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Two Wisdoms?

The Unity of Truth, The Spirit of the (Academic) Disciplines, and the Norms of Academic Philosophy

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Abstract: Paul Moser’s “Christ Shaped Philosophy” has generated a wide ranging discussion. Early in that discussion, William Hasker argued that Moser’s call for disciplinary reform conflates two discrete concepts of “wisdom” (and by extension of “philosophy”). Here, I argue (i) that these “two wisdoms” are not discrete, but interdependent aspects of a single wisdom, (ii) that current disciplinary norms in academic philosophy violate this interdependence, and (iii) that Moser’s call for reform is therefore justified.

Perhaps the most obvious point to make about the Christ-Shaped Philosophy (CSP) project to-date is that it has generated so much interesting and provocative material that it is impossible to address much of it in what is supposed to be a brief set of comments. With the aim of brevity in mind, I have restricted myself to commenting on just one theme from the discussion (inclusive of Moser’s original paper and the ensuing comments and replies) upon which I might be able to offer a unique perspective. In a separate piece, I will comment more directly on Moser’s views related to CSP.

In Moser’s exchange with William Hasker, it came out that CSP is philosophy in the broad, traditional sense of “the love of wisdom,” over against philosophy in the sense of the current “professionalized” academic discipline. Hasker proposes that these are two discrete senses of the term “philosophy,” and that there are two correspondingly discrete senses of “wisdom,” spiritual and philosophical.¹ He allows that Moser does well to advocate for spiritual

¹ William Hasker, “[Two Wisdoms, Two Philosophies: A Rejoinder to Moser.](#)”

wisdom, as it is, of course, an important good. But he errs, Hasker thinks, in turning this into a call for disciplinary reform, for this conflates the two senses of “philosophy” and the two corresponding senses of “wisdom.” “Once we think that there is a single thing, called ‘wisdom,’” Hasker says, “which both the Apostle Paul and Saul Kripke were seeking, the question becomes inevitable: Which of them got it right?” (2) Forced to choose between Saul and Paul, the Christian must choose Paul. But there is no reason we should have to choose, says Hasker. Saul and Paul can and should co-exist because each supplies a different type of good to the world. Even if one is a greater good than the other, the world is richer for having both.

On the surface this is an attractive view - who wouldn't want to let a thousand flowers bloom? But I believe it is flawed in two related ways. First, it assumes too rosy a picture of professional philosophy; second, it misconstrues the relationship between “spiritual” and “philosophical” wisdom. Regarding the first problem: Hasker admits that “the philosophical profession as presently constituted is at best spiritually ambiguous. But,” he says, “I find more good in it, more to applaud and to support, than Moser does” (3). True enough; but in fact Hasker judges “the philosophical profession as presently constituted” even more positively than this. After all, one could find more good in it than Moser does and still think that it's a failure on the whole and needs to be reformed, either in Moser's way or some other. But this clearly isn't Hasker's view. He finds not only more good, but less bad, than Moser does, so that the overall balance of value in the profession constitutes a *status quo* that simply does not call for reform.

Like Moser I'm not convinced that the *status quo* is “good enough,” and for similar reasons. In his first reply to Hasker,² Moser worries about fragmentation in the discipline as illustrated by the differences between the APA and the SPEP. Just to be clear, I take it that this is the professionalized embodiment of the rift between analytic (APA) and Continental (SPEP) approaches to philosophy. And I agree with Moser that the differences between the two are so great as to raise the question “why the astonishingly different participants are all called “philosophers,” as if they had something intellectually significant in common” (2). But my sense is that the SPEP represents such a minority of professional philosophers that the APA-SPEP divide is only a minor contributor to the fragmentation of the profession. There is considerable fragmentation to be sure, but this is more due to the fact that APA/analytic philosophers, who dominate the profession, seem to have

² Moser, “[Reply to Hasker](#).”

nothing “intellectually significant in common” either. I have argued extensively for this point elsewhere,³ so I shall simply assert it here.

