Jesus and Philosophy

New Essays

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Introduction: Jesus and Philosophy

Paul K. Moser

How are Jesus and philosophy related? How should they be related? Such questions about the relevance of Jesus to philosophy take us back and forth between philosophy and theology in a way suggesting that the two disciplines are importantly related, at least regarding various topics of interest to philosophers and theologians. Contemporary philosophers seldom tread on theological ground, perhaps owing to general uneasiness with things theological. In any case, inquirers about the relevance of Jesus to philosophy shouldn't hesitate to cross disciplinary boundaries when explanation, knowledge, and truth are served. We shall proceed accordingly.

1. FROM ATHENS TO JERUSALEM

We may begin, for the sake of adequate context, with a question broader than that of the relevance of Jesus himself to philosophy: what, if anything, does Jerusalem, as the center of the earliest Jewish-Christian movement of Jesus's disciples, have to do with Athens, as the center of Western philosophy in its inception? Do they share *intellectual goals*, and if so, do they share *means* to achieving their common intellectual goals? The two questions demand *yes* answers, because Jerusalem and Athens both aim to achieve *truth* (perhaps among other things), and they aim to achieve truth via *knowledge* of truth. These two factors play a significant role in what defines Jerusalem and Athens, and thus Jerusalem and Athens share something significant, however much they differ and even avoid or fear each other.

Of course, aiming for truth via knowledge of truth doesn't set Jerusalem and Athens apart from many other influential movements. The later natural and social sciences, for example, aim for truth via knowledge, but they aren't original citizens of either Jerusalem or Athens. The earliest philosophy characteristic of Athens seeks a kind of philosophical truth whose discovery

didn't wait for the later empirical work of the natural and social sciences. Accordingly, Socrates and Plato pursued their philosophical work vigorously even though the natural and social sciences were at best immature, if they existed at all. Similarly, the theology characteristic of the earliest Christian movement in Jerusalem didn't wait for the empirical work of the later natural and social sciences. Its theology of the Good News of God's redemptive intervention in Jesus as God's self-giving Son for humans approached the wider world without relying on the natural and social sciences. So, the founding philosophers and theologians from Athens and Jerusalem didn't need to draw from the natural or social sciences to launch their respective traditions of seeking truth via knowledge.

What *distinguishes* Jerusalem from Athens? We may begin with the rough observation that Socrates and Plato started a *wisdom movement* that characterized humans as cognitive and moral agents in pursuit of the good life. The wisdom movement of Socrates and Plato focused on death as well as life: " . . . those who really apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are directly and of their own accord preparing themselves for dying and death" (*Phaedo* 64a). Death, according to Socrates and Plato, is the release of the soul from the body, and this release enables the soul to attain finally, without bodily interference, to unadulterated truth and clear thinking. Persons of wisdom (philosophers) welcome death as an opportunity for intellectual purification from the physical, sensory, and emotional pollution of the present transitory world. Plato's *Phaedo* promotes this philosophy of intellectual enlightenment characteristic of ancient Athens as the birthplace of Western philosophy.

In contrast to the philosophers of Athens, Jesus and his follower Paul of Tarsus promoted a *Good News power movement* that offered people the power of spiritual, moral, and even bodily redemption by God.[1] The heart of this redemption is offered as a gift of gracious reconciliation of humans to God, including fellowship with God, at God's expense (see, for example, Lk. 15:11–24, 24:1–35, 1 Cor. 1:9, 15:12–32, 2 Cor. 5:16–21). Jesus and Paul, as devout Jews, proceeded in the theological light of such ancient Hebrew prophets as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Hosea, and drew their general idea of divine Good News from the book of Isaiah (cf. Isa. 52:7, 61:1).[2] The promise of

[1] On the unifying idea of a Good News proclamation among the New Testament writers, see Eugene Lemcio, "The Unifying Kerygma of the New Testament," in Lemcio, *The Past of Jesus in the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 115–31. Cf. Lemcio, "The Gospels within the New Testament Canon," in C. G. Bartholomew, ed., *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (London: Paternoster, 2006), 123–45.

[2] On the contribution of the book of Isaiah to the Good News message in the New Testament, see Otto Betz, "Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom," in Peter Stuhlmacher, ed., *The Gospel and*

divine redemption preached by Jesus and Paul included a promise of *bodily* resurrection that isn't to be confused either with resuscitation of a dead person or with immortality.

Socrates and Plato hoped for immortality for at least some humans, but they had no place for bodily resurrection in their hope. The human body, in their story, obstructs human purification as intellectual enlightenment and thus is an impediment to the kind of mental and moral goodness offered (at least in principle) by our impending death. In contrast, Jesus and Paul taught, in the tradition of Genesis 1–2, that God's creation of the physical world was initially good, and not a mere impediment to our intellectual purification. They embraced and extended the reported divine promise to some of the ancient Hebrew prophets that the people of God would be raised from the dead, even bodily. Without such resurrection, they assumed, human redemption would be gravely incomplete, because God intended humans to be embodied. Full resurrection, in their eyes, thus included embodiment; accordingly, Paul and various other early followers of Jesus preached the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus and, for the future, of his followers too (see 1 Cor. 15:1–15).[3] Jerusalem thus contradicts Athens, and the two won't be united in their attitudes toward either the value of the physical world or what humans ultimately need.

According to the apostle Paul, the Good News movement stems from God's redemptive self-revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. More specifically, this movement is founded on "the power of God for salvation for everyone who trusts [God]" (Rom. 1:16; cf. 1 Cor. 1:18), and this divine power is perfectly exemplified in the human Jesus (2 Cor. 4:4, 5:19; cf. Phil. 2:6). Paul thought of (a) the obedient death-by-crucifixion undergone by Jesus and (b) God's resurrection of Jesus from the dead as two decisively related moments in a single life-giving, redemptive movement by the one true God of authoritative righteous love (*agape*). The resurrection of Jesus was central to Paul's understanding of salvation as divine redemption from evil and death; he thus held: " . . . [I]f Christ has not been raised [from the dead by God], your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). In addition, Paul speaks of the kind of "knowing Christ" who is essential to

the Gospels (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 53–74, Rikki Watts, *New Exodus and Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), chap. 4, and Graham Stanton, "Jesus and Gospel," in Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9–62.

