the eyes of an atheist, we have to assume, for the moment, that a world like this is possible without God. If that's right, then Anselmianism is wrong. Indeed, classical theists couldn't be more wrong! And if we're wrong about the dependence of everything on God, why think we're right about morality in an atheistic world? If atheism is true, and God does not exist, we're inclined as classical theists to say we were wrong, dead wrong. And in such a case, the confidence with which we would assert the inevitable nihilism of such a worldview would decrease. (By the way, if God does exist, we would wish that atheists would admit that they're wrong and begin to acknowledge some of the deep implications of theism, rather than confidently pontificating about the irrelevance of God's existence.) At any rate, the atheist is convinced that God does not exist and that a world of the level of complexity as it appears is possible without God—a world that at

least looks like it can feature love, relationships, the satisfactions of morality, the need for social harmony, and the like—and a world like that, we contend, if it's possible without God, rightly invests in atheists a certain entitlement to some tenacity on the issue of morality.

And again, we can explain this very well as classical Christians. A world like this just *can't exist* without God, if we're right. So it's rather natural for folks in this world, even if they're atheists, to apprehend the power of morality, to sense its authority, and, thinking this is reconcilable with an atheistic world, to look for the foundations of morality other than in God. Ultimately we think their efforts fail, but we think this largely explains why arguments that atheism leads to nihilism are often bound to be less persuasive than many theists might expect. Better to approach atheists by affirming their conviction in moral truth and then asking what better explains it, rather than implicitly encouraging them to assume such a world as this is consistent with atheism and then inviting them to construct a secular ethic.

Historically, there have been a series of objections to theistic ethics. Can you briefly survey for us the reasoning behind these objections?

Baggett and Walls: Many of the objections to variants of voluntarism, at least, come from the Euthyphro Dilemma in one way or another. Our list may not be exhaustive, but we identified and discussed the *normativity* objection, the *no reasons* objection, the *abhorrent command* objection, the *vacuity* objection, *epistemic* objections, and *autonomy* objections. Normativity objections ask how God's will, commands, nature, or motivations can produce moral duties; no reasons objections claim God's willings or commands, if they are the foundation of morality, would be unacceptably arbitrary and lack principled reasons; abhorrent command objections suggest God could render irremediably evil things morally good or right. Vacuity objections suggest that voluntarism inevitably renders moral discourse generally and ascriptions of moral qualities to God specifically devoid of determinate content; epistemic objections raise questions about how we can apprehend moral truth if its locus is the will, nature, or commands of God; and autonomy objections insist that divine authority threatens human freedom and dignity.

Your discussion surfaces several major distinctions – seven, to be exact – when considering how to think about the above objections and how to respond to them. Can you briefly state these distinctions and indicate how they are relevant?

Baggett and Walls: We argue that this set of distinctions, applied together, can defuse the classical objections to the sort of theistic ethical vision we defend. Some of these distinctions have cropped up in the literature, of course—some with a rich history indeed—but we wanted to explore their cumulative force. In no particular order, here they are. We distinguish an *analysis from a definition*, and aim to provide more the former than the latter when tying divine commands to moral *obligations* (the primary deontic

matter of moral rightness) and the divine nature to moral *goodness*. This helps both to avoid some of the semantic problems plaguing overly voluntarist divine command theories and to show how some mechanism is needed to delimit exactly what among the morally good is specifically dutiful. *Epistemic versus ontological* distinctions are useful in answering epistemic objections to theistic ethics, and the *difficult versus impossible* distinction enables us to generate an algorithm for distinguishing between possible and impossible divine commands. We opt for analogical language over either *equivocal or univocal* language when predicating moral properties of God in an effort to preserve room for divine prerogative without falling prey to intractable arbitrariness problems. The *dependence/control* distinction enables us to affirm the dependence of necessary moral truths on God without compromising their invariance. Finally, our *conceivability versus possibility* distinction is brought to bear to answer various epistemic and arbitrariness objections. Taken together, this powerful set of distinctions provides resources to answer satisfactorily, so we argue, all the classical Euthyphro-inspired objections to theistic ethics.