But the fact that analytic philosophers don’t have anything intellectually (or as I’d prefer to put it, “philosophically”) significant in common doesn’t mean they don’t have *anything* in common. A.J. Ayer once claimed (reportedly) that the one thing analytic philosophers have in common is vanity.⁴ That’s probably an exaggeration (surely not *every last one!*), but I do think there’s something to it. One does not have to be a Christian to note, and to worry over, the tendency among analysts to engage in the kind of vanity-driven behavior described by Richard Davis:

I have seen Christian philosophers “verbally destroy”(read: humiliate) those less aggressive and quick on their feet than themselves—all for the sake, one suspects, of demonstrating just how impressive they are, so that they can bid up their “ranking” in the grand pecking order.⁵

Robert Solomon once made a similar observation:

In my travels around the country, I often meet people—successful businesspeople, artists, and others—who without any prompting regale me with a familiar confession. It begins “I had a philosophy class once, but....” I know what is coming. I cringe from the opening syllables. ... Too often it is “but I hated it,” typically followed by a most unflattering

³ See my [Analytic Philosophy: the History of Illusion](#) (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), my [“Conformism in Analytic Philosophy: On Shaping Philosophical Boundaries and Prejudices,”](#) *The Monist*, 88:2, April 2005, or my [“Prolegomena to Any Future History of Analytic Philosophy,”](#) *Metaphilosophy*, 35:4, July 2004. Compare, for instance, [Brian Leiter’s statements about analytic philosophy](#) in *The Philosophical Gourmet Report*, or Peter van Inwagen’s characterization of analytic philosophy in “What is naturalism? What is analytical philosophy?” (in Corradini, Galvan and Lowe (eds.) *Analytic Philosophy without Naturalism*, Routledge, 2005, 74-88).

⁴ Ved Mehta, *Fly and the Fly Bottle: Encounters with British Intellectuals*, Boston Toronto: Little, Brown and Co. pp. 83-84. Technically, Ayer was answering the question whether there is any quality that all *philosophers* have in common, and he gives his answer in terms of “philosophers” rather than “analytic philosophers.” But given the context of the conversation in which this occurs, and the explanation and examples given, not to mention the overall topic of the book in which it is recorded, it’s pretty clear that the subject is *analytic philosophers*, or even more specifically *British analytic philosophers through the late 1950s*, and not philosophers generally.

⁵ Davis, [“Christian Philosophy: for Whose Sake?”](#) p.3.

portrait of an uncaring, pompous teacher who was obviously too clever by half and intent on displaying this.⁶

But whereas Davis understands this tendency in terms of Biblical concepts like “the flesh” and “the world,” Solomon sees it as deriving from the methodological norms of analytic philosophy itself. By exalting analysis over synthesis, destruction over construction, “the joy of philosophy becomes largely destructive, the fun of ‘tearing apart’ and destroying ... arguments,”⁷ and perhaps by extension the people who advance them. In this vein, it seems to me that analytic philosophers are frequently guilty of what we may call (with apologies to both O.W. Holmes and A.N. Whitehead) the “fallacy of delusive exactness,” consisting in the practical rejection of Aristotle’s oft quoted dictum about seeking only as much exactness as a given subject-matter allows. I suspect that this tends to make analytic philosophers perfectionistic and nitpicky, which in turn tends to make them more critical and combative than is desirable.

In any case, these two explanations of the behavior in question – Davis’ and Solomon’s – are not mutually exclusive. It’s quite possible for “standard practice” in any domain to embody vice (or virtue), and quite normal for it to at least tend in one direction or the other. Such fusion of professional practice and vice is morally insidious, since it naturally leads people to treat others badly simply in the course of “doing one’s job.” The kind of behavior Davis describes could well be driven by “the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16), and probably in many cases it is. But it could also be driven by an otherwise commendable sense of duty to uphold the highest professional standards, guided by the flawed view that “this is how philosophy ought to be done.”