[3] On the place of resurrection in the earliest Christian preaching, see Floyd V. Filson, *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), Rowan Williams, *Resurrection* (London: Darton, 1982), and Markus Bockmuehl, "Resurrection," in Bockmuehl, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 102–18.

salvation as involving our knowing "the power of his resurrection" via our being conformed to Jesus's death (Phil. 3:10). Paul thus proclaimed the death-by-crucifixion of Jesus *because* he also proclaimed the resurrection-by-God of Jesus for divine redemptive purposes. The two, according to Paul, must be portrayed together to capture God's redemptive Good News movement (see, for example, Rom. 3–6).

The divine power central to the Good News movement of Jerusalem is, in Paul's perspective, cognitively as well as morally and spiritually important. Many philosophers of religion have overlooked this perspective, and hence its distinctive underlying epistemology has rarely surfaced in philosophy. Paul holds that he knows the risen Jesus on the basis of his knowing firsthand the power of Jesus's resurrection by God (cf. Phil. 3:8–11). Redemption, according to Paul, consists in knowing firsthand the divine power of Jesus's divine resurrection in virtue of being transformed by it to conform to Jesus's self-giving death, in volitional fellowship with the God who raised Jesus from death.

Joseph Fitzmyer has characterized the relevant power and corresponding knowledge, as follows:

> This "power" is not limited to the influence of the risen Jesus on the Christian, but includes a reference to the origin of that influence in [God] the Father himself. The knowledge, then, that Paul seeks to attain, the knowledge that he regards as transforming the life of a Christian and his/her sufferings, must be understood as encompassing the full ambit of that power. It emanates from the Father, raises Jesus from the dead at his resurrection, endows him with a new vitality, and finally proceeds from him as the life-giving, vitalizing force of the "new creation" [cf. 2 Cor. 5:17] and of the new life that Christians in union with Christ experience and live . . . [T]he knowledge of [this power], emanating from Christian faith, is the transforming force that vitalizes Christian life and molds the suffering of the Christian to the pattern which is Christ.[4]

This characterization of resurrection power fits with Paul's aforementioned view that the Good News of what God has done through Jesus is "the power of *God*" for human salvation (Rom. 1:16; cf. Eph. 1:19–20). As a result, the Good News Jesus movement advanced by Paul is no narrow Jesus cult, but is rather offered as a power movement of the one true God of the whole

[4] Joseph Fitzmyer, "'To Know Him and the Power of His Resurrection' (Phil. 3:10)," in Fitzmyer, *To Advance the Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 208–9.

world, including Gentiles as well as Jews (Rom. 3:29, 15:15–17).[5] This fits with the focus on God in the ministry of Jesus himself (see, for example, Mk. 1:15, 12:29–30).

In Paul's perspective on the earliest Jesus movement, God's intervening Spirit supplies the needed *power* of resurrection, including the power that raised Jesus (Rom. 1:4). The same Spirit, according to Paul, supplies the needed firsthand authoritative *evidence* and *knowledge* of this power to willing recipients (see Rom. 5:5, 8:15–16, 1 Cor. 2:9–12). Such an approach to evidence and knowledge of divine reality acknowledges *purposively available* evidence of divine reality that is offered in accordance with divine redemptive purposes. This kind of cognitive perspective on knowledge of divine reality was evidently influenced by Jesus himself (see Mk. 4:2–12, Matt. 11:25–30). With regard to evidence of divine reality, philosophers of religion and theologians often leave inquirers, without an authoritative volitional challenge, at the level of merely theoretical assessment of propositional evidence, including historical propositional evidence. At this level, one can't make good sense of the revolutionary Good News movement launched by Jerusalem, particularly by Jesus and, in his wake, Paul. Such a life-transforming revolution needs an authoritative volitional anchor deeper than merely theoretical assessment of propositional evidence, including historical propositional evidence.[6] Jesus and Paul (following Jesus) redirect religious epistemology accordingly, to authoritative divine evidence that offers the needed volitional challenge to humans and thus moves beyond merely theoretical assessment.

In contrast with the Jerusalem of Jesus, Athens yields an intellectual-enlightenment wisdom movement that holds out no hope or even desire of lasting life via bodily resurrection. Contemporary Western philosophy largely follows suit, particularly as a result of its widespread abandonment of robust theism. Following Jesus, Jerusalem offers a Good News power movement of redemption as fellowship with God and eventual deliverance by God from both evil and death into lasting life, including bodily resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is thereby proclaimed, by Paul and other early disciples, as the victory inauguration of this revolutionary movement of God's intervening Spirit. The movement, as represented by Jesus, focuses on the

[5] See Dunn, "Christology as an Aspect of Theology," in A. J. Malherbe and W. A. Meeks, eds., *The Future of Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 202–12.

[6] On this point, in connection with theoretical historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, see Paul Minear, *The Bible and the Historian* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), chap. 5, Dale Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and its Interpreters* (London: T&T Clark. 2005), and Paul Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 3.

gracious redemptive intervention of a divine Spirit that empowers lasting life in divine-human fellowship, including human freedom to love all people, even enemies. Life, according to this Good News movement, can offer, via divine empowerment, progressive moral and spiritual renewal toward God's character of unselfish love and, in the future, bodily resurrection.

The central question from Athens to Jerusalem is cognitive, if often skeptical: How can one *know* that the redemptive promise of the Good News movement is actually reliable rather than just wishful thinking? Jerusalem's answer, represented by Jesus and Paul, is widely neglected: by volitionally knowing firsthand the promise-*Giver*, via one's willing participation in the available power of God's life-giving and life-transforming Spirit. The question from Jerusalem to Athens is thus, as always, volitional: Are we humans sincerely *willing* to participate in the powerful life of a perfectly loving God, thereby giving up our selfish lives for the sake of lasting lives in God's unselfish love, even toward enemies? Jesus himself was not particularly optimistic about the answer to the latter question (see, for example, Lk. 18:8).

2. GOOD NEWS FOR PHILOSOPHY

The Good News movement underwent a striking shift, after the crucifixion of Jesus, that resulted in the preaching, by Paul and others, of the bodily resurrection of Jesus by God. Jesus as the preacher of the Good News about God's arriving kingdom, under formative influence from the book of Isaiah, became *an object of focus* in the preaching of the Good News by his earliest, Jewish disciples. The *preacher* thus became *a central part of the preached*; the *proclaimer* became integral to the *proclaimed*, as many New Testament scholars have noted.[7]

In one of the earliest statements of the Good News in the New Testament, Paul writes:

> For I delivered to you of first importance what I have received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared also to me, as to one untimely born . . . . If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is futile and your faith is futile too. We are

[7] On this theme, see Filson, *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord*, and Klyne Snodgrass, "The Gospel of Jesus," in Markus Bockmuehl and Donald Hagner, eds., *The Written Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 31–44. Cf. Betz, "Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom."