You did not intend to write a technical treatise on the nuanced and often complicated intricacies of Ockham. But a critique of Ockham or of "radical voluntarism" is strongly relevant to how your own view is differentiated. For the sake of one's own study, who would you recommend for scholarly reading in this area? Who has helped shaped your view of how to interpret Ockham's theology and philosophy in the areas relevant to this book?

Baggett and Walls: We largely deferred to the tradition of casting radical voluntarism as Ockhamism, though nothing much in our analysis rode on dubbing it as such; but John Hare has nevertheless challenged us on this score by reminding us of how vexed a question it is what Ockham himself personally had to say on the matter. This is a fascinating debate among Ockham scholars, a debate we didn't enter in our book and one relatively peripheral to our project; but Hare, someone whose work in the history of ethics is nearly unparalleled among contemporary scholars, suggests works on Ockham by Marilyn Adams and Lucan Freppert. The introduction of our book made it clear we didn't intend a historical study, despite our liberal use of ideas from the history of philosophy, but rather to bolster a theistic vision of the shape and contours of ethics—not to provide original exegetical analyses of past perspectives and canonical texts or engage in technical debates on the finer points of historical figures.

Chapters 3-5 provide an important grouping within the book, since you are articulating and clarifying your concept of God and its relationship to your concept of goodness. The contributions of these chapters are indispensible for understanding your discussion on divine command theory in chapter 6 and following. What is the operative conception of God to which the moral argument points?

Baggett and Walls: The operative conception of God in the book derives from classical theism and orthodox Christianity. Moreoever, we see an implication of classical theism to be an Anselmian picture of God, according to which God is the greatest possible being, omniscient, omnipotent, and so on. More specifically, we consider ourselves as Reformed thinkers, but Arminian rather than Calvinist when it comes to matters soteriological. We argue that only a theology and philosophy as rich as this is able to sustain the moral argument and avoid the pitfalls. One of the features of moral apologetics to which we're most drawn is what it has to say not just about God's existence, but in terms of his character. A God who is necessarily, perfectly, and recognizably good and loving, wise and just, is a vital part of our theistic vision.

In chapter 4, you argue that a Calvinistic conception of God is problematic for various reasons. Can you briefly outline your reasons *and* also why you think this problem is significant to the overall health of making an *apologia* for "theistic foundations of morality"?

Baggett and Walls: We didn't want to overstate or overestimate the differences we have with our Calvinistic brothers and sisters, and we realize that, seeing through a glass darkly, we have to approach these matters with all due deference to other ways of seeing things. Nonetheless, we are firmly convinced that a Calvinistic paradigm with its compatibilist commitments undermines the moral argument by requiring us to affirm God's goodness and love toward people we're told he has chosen not to save, even though he could save them without violating their free will (compatibilistically defined). Or worse, it requires us to outright deny God's love for such persons. Either way, an intelligible account of God's perfect goodness cannot be sustained, and this is devastating for moral arguments.

Some have argued that Aquinas was as much of a compatibilist (on human freedom and divine sovereignty) as Calvin was. Do you find that convincing? Does it even matter? If not, why not?

Baggett and Walls: We aren't specialists on Aquinas, but it's noteworthy that some who are (like Eleonore Stump) don't characterize Aquinas in those terms. But ultimately the compatibilist debate isn't settled by chalking up more names with the bigger theological pedigree to your side of the debate. If the debate were settled in that way, Calvinism, a minority position in the history of the church, would lose hands down. But that's not how the debate gets settled, and we recognize that there were important Christian thinkers through the centuries who did affirm a more Calvinist or Augustinian approach. (We also recognize the great richness of the Calvinist tradition apart from what it says about soteriology.) In light of how much debate there's been on this issue, we think it shows that the biblical deliverances on these matters are not as crystal clear as some on

both sides of the debate would argue. So what we intentionally aimed to do in our chapter on Calvinism was offer what we considered several compelling philosophical reasons to give pause to Calvinist readers. Hopefully they'll find some reasons to go back to their Bibles and reconsider their interpretations, and perhaps opt for ones that don't so strongly fly in the face of general revelation.