Are the norms of analytic philosophy problematic in this way? I have argued elsewhere that they are,⁸ and not only because they tend⁹ toward the sorts of specific vices of unkindness or pride (etc.) noted by Davis and Solomon. Like the material generated by the CSP project, there is too much on this theme to include here, so I will limit discussion to just one other troubling

⁶ Solomon, *The Joy of Philosophy*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 4.

⁷ Ibid. p. 8.

⁸ Preston, *Analytic Philosophy: the History of Illusion*. See especially ch. 1, which you can read on Google books by following the link. The Solomon case and a number of others are covered there.

⁹ It is important to note that this is a matter of tendency only. It is possible to resist the characterological pressures exerted by these methodological norms, and to be both an analytic philosopher and a warm and delightful person. Eleonore Stump is the best example of this that I’ve personally had the pleasure to observe.

norm of analytic philosophy – one that illustrates the second problem with Hasker’s view (that it misconstrues the relationship between philosophical and spiritual wisdom) as well as the first (that he has too rosy a view of the profession).

Recall that Hasker takes Moser’s prophetic call for disciplinary reform to be wrongheaded insofar as it assumes that philosophy *as an academic discipline* has some special connection to, or responsibility for, spiritual wisdom. Hasker’s view seems to be that philosophy is responsible for philosophical wisdom only, not spiritual wisdom. But this position is quite inconsistent with the “great tradition” in philosophy. If we were to put Socrates (or Plato, or Aristotle, or Boethius, or Aquinas, or... almost any other major philosophical figure up to and including, say, T.H. Green) alongside Paul (the Apostle) and Saul (Kripke), I suspect that they would take *something like* Pauline wisdom to be the *telos* of Sauline philosophy; indeed, I think they would not want to classify the products – the particular insights – of Sauline philosophy as “wisdom” at all except insofar as they were integrated with a broader picture of reality ordered to a moral and/or spiritual end. As I have argued elsewhere,

Traditionally, the overarching goal of philosophy is the rational construction of a general—and in that sense all-embracing—worldview that would provide reasonable answers not only to metaphysical but also moral questions, thereby serving as a rough-and-ready roadmap orienting the human being toward its *summum bonum*, a life of *eudaimonia*.¹⁰

On this view, the fine-grained questions and answers of Sauline philosophy count as wisdom only insofar as they are subsumed within a more coarse-grained theory ultimately focused on, and practically useful for, *living a flourishing human life* – a theory, we might say, of how to live as a human, given the nature of humans and of the world in which they find themselves. This is to say that all philosophy has an ethical end, but it is not to “reduce” philosophy to ethics. All the philosophical subdisciplines, and all the non-philosophical disciplines, have their proper place. But their proper place is *within* a human life lived rightly, or at least within the aspiration to live such a life; and presumably even aspiring to that ideal (let alone achieving it) requires us to draw upon all our knowledge, including our Sauline knowledge, in formulating the sort of conceptual “road map” mentioned above.

¹⁰ Preston, [*Analytic Philosophy: the History of Illusion*](#), pp. 10-11.

Such a road map is the kind of thing that often gets called a “worldview.” In *Knowing Christ Today*,¹¹ after an instructive discussion of the interplay between particular and general knowledge (a division which corresponds closely but perhaps not entirely with Hasker’s philosophical/spiritual distinction), Dallas Willard says that “worldview... consists of the most general and basic assumptions about what is real and what is good” (43), and that this determines “the orientation of everything else we think and do” (43), “what we shall undertake to deal with or omit in our actions day by day or hour by hour” (44), so that “worldview is simply our overall orientation in life” (44). More specifically, he identifies four central “worldview” questions (45-50):