> also then found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.... If we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:3–8, 14–15, 17, 19–20).

Paul had unmatched influence in clarifying the Good News movement after the death of Jesus. The Goods News, according to Paul, includes that "Christ died for our sins" and was raised from the dead. Paul regards the Good News as false and futile in the absence of the resurrection of Jesus by God. In particular, he links the resurrection of Jesus by God to the divine forgiveness of human sins in such a way that if there is no resurrection of Jesus, "you are still in your sins."

According to various New Testament writers, a central theme of the Good News movement is that God forgives human sins, and humans are thereby offered reconciliation and fellowship with God, in connection with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. What exactly this connection involves has been a topic of controversy among philosophers of religion and theologians. If we think of *atonement* as divine-human reconciliation that suitably deals with human sin as resistance to divine unselfish love and fellowship, we may understand the heart of this controversy about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as a debate about atonement. How exactly do the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus figure in (the intended) divine-human atonement? How, in addition, is such atonement to be appropriated by humans? Furthermore, is such atonement actually needed by humans? If so, why is it needed? These are among many questions that emerge regarding the person and mission of Jesus, and they have generated controversy in philosophical theology and in philosophy of religion.

We do well not to portray Jesus as a typical teacher of Jewish wisdom. At the Last Supper, according to Matthew's Gospel (26:28), Jesus announced that he will die "for the forgiveness of sins." The atoning sacrifice of Jesus as God's sinless offering for sinful humans is, at least according to Matthew's Jesus, at the center of God's redemptive work. Among other New Testament writings, John's Gospel (cf. Jn. 1:36) and Paul's undisputed epistles (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7, 2 Cor. 5:21, Rom. 3:24–26) concur on this lesson about atonement. This unique role attributed to Jesus in divine-human atonement sets him apart from Abraham, Moses, Paul, Confucius, Krishna, Gautama the Buddha, Muhammad, the Dalai Lama, and every other known religious leader. Only Jesus, as portrayed at least by Matthew, John, and Paul, offered himself as God's atoning sacrifice to God for wayward humans. Only Jesus, therefore, emerged as the human center

of the first-century Good News of God's intended redemption of wayward humans.

Many philosophers of religion and theologians share the apostle Peter's initial denial that the death of Jesus is central to the divine plan of reconciliation of humans to God (see Mk. 8:31–32). In fact, they doubt that the crucifixion of the obedient Son of God would be compatible with God's merciful love, at least toward Jesus. Paul faced similar doubts about the cross of Jesus among the earliest Christians in Corinth, and he responded straightforwardly: "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ *and him crucified*" (1 Cor. 2:2, italics added). The obedient death of Jesus is, in Paul's portrait of the Good News, as important as his resurrection for divine-human reconciliation.

The Roman crucifixion of Jesus seems to seal his fate as a dismal failure, perhaps even as one "cursed" before God (see Gal. 3:13, Deut. 21:23). Even so, the cross of Jesus is announced by Paul, Matthew, and John, among other New Testament writers, as a central place of God's atoning sacrifice and turnaround redemptive victory on behalf of humans. Out of the evident defeat of Jesus, according to the Good News movement, God brought a unique manifestation of divine love and forgiveness toward humans, even toward God's enemies. The fatal cross of Jesus is proclaimed as a central part of God's intended grand reversal of the dark human tragedy of alienation from fellowship with God. This reversal, according to the proclamation of the Good News movement, aims at divine-human reconciliation, or atonement, by means of a stark but powerful manifestation of God's righteous and merciful character as exemplified in Jesus.

The Good News movement founded by Jesus offers a *divine manifest-offering* approach to divine-human atonement. According to its unique message, what is being made *manifest* is God's character of righteous and merciful love, and what is being *offered*, in agreement with that character, is lasting divine-human fellowship as a gracious divine gift on the basis of (a) the forgiveness manifested and offered via God's atoning sacrifice in Jesus and (b) God's resurrection of Jesus as Lord and as Giver of God's Spirit. The manifestation of God's self-giving character in Jesus reveals the kind of God who is thereby offering lasting divine-human forgiveness and fellowship to humans. Although the death of Jesus can't bring about divine-human reconciliation by itself, it is presented, by Jesus, Paul, and others, as supplying God's distinctive means of intended implementation of reconciliation via divine manifestation and offering. For the sake of actual divine-human reconciliation, according to Jesus and Paul, humans must *receive* the manifest-offering via grounded trust and obedience (cf. Matt. 7: 21–23, Rom. 5:1–2).

Paul acknowledges that the message of the cross of Jesus as central to divine-human atonement appears to some people to be utter nonsense:

> [T]he message of the cross is foolishness to those perishing, but to us being saved it is the power of God.... Jews request signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those called [by God], both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength (1 Cor. 1:18, 22–25).

The power and wisdom of God's morally righteous and merciful character are manifested, according to Paul, in the crucified Jesus, whom God approvingly raised as Lord from death by crucifixion. Such divine power and wisdom, in Paul's Good News message, overcome even death, thereby surpassing any human power or wisdom, including the human power of evil. According to the Good News offered by Jesus and Paul, God sent God's own beloved Son, Jesus, to live and to die and to be resurrected by God. The divine aim was to manifest God's forgiving and righteous love for all people, even God's enemies (Rom. 5:6–8), and thereby to offer people lasting divine-human fellowship under Jesus as Lord who offers God's empowering Spirit (1 Cor. 1:9, 1 Thess. 5:10). The Good News message of Jesus and Paul implies that Jesus came from God to identify with humans in their weakness and trouble, while he represented his divine Father in righteous and merciful self-giving love. As divinely appointed mediator, Jesus thus aims to serve as a personal bridge between God *and* humans by seeking to reconcile humans to his Father with the divine gift of fellowship anchored in merciful, forgiving love and God's own intervening Spirit.