Concerning moral obligations, you argue for a particular version of voluntarism. Can you unpack the uniqueness of that version and state why it's significant toward some helpful work concerning how we understand divine command theory?

Baggett and Walls: The variant of divine command theory to which we're drawn is hardly unique to us. It has a rich history in the church, has resources to defend itself against standard objections, has a great deal of explanatory power, and provides an effective way to identify what is morally obligatory. Following suggestions and insights in Alston, Adams, and MacIntyre, we delimit divine command theory to deontic matters of moral obligation and permissibility and thereby help explain ineliminable social aspects of moral duties. Perhaps in partial disagreement with William Lane Craig and Al Plantinga (scholars with whom we certainly agree much more than disagree), we preserve room for the contingency of some of God's commands. Although some commands and thus duties may be contingent or person-relative, they would all obviously still need to be consistent with God's moral perfection. But we think that carving out room for such divine prerogative is important for preserving this aspect of divine sovereignty and in no way makes our version of voluntarism liable to arbitrariness objections. More so than Craig, we're not at all averse to calling ourselves (and Craig himself) voluntarists so long as it's clear we're not Ockhamists colloquially understood.

The concept of a "recognizably good God" figures significantly in your discussion. Why is that so? How should we understand the epistemological and moral significance of God being "recognizable."

Baggett and Walls: It's a central part of our argument that rational belief in God's goodness requires that his goodness is recognizable in this sense: some things have to be ruled out. A command to torture children for the fun of it simply stands beyond the pale. We argue that it wouldn't be rational to believe that God issued any such command. In light of what we know about morality, it would be more rational to believe that we missed God on that one rather than that God issued such an obviously corrupt command. Affirmations of God's love and goodness, to be rational, must feature determinate content that precludes some possibilities. As Wesleyans we believe that God's prevenient grace restores to us as human beings, even in an unjustified state, the capacity to recognize certain clear moral truths. Without this belief we would simply despair over the efficacy of moral apologetics to persuade the unpersuaded! So we don't

deny the noetic effects of sin, but rather affirm them, but think that a doctrine like prevenient grace renders such a commitment consistent with enough moral clarity that we can say with confidence certain things about God's moral character. Without such confidence, an affirmation of God's love and goodness is rather thin and uninformative. So we can speak with confidence that God is a God of love, a God of mercy, a God who desires that none should perish, a God who not only doesn't but simply can't, because of his perfection, issue a command like child torture for fun. God's ways are above ours, no doubt, but this doesn't preclude our ruling out some commands as actual divine commands.

A natural moral law theory plays a role in your discussion of "knowing God's will." Can you explain how and why which parts of that theory resonate with your work in *Good God*?

Baggett and Walls: We think natural law theory and divine command theory, at their best, largely dovetail and can complement one another. We're not drawn so much to a natural law theorist's attempt to derive oughts from goodness via nondefective inferences, but we do gravitate to explanations of moral clarity by appeal to God's having inscribed the world with aspects of his goodness and our natures with an echo of his own image. We think the Bible and experience both make clear that creation bears witness to the moral law. As a result, we think the use of moral conscience and intuitions at its best taps into aspects of God's general revelation that can help inform and adjudicate on matters pertaining to special revelation. As Alasdair MacIntyre argues, certain natural law indicators can help us determine which "god" we ought to obey. Creational indicators that point to God's good ends can help shed moral light along the way. Our susceptibility to sin should often make our claims about general revelation provisional, but regarding some matters, the matter is clear. It's a mistake of every first year ethics student to think that simply everything ethical is up for grabs and colored grey. We also deeply resonate with the aspect of natural law according to which the standard of morality depends on the nature and relations of things. So we, as human beings created in God's image, which is not expunged even in our fallen state, have by God's grace been enabled to recognize certain unalterable and axiomatic moral truths that, if attended to, can point to God, their source and ultimate exemplar. And the fact that part of our nature is that we've been made for fellowship with God implies that no ethic that doesn't include such fellowship as part of our *summum bonum* is complete.

How should we think about the "problem of evil" and how to address it in light of the discussion in *Good God*?