1. What is (ultimately) real?
2. What is the good life?
3. Who is the good person?
4. How does one become a good person?

Willard took these questions to be central to philosophy, understood as “the attempt to provide a rational account of the essential structures of experience”¹² - an attempt beginning with the Greeks and continuing through an ever developing tradition of inquiry up to and including the current “professionalized” state of philosophy as an academic discipline. Presumably Hasker would agree with this much, since the set of “metaphysical questions” given in his book, *Metaphysics: Constructing a Worldview*, cover essentially the same terrain (but with an emphasis on questions about reality rather than questions about value).¹³ It is less clear whether he would agree with Willard’s next point: that Jesus addressed and answered these questions as surely as any philosopher has. According to Willard, Jesus’ answers to the worldview questions are (paraphrasing some points from pp. 50-55 of *Knowing Christ Today*):

1. Reality consists in God and His kingdom (where “God’s Kingdom” is the range of His effective will, and where God’s will, overridingly characterized by *agape* love, wills good for all).
2. The good life is life in the kingdom of God.
3. The good person is one who is pervaded with love.

¹¹ Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*, (New York: Harper One, 2009).

¹² Willard would regularly use this description along with the four questions to give and initial characterization of philosophy as part of the first lecture in most every class he taught.

¹³ William Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a Worldview* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press), pp.13-16.

4. One becomes a good person by trusting Jesus enough to follow His teachings about how to live in God's kingdom and thus become pervaded with love.

On this view, then, philosophical wisdom and Christian-spiritual wisdom overlap, addressing the same central questions. Christianity has a distinctive set of answers, to be sure, but that's no reason to think of its "spiritual" wisdom as absolutely different in kind from "philosophical" wisdom any more than the differences between Plato and Aristotle, or Plato and Hume, show that they were doing "philosophy," or seeking "wisdom," only in discrete senses.¹⁴

So it is not at all clear to me that Christian philosophy, and its spiritual wisdom, are so different from non-Christian philosophy in the great tradition, and its philosophical wisdom, that we ought to say they are "philosophy" and "wisdom" only in different senses. And in fact Hasker gives us no good reason for thinking that they are thus different. Apparently he thinks that the difference is self-evident, for all he does is to invite us to "compare some beloved biblical text – say, the letter to the Philippians – with a philosophical construct such as Kripke's theory of necessary truth" (p. 2). "Both convey genuine wisdom," he says, "but surely not the same kind of wisdom," emphasizing that "spiritual wisdom ... is significantly different from the sort of insight that is prized, and sometimes attained, by philosophers" (p. 2). But what exactly are the respective features of spiritual and philosophical wisdom in which the difference consists? And do those features really constitute a difference the likes of which would justify or even require exempting philosophy from responsibility for spiritual wisdom?

When I perform the suggested comparison, I note numerous differences, of course. Some of them may even be "significant" differences. But it is far from obvious that any of these differences either entail or justify a clean break between spiritual and philosophical wisdom. Obviously, philosophical wisdom can inform and elucidate spiritual wisdom – and it must if a worldview is to be cognitively respectable at all, let alone count as genuine

¹⁴ One might suggest that there is an important difference in the methods used to address those common questions. But I think Willard would want to call this a stylistic rather than a methodological difference, for at a very general level both Christian and non-Christian philosophy answer their common questions by looking to reason and experience (see his "[Jesus the Logician](#)," *Christian Scholars' Review*, 28:4, 1999, 605-614. The experience(s) relevant to the Christian answers may indeed be of kind unfamiliar to non-Christians, but again that's not a basis for saying that Christian philosophy/wisdom is absolutely different from non-Christian philosophy, especially when one considers that one of Jesus' prime teaching-objectives was to lead people into the relevant forms of experience (cf. John 8:31-32, John 13:17, John 14:21-24).

“wisdom” (as opposed to a mythological worldview, say). In the first chapter of Philippians alone there are at least two obvious opportunities for this, one involving the relationship between intentions and the value of corresponding actions, the other involving the relationship between the human person and its body. Arguably, even Kripke’s theory of necessary truth could be relevant to these issues (and of course he himself applies it to the question of mind-body identity).

