



## Evangelicalism and Philosophy

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### Introduction

I remember the day, some years ago, when I arrived on the doorstep of a rather large chalet, following many others to the small Alpine village of Huémoz, Switzerland. This tiny farming village is where L'Abri Fellowship has its home. When I got off the postal bus, after the long and arduous climb up the winding road, I met with a staff member and was welcomed into one of the L'Abri chalets for a period of study. Little did I know it then in 1980, but this day was to change the course of my life.

In the next days and weeks I discovered L'Abri was made up of a community of people from all over the world. Each student taking part in gardening, preparing meals, studying, attending prayer meetings, lectures and discussions. All these activities, combined with the intense interaction of a community life, had the aim of being something of a demonstration of the existence of God. In addition to the centrality of Christ, Christian worldview, Spirituality and so on, one of the pivotal things that was emphasized at L'Abri, contrary to much of the evangelical focus at the time, was the relevance of philosophical ideas for understanding God, ourselves, others, the world, and the cultures in which we live. Francis Schaeffer, who with his wife Edith started L'Abri, comments:

Christians have tended to despise the concept of philosophy. This has been one of the weaknesses of evangelical, orthodox Christianity - we have been proud in despising philosophy, and we have been exceedingly proud in despising the intellect.<sup>1)</sup>

This detachment from philosophy and the intellect did not only have harmful effects on the credibility of the evangelical community and the wider church,<sup>2)</sup> but it left evangelicals in a

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dilemma as to how to interact with people, especially the younger generation, in late modernism. According to Schaeffer, the significant philosophical questions of a pluralistic culture and the worldviews it comprised were largely ignored. Unfortunately, this perspective was prevalent in many evangelical seminaries, which equally tended to marginalize philosophy. Schaeffer writes:

Our theological seminaries hardly ever relate their theology to philosophy, and specifically to current philosophy. Thus, students go out from the theological seminaries not knowing how to relate Christianity to the surrounding worldview. It is not that they do not know the answers. My observation is that most students graduating from our theological seminaries do not know the questions.<sup>3)</sup>

Schaeffer was convinced that evangelicals and evangelical seminaries were short sighted here and he made every effort to broaden the vision. Christianity, Schaeffer argued, dealt with the whole of life, including the arts, music, literature and philosophy.<sup>4)</sup> He consistently reinforced with urgency the importance of having a grasp of the philosophical ideas that were influencing our generation and philosophy played a key role in his thought. Ronald Nash comments:

Philosophy plays a central role in the work of Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer recognized that important developments in philosophy had helped push modern man into his present predicament. .... It was Schaeffer's method then to look at the broad flow of philosophy and culture in the West, and to focus upon key thinkers at critical points where these problems were most apparent.<sup>5)</sup>

While Schaeffer was not a professional philosopher he contributed to preparing the way for many who were to take up such a vocation. He discussed the works of Nietzsche, Foucault, Wittgenstein, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Sartre and other influential thinkers seeing the necessity for Christians to interact with such philosophers and the issues they raised.<sup>6)</sup> Philosophical poverty, too often an evangelical trademark, diminished the credibility of the truth of Christianity. Schaeffer, among others,<sup>7)</sup> sowed the seeds for a renewed Christian interest in philosophy,<sup>8)</sup> which has now grown and developed in a dramatic fashion.

At present, I am a third generation staff member at L'Abri with a published doctoral thesis on the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. I believe, more strongly than ever, that evangelicals need a clear understanding of historical and contemporary philosophical thought if they are to meaningfully evaluate their tradition and challenge their culture for the sake of Christ.

The specific task of this chapter will be, firstly, to provide an overview of a striking resurgence of Christian involvement in philosophy in North America. Secondly, as we move into the twenty-first century, evangelicalism must continue to deal the currents and influences of modernism and postmodernism. In this second section, I shall trace out three core issues that are pivotal for the present and future of the evangelical faith and philosophy:

- i) the matter of the appropriate role of reason and evidence in belief in God.
- ii) the debate concerning realism and anti-realism, focusing on the discussion between the two philosophers Alvin Plantinga and Merold Westphal.
- iii) the problematic of the relation between theology and philosophy centering on Paul Ricoeur and Alvin Plantinga. This will be developed through a dialogue with two philosophically minded theologians, Kevin Vanhoozer and Craig Bartholomew, who have creatively attempted to clarify this issue.

Thirdly, I intend to outline a number of trajectories for future philosophical investigation.

### **1) The Resurgence of Christian Philosophy**

An extraordinary resurgence of a Christian interest in philosophy is taking place and evangelicals are participating in this flourishing. Alvin Plantinga points out that Christians have addressed several weighty issues and contributed significantly to philosophical discussions.<sup>9)</sup> He argues that the shining light in Christian philosophy is philosophical theology. Plantinga writes:

At present, this enterprise is faring rather well, perhaps even flourishing; the last few years have seen a remarkable flurry of activity in philosophical theology as pursued by Christian philosophers.<sup>10)</sup>

Christian insights in philosophy and philosophical theology are having massive implications in their own right: studies on the divine attributes, God's eternity and action in the world, the argument from evil and so on, but they equally open fresh opportunities for other disciplines such as history, literature, and Biblical interpretation. Evidence of this, from both the analytic and continental traditions, is found notably in the fecund work of A. C. Thiselton and Kevin Vanhoozer.<sup>11)</sup> While Plantinga recognizes there is further work to be done in philosophical theology, positive and negative apologetics, and Christian philosophical criticism,<sup>12)</sup> the current renaissance of a Christian concern for philosophy is extremely positive.