Baggett and Walls: Moral evidence in this world points to God, but the problem of evil shows that sometimes the evidence might be thought to point in the opposite direction altogether. This makes moral apologetics and the problem of evil go head to head. Both

can't win, and the victory of one marks the defeat of the other. Our case for moral arguments for God, then, are rightly seen as a direct assault on the problem of evil. To drive that point home we devoted a chapter to the problem of evil, taking on two analogies of my (Dave's) mentor and friend Bruce Russell.

Over the last 3-5 years, professional philosophers and theologians have given increased attention to the Old Testament "conquest narratives" and whether they can be reconciled with a perfectly and recognizably good God. Can they? How does your discussion contribute to this area in the literature?

Baggett and Walls: We deploy the distinction between "hard versus impossible" to argue that the conquest narratives, the binding of Isaac, and the like are not irreconcilable with God's perfect goodness. We basically ask if we can imagine a reason why God might have acted in this way, and with a bit of effort we can postulate several possibilities. Carving out room for the possibility is the first step, and then we extend the discussion by exploring other possibilities about what God's universal love would entail even for those killed in those narratives. Paul Copan's excellent book *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* takes such discussions even further, and we encourage readers to take a look.

Chapter 10, "Ethics and Eternity," significantly crowns the discussion by extending moral apologetics and theistic ethics to issues distinct to areas of "special revelation" in the Christian theological tradition, including: the afterlife, resurrection, incarnation, and the Trinity. Can you briefly describe how these contribute to the discussion in a unique way?

Walls: It matters enormously to one's view of everything, including morality, whether one believes ultimate reality is Trinity, or something like quarks and gluons. If ultimate reality is an eternally loving relationship of persons, morality is far more deeply grounded than it could ever be if it evolved as a matter of socio-biological evolution. Likewise, if Jesus was the second person of the Trinity, whose death is the definitive expression of love in our world, then not only are we obligated to love him and each other in return, but we have extraordinary resources and power to do so that we would not otherwise have. Moreover, resurrection and the afterlife ground our hope that love is stronger than death, and that justice will finally prevail is more than a fond wish. There is reason to believe that morality and happiness finally and inevitably converge, and that true happiness can never be advanced by living selfishly or immorally. How the world will end, and to what end it will come has enormous ethical implications in the same way that the true origin of the world does. Distinctively Christian doctrine has profound consequences in both of these regards.

In a forthcoming book, you are planning on writing what you described to me as a "full on assault on naturalistic ethics." Can you tell us further about what we can anticipate in that project and how _Good God_ is related to that endeavor?

Baggett and Walls: That book is a natural extension of the discussion of _Good God._ For space constraints, we couldn't give as rigorous a refutation of naturalistic ethics as we wanted to, so we decided to largely defer the project to a later book. We argue that naturalism can't, at the end of the day, account for the moral truths that most of us claim to believe in. We'll spend quite a bit of time taking apart Darwinian ethics, and encouraging our secular friends to read more Nietzsche.

The issues that you take up in chapter 10 – e.g., the moral apologetics significance of "the role of God's grace in enabling us to live a moral life" – would seem to offer a unique interdisciplinary opportunity for theologians, philosophers, apologists, pastors, and other spiritual formation and soul care leaders to collaborate. If so, can you envision some further projects in this area that would strengthen the case for Christian theistic foundations of morality?

Walls and Baggett: Our culture is badly in need of moral renewal, including the Church, and your suggestion here is an important one! Too often grace has been understood primarily as forgiveness for moral failings, and sometimes even exemption from the need to be moral. This is a rather impoverished view of grace, to put it mildly! Having a strong account of morality, however, is not particularly encouraging if it does not include the resources to truly be moral, to experience profound and thorough moral transformation. John Wesley highlighted the encouraging nature of God's commands when he remarked that every command of God is actually a concealed promise, for what God commands, he will enable and empower us to do.

So you are right to suggest that a strong account of moral apologetics requires far more than working out these issues philosophically and theologically; it also requires a meaningful commitment to moral transformation, and some plausibly visible results. Without this, even a compelling account of how God in his incomparable nature of perfect goodness grounds morality may ring somewhat hollow. Spelling out the implications of this for Christian discipleship and the life of sanctification is indeed a project that will require the collaboration of pastors, theologians, philosophers, and apologists. And indeed, even spelling out these implications is not enough if they do not issue in meaningful growth and action. Here is where pastors and other spiritual directors must play a crucial role in the larger project.