But the real test for Hasker’s view is whether Sauline “philosophical” wisdom can stand on its own, apart from “spiritual” wisdom. And the answer from the standpoint of “the great tradition” in Western philosophy, I suggested above, is that the particular insights of Sauline philosophy fall short of “wisdom” unless they are integrated into a worldview that not only *includes*, but which is *ordered to the practical attainment of*, a moral and/or spiritual end. Isolated from such a worldview, while Sauline insights may indeed be items of *knowledge* (as distinguished from *wisdom*), they are also mere items of trivia.

Astonishingly, though, the tendency to trivialize philosophical knowledge in exactly this way is a norm of analytic philosophy (or, if you wish, “contemporary, professionalized philosophy in the analytic context” – but what, really, is the difference?). Witness Scott Soames’ observation that

‘philosophy done in the analytic tradition aims at truth and knowledge, as opposed to moral or spiritual improvement...the goal of analytic philosophy is to discover what is true, not to provide a useful recipe for living one’s life.’¹⁵

From the traditional perspective outlined above, the opposition between *aiming at truth and knowledge*, on the one hand, and *aiming at moral or spiritual improvement* on the other, appears bizarre. That is because on the traditional view (i) human life has a moral or spiritual (and most often a moral *and* spiritual) *telos*, (ii) the nature of reality is consonant with this *telos*, (iii) knowledge of reality is integral to this *telos*, and thus (iv) the acquisition of truth and knowledge serves that *telos*. In fact, (v) the principal motive, historically, for seeking truth and knowledge, and (vi) the principal justification for enjoining others to do so, and (vii) for creating and sustaining social institutions (like *academic disciplines* and *the university*) that facilitate the seeking of truth and knowledge, is that all of this serves that *telos*.

All of this is part of what we may call the standard Western-philosophical worldview from at least the time of Socrates through, arguably, the end of the 19th century (and of course many of the best Eastern thinkers

¹⁵ Soames, [*Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*](#), Vol. 1, 2003, p. xiv.

approximate it in many ways). There have always been dissenters, of course, but the point is that this was a norm, the view associated with those widely taken to be our *best* thinkers, and embraced widely as a guiding cultural ideal capturing our highest cultural aspirations (which, of course, have never been perfectly, or even very-well, realized).

All of this grew out of the traditional conception of philosophy itself, as the love of wisdom. I'm sure we all know the story of how a great many of what we now regard as distinct academic disciplines first emerged within the scope of philosophical enquiry, and only later came to stand on their own as disciplines in their own right. It was through this expansion of more specialized fields of knowledge with their own traditions of inquiry that philosophy came to be seen not only as a discipline in its own right, but as the principal integrator of knowledge from all the disciplines, conceptually connecting (or at least trying to connect) all knowledge *to*, and subsuming (or at least trying to subsume) all pursuit of knowledge *under*, humanity's moral and spiritual *telos*.¹⁶ In the explicitly Christian contexts of Europe, Britain and, later, America, all of this took on an explicitly religious dimension, but one largely consonant with the traditional philosophical vision.

During this period, something much closer to Moser's CSP was the norm in academic philosophy, and in higher education generally, especially in the United States;¹⁷ for it was simply assumed that, as Hasker himself once put it in an article on a different topic, "there is...a single reality, all of which is created by God and under his dominion, and all of which we as his children and image bearers must seek to understand." It was simply assumed that "one's scholarly thinking should ... be permeated by Christian attitudes and beliefs, by Christian ways of seeing God's world—and, conversely, one's Christian vision of God's world should be ... informed with the best insights gleaned from scholarly activity. In such a situation," Hasker rightly observed, "one is not confronted with the task of "integrating" two more or less separate

¹⁶ See Alasdair MacIntyre's [*God, Philosophy, Universities*](#) (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009). Hasker himself has written a wonderful paper on the integration of faith and learning which touches upon some of these themes in a non-historical and disciplinarily nonspecific way ("Faith Learning Integration: An Overview," cited in note 18, below). One way to put the point I'm making here is that the need for such a paper, like the need for Moser's call to disciplinary reform, is a historical peculiarity of monumental proportions, but one we are apt to miss because we are accustomed to the norms of our peculiar period. But when we get enough historical perspective to see just how peculiar our setting is, we ought to be disturbed by it, rather than remaining comfortable with the *status quo*.