A central theme of the Good News message is that Jesus's obedient death on the cross, commanded of him by God (see Rom. 3:25, 1 Cor. 5:7, Phil. 2:8; cf. Mk. 14:23–24, Jn. 18:11), aims to manifest how far he and his Father will go, even to gruesome death, to offer divine forgiveness and fellowship to alienated humans. According to this message, Jesus gives humans all he has, avowedly from his Father's love, to manifest that God mercifully and righteously loves humans to the fullest extent and offers humans the gracious gift of unearned fellowship and membership in God's everlasting family via reception of God's own empowering Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:8, Jn. 3:16–17). This is the heart of the Good News that emerges from the Jerusalem of Jesus and Paul and goes far beyond anything offered in the wisdom movement from Athens.

The Good News movement reports that God uses the crucifixion of the willingly obedient Jesus as the episode whereby selfish human rebellion against

God is mercifully judged and forgiven by God. This claim does *not* imply that God punished Jesus, and no New Testament writer teaches otherwise, contrary to some subsequent, less careful theologians. (Some theologians might be inclined to counter with Mk. 14:27 or Gal. 3:13, but neither passage implies that God punished Jesus.) According to the Good News, God sent Jesus into the rebellious human world to undergo, willingly and obediently, suffering and death that God would deem adequate for dealing justly, under divine righteousness, with human rebellion against God and God's unselfish love. Jesus thus pays the price on behalf of selfish humans for righteous divine reconciliation of humans and thereby removes any need for selfish fear, condemnation, anxiety, guilt, and punishment among humans in relation to God (see Rom. 8:1).

In the writings of Paul, Matthew, and John, among other New Testament writers, the crucified Jesus is the manifest power and mirror image of a perfectly loving God. Specifically, according to Paul, the foundational motive for the crucifixion of Jesus is his Father's *righteous love* for humans:

> Now apart from law, a righteousness of God has been manifested, to which the Law and the Prophets bear witness. This righteousness of God comes through trust in Jesus Christ to all who trust [in him]. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God put forth as an atoning sacrifice, through trust, in his blood. He did this to manifest his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed. He did this to manifest his righteousness in the current time, in order to be righteous and the one who justifies those who trust in Jesus (Rom. 3:21–26).

Paul identifies three times here the *manifestation* of God's righteousness as central to God's redemptive plan involving Jesus, including his death. In addition, Paul twice suggests that this divine manifestation is aimed at God's graciously justifying, or reconciling, humans before God via trust in Jesus. This passage thus repeatedly endorses a divine manifest-offering approach to atonement via Jesus. God's graciously forgiving offer of divine-human reconciliation, according to Paul, comes with a manifestation of God's righteousness in the crucified Jesus.

Unlike many later theologians, Paul decisively links divine righteousness, or justice, with God's love: "God manifests his own love (*agape*) for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us . . . . Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath [of God] . . . . [W]hile we were enemies [of God], we were reconciled

to God through the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:8–10). God thus takes the initiative and the crucial means through Jesus in offering a gracious gift of divine-human reconciliation. Paul, accordingly, takes the sacrificial death of Jesus to manifest divine love and righteousness. He seems, accordingly, to have thought of divine love as *righteous love.*

Famously, Paul denies that the divinely offered gift of reconciliation can be earned by human "works" that obligate God to redeem humans (Rom. 4:4), because humans have fallen short of the divine standard of perfect love (Rom. 3:10–12, 23). Still, obedience as internal volitional submission to God's authoritative call to repentance and divine-human fellowship is central to appropriating the offered gift (Rom. 1:5, 6:16, 16:26, 2 Thess. 1:8; cf. Matt. 7:21–25). Such appropriating, however, differs from earning a reward, because the divine gift of righteousness to humans comes not by human earning but rather by divine gracious reckoning of a gift via human trust, which includes volitional yielding, toward the Gift-Giver (see Rom. 4:5–11, 10:8–10). As a result, human prideful boasting, or taking of self-credit, before God with regard to the Good News of reconciliation is altogether misplaced (Rom. 3:27).

According to the Good News movement of Jesus and Paul, the God of perfect love, who is the Father of Jesus, is also a God of *righteous wrath and judgment* (Rom. 1:18, 2:2–8).[8] The pertinent idea is this: (a) *because* God is inherently loving toward all other persons, God loves all sinners, including God's enemies, and (b) *because* God loves all sinners, God has wrath and judgment toward sin, given that sin leads to death (as separation from God) rather than life (as obedient fellowship with God). God as perfectly loving seeks to reconcile humans to God, even via judgment, in a way that exceeds mere divine forgiveness and satisfies God's standard of morally perfect love in divine-human reconciliation and fellowship (see Rom. 11:15, 30–32).

Divine forgiveness of humans wouldn't by itself adequately deal with the source of the wrongdoing that called for such forgiveness, namely, human neglect of divine authority (on which see Rom. 1:21, 28; cf. Matt. 7:21–27). In judging the source of wrongdoing, according to the Good News movement, God upholds perfect moral integrity in divine redemption of humans, without condoning wrongdoing or evil. More specifically, through the loving self-sacrifice of Jesus, *God* meets the standard of morally perfect love *for humans*

[8] On the place of divine judgment in the message of Jesus and Paul, see Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, trans. L. M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), and Edward Meadors, *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

(when they wouldn't), and then God offers this gracious gift of divinely provided righteousness to humans, as God's Passover lamb for humans (1 Cor. 5:7; cf. Matt. 26:26–29, Jn. 1:29), to be received by trust in Jesus and God as redeeming Gift-Givers. Otherwise, human prospects for meeting the standard of divine perfect love would be dim indeed.[9]

Paul reports that "God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself," not counting our sins against us (2 Cor. 5:19). This redemptive theme is at the heart of the Good News message of Jesus and Paul. The motivation of undergoing crucifixion for Jesus was his *obedience* to his Father on behalf of humans for the sake of divine-human reconciliation. He expressed the centrality of obedience to his Father in Gethsemane at a pivotal moment: "Not what I will, but what You will" (Mk. 14:35–36; cf. Mk. 14:22–25). Likewise, Paul identified the crucial role of Jesus's obedience: "Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became *obedient* to death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6–8, italics added; cf. Rom. 5:18–19). The acknowledged obedience of Jesus in his death is obedience to the Good News redemptive mission of his Father, who reportedly gave Jesus his cup of suffering and death (Rom. 8:3–4; cf. Jn. 18:11).

