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Rejoinder to the Rejoinders of Oppy and Hasker

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Abstract. This is a reply to the latest rejoinders from Graham Oppy and William Hasker. It contends that the position of my essay “Christ-shaped Philosophy” escapes their objections and hence is more resilient than they suppose.

1. Ad Oppy

Oppy offers the following concise rejoinder: “Moser seems to commit himself to the following claims: (a) ‘Christ-shaped philosophy’ is distinctive primarily in virtue of its content; (b) ‘Christ-shaped mathematics’ is distinctive primarily in virtue of something other than its content. (c) ‘Christ-shaped philosophy’ provides a model for ‘Christ-shaped mathematics’.

But, at least *prima facie*, (a)-(c) form an inconsistent set of claims. The question is: How does Moser propose to deal with this apparent contradiction?” In response, I propose to deal with “this apparent contradiction” in three ways.

First, I deny that (a)-(c) yield even an apparent contradiction. Imagine that (a)-(c) are true, but that Christ-shaped philosophy provides a model for Christ-shaped mathematics in virtue of something other than the content of Christ-shaped philosophy. In that scenario, we have not even the appearance of a contradiction. The allegation of an apparent contradiction is, then, puzzling and off the mark.

Second, I presume that “primarily” in (a) does not mean “exclusively,” and therefore I hold that (a) allows for Christ-shaped philosophy to provide a model for Christ-shaped mathematics in virtue of something other than the content of Christ-shaped philosophy. At the same time, I myself would hesitate to use “primarily” here without careful explanation, and I actually would prefer not to use it at all. My concern is just this: Christ-shaped philosophy is equally distinctive in virtue of its mode and its ultimate purpose, which are not reducible to its content. So, it would be misleading to use “primarily” in (a), at least in any ordinary sense of the term.

Third, Christ-shaped mathematics, for instance, can be modeled on the mode and the ultimate purpose of Christ-shaped philosophy without incorporating into mathematics the content of Christ-shaped philosophy. This is important, because it would be a wayward, special-pleading approach to mathematics that (somehow, implausibly) builds the Good News of Jesus Christ into the very content of mathematics. Introducing the Good News as an axiom, for instance, would change the rules involved with the content of mathematics as we know it. We cleanly avoid that deficiency if we allow the mode and the ultimate purpose of Christ-shaped philosophy (as characterized in my opening essay) to provide the model for Christ-shaped mathematics. For instance, doing mathematics via the received power of the Spirit of Christ, with the accompanying fruit of the Spirit (see Gal. 5:22-23), and for the ultimate purpose of the honor of God in Christ, will look very different from doing mathematics otherwise.

As Richard Davis notes in his helpful essay in this series, “Christian Philosophy: For Whose Sake?,” “Spirit-filled, *agapē* empowered thinking is for the sake of the Savior and is directed upon him....” He adds: “Every Christian philosopher needs to ask: *why* am I doing this? What’s the point? The fact is: who you are as a philosopher is determined by the purpose of your writing, thinking, and speaking. For whose sake are you doing it?” Christ-shaped philosophy prompts such self-reflective questions. It also recommends a good answer not only for philosophers but also for theorists in other disciplines. It offers a mode and an ultimate purpose that transfer straightaway to all truth-seeking disciplines, even mathematics and the natural sciences, without distorting the proper content of those disciplines. This is the core of a direct answer to Oppy’s concluding question: “what are the ways in which he [Moser] supposes that ‘Christ-shaped philosophy’ is a model for other disciplines?” The next section clarifies my answer a bit further.

2. Ad Hasker

Hasker responds to my previous reply to him as follows: “I [Hasker] was mistaken in thinking that Moser’s estimate of philosophy – that is, of professional philosophy – is both too high and too low. On the contrary, his estimate of the discipline, as stated in his two papers and his reply to me, is unrelentingly negative. He really does view philosophical discussion primarily as a distraction from more pressing spiritual concerns. The serious study of the history of philosophy is rejected as a trivial pursuit.” I, however, cannot recognize my own position in this blunt, unqualified reading of my position, but I do note that no quotations from my work document the alleged bluntness while the slippery term “primarily” shows up again.

One must wonder why Hasker didn't use the modifier "exclusively" instead of "primarily," given the bluntness of his accompanying interpretive statements in the quotation. Why does he hedge with "primarily," instead of using a further blunt hammer with "exclusively"? I suspect that Hasker himself feels, at some level, that my position calls for the inserted hedge, and not the bluntness of his accompanying statements. Without the hedge, we have a caricature of my position; hence the required use of "primarily," even by his own lights. His use of "primarily" suggests an inconsistency in his interpretation of my position as "unrelentingly negative." Accordingly, we do not typically say that a position is both "primarily" negative and "unrelentingly negative."

Readers of my previous reply to Hasker will recall that it commented on the seriously *mixed* character of so-called "professional philosophy," as evidenced by the widely, even embarrassingly divergent proceedings of the APA and SPEP. Here is one relevant comment in my previous reply: "I have no sweeping view to offer regarding 'the profession of philosophy', given its fractured and polymorphic status. It is clear, however, that such a fractured profession does not merit praise as a whole. Taken as a whole, it is at best a morass. As a result, we need a criterion to separate the good from the bad and the ugly." This comment assumes, contrary to Hasker's blunt interpretation, that my take on professional philosophy is not in fact "unrelentingly negative." It assumes, in particular, that there is some "good" in professional philosophy that needs to be separated from "the bad and the ugly." I can find no basis, then, for the blunt interpretation of my position as "unrelentingly negative" toward professional philosophy, and, in any case, I disavow such an interpretation. Hasker has set up a straw man.