¹⁷ See Julie Reuben's discussion of moral philosophy and natural theology in connection with "the unity of truth" in chapter 1 of *The Making of the Modern University* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

and disjoint bodies of knowledge and belief; rather, there is a unitary vision of truth.”¹⁸

But all of this changed in the twentieth century. As Julie Reuben has documented,¹⁹ this happened largely through challenges to the idea of “the unity of truth” – initially to its practical implementation in higher education, and later to its correctness. Although relevant seismic rumblings can be traced back to at least the end of the medieval period (in the rise of nominalism, empiricism, and modern science, the reformation, the rise of industrial society, secularization, and so on – all of which are related in interesting and complex ways)²⁰ most of the pre-twentieth-century effects on culture, on institutional and social life, seem in retrospect to be mere foreshocks to the ground-shifting upheavals of the twentieth century. For those earlier rumblings took place *within* the broad contours of the standard Western-philosophical worldview. Whatever else may have been in a state of truly chaotic upheaval, this at least was a fairly stable norm, and any serious contender for a correct theory, or practice, or form of life, had to be at least *prima facie* compatible with that norm. But in the twentieth century, we see the abandonment of that norm in nearly every dimension of Western life, from the theoretical to the practical, from the political and moral to the educational and beyond. In all of these areas, the previously marginalized views of dissenters-from-the-norm became the new normal.

In this “brave new world,” religion and traditional philosophy both became outcasts, for many of the same reasons. And there were many such reasons. But among the more prominent were the epistemic reason that they did not and could not meet the requirements for knowledge on the model of the natural sciences, and the moral/political reason that the pursuit of grand ethico-religious visions actually made people and societies worse, not better. The two reasons were, of course, related: the main reason that (purportedly) the pursuit of such grand visions made us worse was that people had conflicting visions, with correspondingly conflicting forms of life, the pursuit of which led to real conflict in the real world with all of its vices, from unpleasantness to horror. And the reason that (purportedly) this kind of trouble was unavoidable so long as people kept pursuing grand visions, was

¹⁸ Hasker, “Faith Learning Integration: An Overview,” *Christian Scholars’ Review*, 21:3, March 1992, 234-248, pp. 236-7.

¹⁹ Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*.

²⁰ See Michael Gillespie’s *The Theological Roots of Modernity and Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, and Brad Gregory’s *The Unintended Reformation* for broad coverage of some of the relevant shifts and upheavals.

that the background disagreements could not be settled by appeal to evidence and knowledge, the way that (purportedly) things could be settled in science.²¹

It was in this context that analytic philosophy arose; and in fact, as I and others have argued,²² analytic philosophy represents the capitulation of the philosophical tradition to these cultural trends. (It is *one* prominent form that philosophy took in capitulating to these trends; Pragmatism is another; “Continental” philosophy yet another.) Consequently there are, built into the very culture of analytic philosophy, features opposed to the standard Western-philosophical worldview, and hence also to CSP insofar as it is an expression or specification of that worldview. One of these features is the assumption that there is “philosophical” wisdom – or at least knowledge – worth having apart from the “spiritual” wisdom of a rationally-informed, morally-ordered, life-guiding worldview. But I beg to differ. Logic may carve reality at its joints, but if our logical carvings are to be helpful rather than harmful they must be guided by a vision of the jointed-entity as a flourishing, organic whole; and such a vision belongs to “spiritual wisdom.” For the Christian, that means making our philosophical work subservient to a vision of reality as the kingdom of God, an infinite and eternal domain pervaded with *agape* love. And this, I think, is not too far from Moser’s vision for CSP.

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²¹ On all of this, see Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*.

²² *Analytic Philosophy: the History of Illusion*. Cf. Thomas Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy* (New York and London: Continuum, 2011), John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), George Reisch, *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science: To the Icy Slopes of Logic*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), and MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, ch. 19.