Paul presents Jesus as God's Passover lamb on behalf of humans, that is, as God's own atoning sacrifice to God for humans (Rom. 3:25), because he was perfectly obedient in the eyes of his perfectly righteous Father. Jesus's perfectly obedient life toward God, according to at least Paul, Matthew, and John, is an acceptable sacrifice to God for humans and is offered on behalf of humans by Jesus and God. Gethsemane and the Last Supper manifest these central lessons about Jesus's obedience toward God. Gethsemane shows Jesus passionately resolving to put his Father's will first, even in the face of death, and the Last Supper has Jesus portraying, with the bread and the wine as emblematic of his body and his blood, the ultimate self-sacrifice pleasing to his Father on behalf of humans. The idea of a Passover sacrifice has roots in ancient Judaism (see Ex. 12:1–27), but it continued to figure in the Good News of redemption preached, at least by Paul, Matthew, and John, among the earliest Christians. Their Good News message rests on a perfectly righteous divine character and a divine redemptive plan for the world (as identified

[9] On gift-righteousness as central to Paul's thought, see Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), chap. 15. Cf. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology*, trans. E. R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), chaps. 3, 5. For parallels in Jesus, see David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

in Isaiah, for instance) rather than abstract principles of justice or love that typically misrepresent the motivation for what Paul calls God's "redemption in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24; cf. Rom. 5:10–11).

The Good News redemptive mission of Jesus, as proclaimed by Jesus, Paul, and many other first-century Jews, included not only his death but also his resurrection by God. The aforementioned divine manifest-offering approach to atonement captures this fact by acknowledging the divine gracious offering of *lasting* divine-human fellowship under Jesus as Lord. Such offered fellowship requires, of course, that Jesus be *alive* to be Lord lastingly on behalf of humans. This illuminates Paul's otherwise puzzling remarks that Jesus "was raised for our justification" and that "we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 4:25, 5:10), once we acknowledge that justification and salvation from death are, like forgiveness, for the sake of lasting divine-human fellowship under Jesus as Lord (cf. 1 Thess. 5:10).

The resurrection of Jesus, as proclaimed in the Good News message, is offered as God's indelible signature of approval and even exaltation on God's obedient, crucified Son, the atoning sacrifice from God for humans (see Phil. 2:9–11). The resurrection of Jesus thus gets some of its crucial significance from the cross, where Jesus gave full obedience to his Father in order to supply a manifest-offering of divine-human reconciliation to humans via trust in God. In his full, life-surrendering obedience, Jesus manifests his authoritative Father's worthiness of complete trust and obedience, even when death ensues. More generally, Jesus confirms through his perfect obedience the preeminent authority of his Father for the sake of redeeming humans, and his Father, in turn, approvingly authorizes and exalts Jesus, likewise for the sake of redeeming humans. Both Jesus and his divine Father thus have, according to the Good News movement, crucial roles in the divine manifest-offering aimed at the atoning redemption of humans.

3. PHILOSOPHY AS A KERYGMATIC DISCIPLINE

Given the Good News movement advanced by Jesus, Paul, and others, Jesus bears on philosophy to the extent that divine redemption of humans bears on philosophy. Clearly, this movement prompts a wide range of philosophical questions, including conceptual, metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical questions. Philosophical theology and the philosophy of religion have pursued such questions at length, and their pursuit continues in strength. Still, does Jesus make any *disciplinary* difference to philosophy? It seems so, given his distinctive approach to human priorities, which bears on philosophy as well as other truth-seeking disciplines.

Drawing from the Hebrew scriptures, Jesus summarized the divine love commands in the following way:

> [O]ne of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he [Jesus] answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mk. 12:28–31, RSV; cf. Deut. 6:4, Lev. 19:18).

These commands, found in the Hebrew scriptures and in the Christian New Testament, give a priority ranking to what humans should love. They imply that at the very top of a ranking of what we humans love should be, first, God and, second, our neighbor (as well as ourselves). They thus imply that any opposing ranking is morally unacceptable. More specifically, they imply that human projects, including intellectual and philosophical projects, are acceptable only to the extent that they contribute to satisfying the divine love commands. Let's consider briefly how this lesson bears on philosophy as a discipline.

Loving God and our neighbor requires *eagerly serving* God and our neighbor for their best interests. Characterized broadly, our eagerly serving God and our neighbor requires (a) our eagerly obeying God to the best of our ability and (b) our eagerly contributing, so far as we are able, to the life-sustaining needs of our neighbor. Such eager serving is central to love as *agape*, the New Testament kind of merciful love that is incompatible with selfishness or harmfulness toward others. Of course, we shouldn't confuse our neighbors' best interests or life-sustaining needs with *mere preferences* expressed by our neighbors. Otherwise, we would risk making love servile in a manner that benefits no one.

We humans, of course, have limited resources, in terms of time and energy for pursuing our projects. We thus must *choose* how to spend our time and energy in ways that pursue some projects and exclude others. If I eagerly choose projects that exclude my eagerly serving the life-sustaining needs of my neighbor (when I could have undertaken the latter), I thereby fail to love my neighbor. I also thereby fail to obey God's command, as represented by Jesus, to give priority to my eagerly serving the life-sustaining needs of my neighbor, and, to that extent, I fail to love God and my neighbor (cf. 1 Jn. 4:20–21). The divine love commands don't allow us to love God to the exclusion of loving our neighbor.

The lesson about failing to love applies directly to typical pursuit of philosophical questions. If my typical eager pursuit of philosophical questions blocks my eagerly serving the life-sustaining needs of my neighbor (when I could have undertaken the latter), I thereby fail to love my neighbor. I also fail then to obey the divine love command regarding my neighbor. In this case, my eager pursuit of philosophical questions will result in my failing to love God and my neighbor as God has commanded, at least in the commands summarized by Jesus. The failing would be a moral deficiency in serving God and my neighbor, owing to my choosing to serve other purposes instead, namely, philosophical purposes independent of loving God and others.

Even if a philosophical purpose is truth-seeking, including seeking after truths about God and divine love, it could run afoul of the divine love commands. It could advance a philosophical concern, even a truth-seeking philosophical concern, at the expense of eagerly serving God and one's neighbor. For instance, I could eagerly pursue an intriguing, if esoteric, metaphysical truth in ways that disregard eager service toward God and my neighbor. Not all truth-seeking, then, proceeds in agreement with the divine love commands. This lesson applies equally to philosophy, theology, and any other truth-seeking discipline.