In Part 1 of this rejoinder, I mentioned the importance (for being "Christ-shaped") of the mode and the ultimate purpose of Christ-shaped philosophy and other truth-seeking disciplines. I submit that here, in this important area, we can find a faithful criterion for separating the "good" from "the bad and ugly" in professional philosophy, at least for the sake of Christ-shaped philosophy. Such a criterion would call for detailed explanation in advance of wide application, but it does point us now in the right direction, suitable to Christ-shaped philosophy. I have mentioned, in Part 1, that doing mathematics via the received power of the Spirit of Christ, with the accompanying fruit of the Spirit, and for the ultimate honor of God in Christ, will look very different from doing mathematics otherwise. Perhaps it is needless to say that I hold that the same is true for philosophy.

A philosophy is not Christ-shaped just because it includes truths and sound arguments that are philosophical; more is needed to qualify for the

exalted, normative character of being “Christ-shaped.” We might say, in general, that a philosophical argument is “good” because it is sound, but it does not follow that it is good in a different, redemptively significant manner: particularly, in virtue of being an integral component of a Christ-shaped philosophy. Philosophy done for the redemptive purpose of the honor of God in Christ differs from philosophy done to accumulate truths and sound arguments in philosophy (even if while avoiding acceptance of falsehoods and bad arguments). It should go without saying that not all truths and sound arguments in philosophy are redemptively significant.

Redemptive significance, according to the Christian Good News, depends on God’s plan of redemption as *reconciliation* in Christ (*de re* if not *de dicto*). As Paul notes, “through him [= Christ] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col. 1:20, NRSV). The mission of the body of Christ, the church, is to exemplify and to extend such divinely empowered reconciliation. The demonstration of God’s *agapē* in the self-sacrificial cross of Christ is at the center of this redemptive plan, but this does not exhaust the plan. The convicting and upbuilding work of God’s Spirit is also crucial to the plan, and humans must cooperate with God’s Spirit to make the redemption as reconciliation to God *actual* for themselves. In other words, they must share the response of Jesus to God in Gethsemane: not my will but Your will.¹

A philosophy will be Christ-shaped only if it is an integral part of God’s redemptive effort grounded in Christ. Otherwise, from a Christ-shaped redemptive perspective, a philosophy will amount to fiddling while Rome burns. The redemptive effort in question requires self-giving trust in God as part of its mode. As a result, Paul states that “whatever does not proceed from faith [in God] is sin,” where sin includes alienation from God and God’s redemptive mission (Rom. 14:23). Accordingly, following Paul, we should expect two contrasting kinds of philosophy and wisdom: philosophy and wisdom integral to God’s redemptive effort in Christ, and “human” philosophy and wisdom not thus integral (see chapters 1 and 2 of 1 Corinthians). Much of secular professional philosophy falls under the latter category. At a minimum, it is unclear how Hasker’s welcoming embrace of professional philosophy can accommodate the Pauline themes at hand.

Hasker worries that, given my position, “Christian philosophers would lose the credibility and the influence that have been earned by the hard labors”

¹ For the details of this approach to redemption and its bearing on faith in God and knowing God, see Moser, *The Severity of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

of various Christian philosophers. The following issues, however, are pressing but unanswered.

1. *Whose* credibility does he want to earn, and can it really be “earned” in a secular setting when one has the risen Christ as Lord? Given the morass that is professional philosophy, as illustrated by the wildly divergent projects in the APA and SPEP, no philosophers will “earn credibility” from *all* professional philosophers. So, one will have to pick and choose, and one should offer a corresponding criterion for this task. (See the cautionary remark in John 5:44, which bears, unfortunately, on much of professional philosophy.)
2. *How*, or by what standard, does he want to earn the credibility, and does his preferred standard give supremacy to God’s redemptive effort in Christ? If not, how is this quest for credibility truly *Christian*, if it is at all?
3. *Why* does he want to earn the credibility? Is the ultimate purpose of this quest God’s redemptive goal in Christ? If not, how is the quest Christian at all?
4. *What* content or practice does he want to be credible with regard to? Does he recommend some content or practice that certain professional philosophers deem valuable? If so, which philosophers, and why prefer those philosophers instead of others? Is there a supreme place, at any rate, for the redemptive content or practices central to Christ-shaped philosophy? If not, how is the announced quest for credibility Christian rather than non-Christian?

I cannot find clear answers to these questions, but, in any case, Hasker’s general worry is misplaced. It rests on his aforementioned false interpretation that my position is “unrelentingly negative” toward professional philosophy.

As a proponent of Christ-shaped philosophy, I value and advocate redemptive philosophy grounded in God’s reconciliation in Christ. The cognitive foundation of such philosophy is explained in *The Severity of God*, but I cannot digress to this big topic. Instead, I conclude with the important lesson that all Christians are called to be redemptive (in obedience to God) in all of their projects, including their academic and professional projects. It does not follow, however, that all Christians are called to be philosophers. God gives different gifts to different people, and such diversity of gifts enhances the redemptive work of the body (church) of Christ, philosophers included.

If we neglect the redemptive component of philosophy under God in Christ, we run afoul of Christ-shaped philosophy. Christians, at least, are well-advised to honor the redemptive significance of philosophy under Christ, even

if they find themselves at odds with much of secular philosophy. Faithfulness to Christ, for Christians, trumps compliance with what is current or customary in a professional discipline, in all cases of either conflict or divergence. Christ-shaped philosophy accommodates this vital lesson. Christians should too.

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