Both of you have written for non-academic readers. With that context in mind, it's not hard to appreciate your writing intent in this project. But how would you advise "professional philosophers" as they think about whether to write for non-

academic readers? Should they do it? How can they do it without "dumbing down" the discussion?

Walls and Baggett: Well, in the first place, we cannot claim that our book is a fully popular book in the same vein of some of our other writings, although we aimed for broad accessibility, as we have noted. We would like to think our book is accessible enough that students could follow most of it, even if they would need the help of their professors with some of the more complicated material.

Not everyone needs to write for a broader audience, but we would urge more serious philosophers to do so, and indeed, even stoop now and again to write something that would fully qualify as a popular work. They should do this not as an alternative to their academic writing, but as a complement to it. Philosophy runs an ever larger risk of marginalization and even trivialization if all the leading philosophers write only for their colleagues and cohorts. C. S. Lewis's challenge here is worth repeating that the vernacular is the real test of how well we really understand something. A good test that more philosophers should attempt to pass is trying to explain their ideas in language that is free of technical jargon. Of course, some issues cannot avoid that, as our Appendix shows.

But if we can seldom translate what we say into language that is intelligible to thoughtful non-specialists, *as well as make it clear what is at stake and why they should care*, then something has seriously gone awry in the discipline that purports to promote the love of wisdom. People who have a heart and a desire to gain deeper wisdom should have resources available to them that will satisfy their hunger.

Too many philosophers are unduly fearful of being labeled a popular writer who is not taken seriously or fear that they will dumb things down in a fashion that will make them appear irresponsible. One way to avoid this problem is to make modest claims and offer suitable qualifications that make clear you are writing a popular work and are not going into all the details a more academic work would require. And of course another strategy is to relegate such details to footnotes. The important thing is not to appear to be more thorough or conclusive than your exposition warrants or to engage in rhetoric that suggests you have. Much popular writing errs by pretending to establish more definitive conclusions than it does or by posing as a more serious work than it really is. All these risks cannot be fully avoided, but more top notch philosophers should attempt popular writing for there is far more to be lost if quality philosophy is relegated and isolated to the tiny percentage of the population that can follow fully academic work.

Incidentally, one very practical way to test the intelligibility of works that aim for a wider audience is by inviting undergraduates to read them. Our book was read by a group of undergraduates at Liberty in order to gauge its accessibility.

Jerry L. Walls is one of the most respected Christian philosophers in America. His engaging, energetic lectures make Jerry a student favorite, and his lively debates outside the classroom help students learn to think and communicate Christianly on a variety of

topics. For many years, Jerry taught at Asbury Theological Seminary and is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame. He has authored and edited nearly a dozen books and has been a contributor to almost 20 others. Jerry has published a pair of books that make a philosophical defense of Christian views on the afterlife, *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* and *Hell: The Logic of Damnation,* and the third in the trilogy, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* is forthcoming this fall. He is also an editor of a volume in the prestigious Oxford Handbook series, *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology.* Two of his other books explore the thought of C.S. Lewis, *C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer* (with Scott Burson) and *The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy* (with Gregory Bassham). Not merely a cut and dry philosopher, Jerry also won a national poetry contest in his college years, and in 2009, he published his first book of poetry *Who Watch For The Morning.* When he is not writing books, Jerry serves as a guest lecturer or avid sports fan.

David Baggett is professor of philosophy at Liberty University and co-author (with Jerry L. Walls) of the 2011 book, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (Oxford University Press) and the author of a couple dozen chapters, articles and book reviews ranging from topics in philosophy of religion, ethics, philosophy of sport, and philosophy and popular culture, including books like *Tennis and Philosophy* (University Press of Kentucky, 2010), *Did the Resurrection Happen?* (Intervarsity Press, 2009), and *C.S. Lewis as Philosopher* (InterVarsity Press, 2008).