The divine love commands, as summarized by Jesus, don't exempt any capable person or group of capable people, not even truth-seeking philosophers. Their purpose is to call *all* capable people to reflect the morally perfect character of God, who is their perfectly authoritative and loving creator. Jesus identifies this purpose in the Sermon on the Mount, after calling his followers to love even their enemies (see Matt. 5:44–45, 48; cf. Lk. 6:35–36). Given that all capable people are created by God to be obedient creatures relative to God, all capable people are called to reflect God's moral character of self-giving love. As a result, no capable person is exempt from the divine command to love God and neighbors. In the presence of the perfectly loving God represented by Jesus, truth-seeking, including philosophical truth-seeking, doesn't trump the requirement to love others, because it doesn't override the requirement to mirror God's perfectly loving character. An assumption of the exemption of philosophers relative to the love commands conflicts with a divine redemptive purpose for capable humans to become loving as God is loving.

Jesus offers the divine love commands within a context agreeable to the following approach to the Good News message of divine redemption:

> Jesus Christ has a twofold meaning for the religious experience of mankind. He is God's call to the world to take history with absolute [moral] seriousness, and he is God's sign in history that [this] invocation has [God's] eternal

> benediction. Those who hear the invocation without the benediction are either fatigued by the prospect of realizing anything ultimate in history or inflamed by the desire to do so on their own terms. The whole Gospel [or, Good News] is not at hand, however, until it is known that in Christ God gives what he commands. That knowledge is the ground of repentance for the rebellious and the resigned alike.[10]

The notion of God's offering, as a gracious and powerful gift, what the divine love commands require of humans is central to Paul's aforementioned presentation of the Good News of God's invitation to redemption as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom. 1:16, RSV; cf. 1 Cor. 4:20, Phil. 2:12–13). In addition, this notion fits with the emphasis of Jesus on God's gratuitous provision toward humans (Matt. 20:1–16, Lk. 15:11–32). That provision intends to save people from being "either fatigued by the prospect of realizing anything ultimate in history or inflamed by the desire to do so on their own terms." More specifically, the provision acknowledges that the divine love commands require a kind of power among humans, the power of self-giving love, which only a perfectly loving God can provide to receptive humans.

The divine love commands issued by Jesus aren't ordinary moral rules that concern only actions. They call for volitional *fellowship relationships* of unselfish love between oneself and God and between oneself and other humans. Such relationships go beyond mere actions to attitudes and to volitional fellowship, friendship, and communion between and among personal agents, with God at the center as the personal source of power needed for unselfish love. The background, foreground, and center of Jesus's divine love commands are thoroughly and irreducibly *person*-oriented and *person*-focused. They direct hearers to persons and fellowship relationships with persons, particularly with God and other humans. The love commands can't be reduced, then, to familiar standards of right action. They cut much deeper than any such standards, into who we are and how we exist in the presence of a person-oriented divine standard of unselfish love.

The divine love commands (a) correctively judge humans by calling them up short by a morally perfect divine standard, and then (b) call humans to obedient self-redefinition, even "new creation," by a gracious and powerful divine redemptive gift of volitional fellowship with a perfectly loving God as manifested by Jesus (cf. Jn. 3:1–12). Willing humans move beyond discussion, then, to personal transformation via obedience, in a relationship of volitional

[10] Carl Michalson, "Christianity and the Finality of Faith," in Michalson, *Worldly Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1967), 192.

fellowship with the God who commands unselfish love as supremely life-giving. In such transformation, pride, even intellectual pride, gives way to the humility of obedience to the divine love commands and their personal powerful source.

How, then, is Jesus relevant to philosophy as a discipline? Philosophy in its normal mode, without being receptive to an authoritative divine challenge stemming from divine love commands, leaves humans in a discussion mode, short of an obedience mode under divine authority. Philosophical questions naturally prompt metaphilosophical questions about philosophical questions, and this launches a parade of higher-order, or at least related, questions, with no end to philosophical discussion. Hence, the questions of philosophy are, notoriously, perennial. As divinely appointed Lord, in contrast, Jesus commands humans to move, for their own good, to an obedience mode of existence relative to divine love commands. He thereby points humans to his perfectly loving Father who ultimately underwrites the divine love commands for humans, for the sake of divine-human fellowship. Accordingly, humans need to transcend a normal discussion mode, and thus philosophical discussion itself, to face with sincerity the personal Authority who commands what humans need: faithful obedience to the perfectly loving Giver of divine love commands, for the sake of divine-human fellowship. Such obedience of the heart, involving the conforming of a human will to a divine will, is just the way humans are truly to *receive* the gift of divine redemptive love. Insofar as the discipline of philosophy becomes guided, in terms of its pursuits, by that gift on offer, it becomes kerygma-oriented in virtue of becoming an enabler of the aforementioned Good News message of Jesus.[11] According to Jesus, humans, including philosophers, were intended by God to live in faithful obedience to the divine love commands, whereby they enter into volitional fellowship with God and, on that basis, with others.

Many philosophers are very uneasy with Jesus, because he himself transcends any familiar, honorific discussion mode and demands that they do the same. Still, there's no suggestion here of being thoughtless, anti-intellectual, or unreasonable on the part of Jesus or his right-minded disciples. Philosophical discussion becomes advisable and permissible, under the divine love commands, if and only if it genuinely honors those commands by sincere compliance with them. Jesus calls people, in any case, to move beyond discussion to faithful obedience to his perfectly loving Father. He commands love from us toward God and others *beyond* discussion and the acquisition of truth, even philosophical truth. He thereby cleanses the temple of philosophy

[11] For elaboration on this approach to philosophy, see Moser, *The Elusive God*, chap. 4.

and turns over our self-crediting tables of mere philosophical discussion. He pronounces judgment on this long-standing self-made temple, in genuine love for its wayward builders. His corrective judgment purportedly brings us what humans truly need to flourish in lasting community with God and other humans, including philosophers: the demand of a life infused with faithful obedience of the heart to a perfectly loving Giver of love commands. At any rate, we can now see that Jesus bears significantly on philosophy as a discipline. This book's selections further clarify the bearing of Jesus on philosophy.

4. THE SELECTIONS

Craig A. Evans addresses two issues in his essay "Jesus: Sources of Self-Understanding." First, to which sources can we appeal to gain reliable historical information about Jesus? Second, what can we hope to learn about Jesus's self-understanding in these sources? Surveying Christian, Jewish, and pagan sources, Evans concludes that these sources point to the historical Jesus, to events of his life, and to a lasting impact on his followers. More specifically, Evans concludes that the New Testament (in particular, its Gospels) is the clearest and most precise source of evidence for learning of Jesus's self-understanding. By "self-understanding," Evans means not Jesus's psychological state or personality, but rather Jesus's appreciation of his role within the history of Israel and of his purpose in his life and his deliberate activities.

Evans argues that Jesus understood himself not merely as a prophet, but as a divinely ordained eschatological agent through whom God would enact the restoration of Israel according to divine rule. Furthermore, Evans argues that Jesus understood his death as the basis for a new covenant with Israel. Importantly, Evans distinguishes Jesus's self-understanding from later developments in Christology.

In "Sipping from the Cup of Wisdom," James Crenshaw examines the evolution of conceptions of deity in the Mesopotamian world up to the writings of the Gospels, with a special emphasis on the Wisdom traditions. Beginning with the idea of human beings created in the image of a deity, including covenantal relationships with such a deity (or deities), Crenshaw identifies a number of conflicting conceptions of humans' relationship to and knowledge of the divine. For example, how does one reconcile a god who destroys and punishes people with a god who shares in human concerns? In addition, how is one to understand the divine plans? Is God a mystery, or can we know something of God's desires? Questions of theodicy abound, and Crenshaw examines their influence on Jesus's teachings. Despite some tendencies to view God as distant and obscure in the ancient world, Crenshaw

concludes that the insights from Wisdom of Solomon and Neoplatonic views of immortality helped to influence the Gospel writers' understanding of Jesus as the divine word and to incorporate Jesus's death and call for universal love into a renewed concept of an anthropomorphized deity.

In "The Jesus of the Gospels and Philosophy," Luke Timothy Johnson considers four philosophically significant approaches to the reading of the Gospels. First, one can understand Jesus as a sage and thus situate him within the historical tradition of other philosophical wisdom sources (such as Socrates or Epictetus). Second, one can situate Jesus in the tradition of character ethics by emphasizing his role as a moral exemplar. Third, one can consider the mythic quality of Jesus, thus facilitating a rich discussion of ontological considerations involving his being considered divine and human, as well as capturing the historical-philosophical tradition and imagination surrounding this approach. Fourth, one can take a narrative approach to the Gospels in order to capture the epiphenomenal character of the Gospels as an art.

Johnson laments the reduction of Jesus scholarship to post-Enlightenment historical and empirical research, and instead argues for a robust commitment to each of the aforementioned approaches, with a special emphasis on the moral exemplar and ontological approaches. Given such a commitment and emphasis, according to Johnson, we can understand how radical both the event of Jesus (including his life, mission, and relationship with God) and the call for discipleship (especially in the transformative role of discipleship) were and are, and thus we can avoid partial (and possibly inaccurate) representations of Jesus and the loss of the central truth of the Gospels.

In "Paul, the Mind of Christ, and Philosophy," Paul W. Gooch proposes that an adequate understanding of the role of philosophy in the Christian faith tradition requires an appreciation of Paul's experiences and teachings on the mind of Christ. Gooch argues that we must understand Paul's putative rejection of philosophy contextually. Specifically, Paul's critique of philosophy and worldly wisdom in his letters to the Corinthian community, for example, are warnings against epistemological hubris and not, specifically, against natural theistic knowledge. Gooch's argument rests upon the premise that had not human beings *some* capacity for knowledge of God, then Paul's message to spread the good news of salvation to all – Gentiles and Jews alike – would be futile. Gooch affirms nonetheless that philosophy remains woefully inadequate for the requisite spiritual knowledge of revelation and divine purposes.

Gooch identifies an instrumental, indirect role for philosophy in the Pauline tradition. Beyond the message to be Christlike in one's activities (a message

that is not concerned solely with the activity of philosophy, but that applies universally to all human endeavors), Gooch argues that we need the rigor and resources of philosophy to engage and to reflect upon Christian beliefs, practices, and concepts. Paul did not shy away from raising metaphysical and epistemological questions concerning Christ and God, and philosophers now have the opportunity to take the mantle of trying to understand and elucidate key concepts in the attempt to know the mind of Christ. Gooch suggests that current philosophers have an advantage over Paul: as Paul sought to understand the mind of Christ through his revelatory experience, we now have both the mind of Jesus and the mind of Paul, as well as our predecessors' history, as resources to assist our seeking of the mind of Christ.

In "Jesus and Augustine," Gareth B. Matthews starts with the observation that problems concerning how words are learned initially, without reference to other words, can give rise to a theory of ostension. Even so, a problem of ambiguity plagues the view that language is acquired by ostension. Augustine, as Matthews explains, saw a solution to such problems of meaning in a theory of illumination implying that Christ is the Inner Teacher. Matthews argues that this theory can help underscore Augustine's theory of inner-life ethics as well.

Placing Augustine's ethical theory within the virtue ethics tradition, Matthews distinguishes Augustine's approach to the development of a virtuous character from Kantian and utilitarian approaches to ethics. The concept of a "complete sin" in Augustine's philosophy takes its roots in acts that have three parts: suggestion, pleasure, and consent, in keeping with Jesus's admonitions in the Sermon on the Mount about sins committed in one's heart. Having located sin not in the act but in its constitutive parts, however, Augustine must address the sins of the dreaming mind, for example, and any other situations where the acts are never consummated. Matthews points here to the special role of the Inner Teacher in fostering a virtuous character and suggests that Augustine's inner-life ethics, as inaugurated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, may be a fruitful approach to ethical theory.

In "Jesus and Aquinas," Brian Leftow argues for a significant, yet indirect, role for Christ in Thomas Aquinas's philosophy. Leftow takes as his starting point two fundamental premises that, when placed together, invite a Christian philosophy: first, that philosophy seeks truth, and second, that Jesus proclaimed, "I am the truth." In other words, if it is the job of philosophy to understand, explore, and expand upon knowledge in the realm of ultimate truth (that is, divine truth), and if God is the locus of such truth, then philosophers (knowingly or not) pursue divine truth.

Leftow contends that for Thomas, philosophy and faith don't just run parallel in pursuit of truth, but that faith, through revelation, completes the ascent toward truth where philosophy must fail. (Hence, we have the replacement of Aristotle's inadequate conception of God with the loving God as Father in Jesus.) Because, however, faith orients the questions philosophers pursue, philosophy still has a prominent role in explicating and comprehending the nature of the truths we are offered. Leftow draws a comparison between Thomas's method and the way that philosophers of science pursue scientific "facts": these philosophers begin with the data of science and provide philosophical explanations for them in the way that Thomas begins with revelation and provides philosophical explanations for the dicta of the faith. Leftow also explores Thomas's conceptions of human and divine singular reference in order to examine the complex relationship between God's knowledge of creation and God's causality. Leftow argues that Thomas understands God's causality in creation in a way that saves God's knowledge of evil without God's determination of evil, while saving human free agency and preventing God's knowledge of creation as dependent upon that creation.

In "The Epistemology of Jesus: An Initial Investigation," William Abraham identifies a number of problems surrounding the marriages between revelation and reason, theology and philosophy, and the divine and the human. Specifically, what, if anything, does Jesus have to do with epistemology? Attempts to incorporate the two present a particular paradox: if divine revelation dictates our epistemology, then we have no independent, nonarbitrary reasons for accepting one source of revelation over another. If, on the other hand, we allow reason to dictate our acceptance of revelation, we have placed the divine in the hands of the humane and the sacred in the hands of the profane.

Using Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah from Mark's Gospel as his primary example, Abraham's solution to this paradox is to acknowledge, first, that we cannot begin any pursuit – theological, philosophical, or quotidian – without a tacit acceptance of the reliability of our current epistemic functions. We thus rely upon memory, sense perception, intuitions, reasoning capabilities, and so on, to pursue any task. However, no sophisticated task ends by christening our basic epistemic framework. Rather, experiences and new beliefs about those experiences force upon us a reevaluation of those epistemic foundations, thus clarifying our existing knowledge and expanding on that knowledge, often on the insistence of revelation's authority (in the case of the epistemology of theology). Hence, we may understand Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah as founded on his antecedent beliefs about scripture, the redemption of Israel, and discipleship, as well as his natural

reasoning capacities, all of which were further clarified and amplified by the diachronic experience of conversion and relationship with Jesus. Abraham concludes that this binary relationship between human cognitive capacities and divine revelation preserves human free agency and responsibility in light of God's assistance to us and his offer of fellowship to us.

In "Paul Ricouer: A Biblical Philosopher on Jesus," David F. Ford offers a comprehensive analysis of the Ricoeurian project with regard to Jesus and philosophy, specifically, a biblical philosophy. Ford argues that Ricouer, as a Christian philosopher, explores "all things" that revolve around the axis of *Logos*. Thus, his work, unlike Karl Barth's, is not specifically theological or doctrinal, but it does complement Christology insofar as all truths relate, ultimately, to God. Armed with the Prologue of John's Gospel, Ford analyzes the transformative process of the Spirit that accompanies the ambitious hermeneutical task of uncovering, exploring, and upending the texts that reveal Jesus as the "how much more" of God.

The approach in question seeks to marshal all available rational resources for the interpretative work of understanding and engaging the manifold metaphors, hyperboles, parables, narratives, and symbols of the scriptures and the resulting tradition. Because the aim of this approach is not directly theological, apologetics and doctrinal exposition are not the primary goals, and so it remains a philosophical enterprise that employs other disciplines. Still, this distinguishes Ricoeur from other philosophers in the Western tradition who have sharply divided faith and reason. By using this approach, however, Ricoeur aims to raise the possibilities of understanding truth – and the fullness of Jesus – beyond simply conventional and secular ways.

In "Jesus and Forgiveness," Nicholas Wolterstorff begins by examining two assertions by Hannah Arendt: first, that forgiveness plays a central role in human action by undoing the seemingly irreversible past, and second, that Jesus was the original advocate of forgiveness, especially in light of the backdrop of pagan antiquity and Jewish law. Wolterstorff argues that Arendt is mistaken in her view of what forgiveness accomplishes. Instead of "undoing" the past, forgiveness, when properly conceived, reconciles the victim with the wrongdoer by bridging the gap that the evil committed by the wrongdoer created. This is achieved through an act of love by the victim, not through an act of punishment. Forgiveness does not *forget*, for this would be tantamount to ignoring a moral judgment of an act as evil. Rather, forgiveness *foregoes* both resentment against the person who committed evil and also any claim to retribution that might restore a just balance. In this way, forgiveness entails an active component of love by requiring not only that a wrongdoer is shown mercy, but that the victim *do good* to the wrongdoer. Still, according to

Wolterstorff, Arendt was correct to identify Jesus as the principal discoverer of forgiveness in human action, because these characteristics of forgiveness that eschew retributive justice are unique to his "ethic of love." To make this apparent, Wolterstorff juxtaposes Jesus's understanding of forgiveness with the punishment-laden conceptions of mercy, clemency, and forgiveness as found in pagan figures such as Aristotle and Seneca. Wolterstorff concludes that these other notions of forgiveness preclude reconciliation, a key concept that Jesus's notion of forgiveness embraces.

In "Jesus Christ and the Meaning of Life," Charles Taliaferro contrasts three different standpoints with reference to the meaning of life: Christian theism, secular naturalism, and Thereavada Buddhism. It is sensible, Taliaferro claims, to seek to understand how any one of these metaphysical standpoints shapes and impacts questions about our activities, purposes, values, and beliefs. Taliaferro finds that though there may be many points of intersection between these three positions, there are radically different implications derived from each of them. Specifically, belief in Jesus Christ has immense normative significance in how we view our activities insofar as such belief both deepens their value and heightens our awareness of life's meaning.

Our internal states, especially our intentions and desires, affect in a subjective way that which we consider meaningful in life. However, Christian belief adds an external reference (in particular, the reality of the goodness of creation as a result of a loving and good Creator) that indicates that life itself is intrinsically meaningful *and* meaningful for God's purposes. Taliaferro takes this to mean *not* that our activities are only meaningful instrumentally, but that our activities take on a deeper dimension and that we are capable of rejoicing in this heightened metaphysical awareness of that meaning. Furthermore, the redemption that is found in relationship with Christ now becomes an integral answer to questions of life's meaning. This redemption is an invitation to be part of the Body of Christ, which Taliaferro believes includes five basic elements: cognition, intentions, a rite, an affective identification, and charity. Thus, the meaningfulness of one's activities depends in large measure on how these elements support or deny being a member of the Body of Christ.