A powerful stimulus for this major change has been the founding by William Alston, Robert

and Marilyn Adams, Alvin Plantinga, Arthur Holmes and George Mavrodes of the Society of Christian Philosophers. Remarkably, this Society is the largest single interest group in the American Philosophical Association.<sup>13)</sup> In addition to the Society of Christian Philosophers, one should also take note of the Evangelical Philosophical Society and its scholarly journal *Philosophia Christi*, renewed academic rigor, articulate published works, university postings of Christians in philosophy and so on. These are vital signs that philosophy being done by Christians from a Christian point of view is experiencing renewed vigor in North America.<sup>14)</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, Alvin Plantinga, Merold Westphal, William Alston and many others have led the way to what has now become, in a relatively short period of time, a widespread phenomena: Christians are gaining respect for their philosophical positions and the cogency of their work calls for consideration in many philosophical debates.<sup>15)</sup>

This astonishing resurgence has been brought about by a diversity of factors, but analytic philosopher Alvin Plantinga has been recognized as one of its key figures.<sup>16)</sup> In his 1983 inaugural address at the University of Notre Dame, Plantinga challenged Christians in philosophy to take the offensive and to display more integrity. Among other things, this meant embracing a greater freedom from the agendas of secular philosophy and the forging of an independence that proclaimed the right to pursue philosophical questions from within a Christian framework.<sup>17)</sup>

Plantinga has done a tremendous amount to stem the tide of atheistic philosophy in establishing that belief in God can be rational and defensible.<sup>18)</sup> He has also significantly contributed to the growing collapse of the argument from evil, which attempted to deny the existence of a wholly good God on the basis of the existence of evil. Christianity, Plantinga declares, is on the move, not only in philosophy, but also in a variety of areas of intellectual endeavor. Evangelicals must take notice of such a progression, and in reliance on God, make every effort to shore up the resilience and attraction that evangelicalism desperately needs if it is to hope to have a significant impact on humanity.

## **2) Three Core Issues**

I shall now focus on three core philosophical issues for evangelicals. These issues are at the heart of the debate between modernism - postmodernism, and furthermore they are connected to the broader question of the relationship between faith and understanding.<sup>19)</sup>

### **i) The Role of Reason and Evidence in Belief in God.**

Questions concerning God's existence continue to be a 'consuming passion'<sup>20)</sup> for

philosophers, and especially for philosophers of religion in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The role of reason and evidence in responding to these queries is a highly significant epistemological issue for evangelicals. In the wake of the audacious proclamation of Friedrich Nietzsche with regards to the death of God, can belief in God be rational?

There have been several objections raised against belief in God: the statement that "God exists" is nonsense; a lack of internal consistency in the logic that God is a personal being; the argument from evil; and there is not enough evidence to be rational.<sup>21)</sup> In this section, my main concern is with the latter argument: rationality and evidence.

The evidentialist objection to belief in God is that it would always be wrong to believe anything without sufficient reasons or evidence. Some evangelicals agree and contend that belief in God requires arguments, reasons, evidential proofs to be rational.<sup>22)</sup> But others respond differently. Reformed epistemologists would disagree that arguments, reason, and evidential proofs are required for belief in God to be rational.<sup>23)</sup> As Kelly Clark points out, evangelical evidentialists have attempted to respond to the evidentialist objection by meeting its demands, while Reformed epistemology has chosen to question the credibility of such demands.<sup>24)</sup>

In response to the evidentialist objection that belief in God requires proof to be rational, R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner and Arthur Lindsley have argued that the theistic "proofs" must not just be respectable, but if they are to be worthy of belief they must prove that God exists.

But if proofs do not prove, it is unreasonable to believe them as arguments. To do so is to say with the mind, that they do not prove and with the will, that they do prove. This is usually what we call fideism rather than rationality.<sup>25)</sup>

These writers contend that if belief in the existence of God does not measure up to the requisite standards of proof it would be irrational to believe it. They attempt to offer proof against the evidentialist objector on the foundation of evidential certainty and therefore argue that belief in God is capable of being as rational and provable as those who claim it is not.<sup>26)</sup> In this case, the objector maintains, "not enough evidence to believe God exists, therefore if you believe you are not rational." This is challenged with the response, "of course there is plenty of evidence, even proof, to believe that God exists, therefore if I believe I am rational."

It is important to recognize that these views are representative of a form of foundationalism. In the Western world, since at least the Middle Ages, foundationalism has been the central

theory concerning how beliefs are to be ordered in a system of belief. A foundationalist asserts that we hold a series of basic beliefs and a series of non-basic beliefs. Non-basic beliefs require evidence if they are to be rationally accepted, while basic beliefs function as the foundation of the house of knowledge in that such beliefs are not dependent on other beliefs. But how can one be sure which beliefs are basic? In that there are a various forms of foundationalism (and disagreements within them), it becomes crucial to have greater certainty that the house of knowledge is based on a solid foundation. This position is often referred to as strong foundationalism.<sup>27)</sup> Jay Wood states:

Strong foundationalists severely restrict what can count as basic belief, what kind of support it lends to other beliefs we hold, and the manner in which this support is communicated to non-basic beliefs. They claim that the foundations of human knowledge must be unshakably certain and that the only way this certainty is transferred to non-basic beliefs is by the ordinary logical relations of deduction and induction.

A strong foundationalist demands that the foundation for belief in God be certain. Basic beliefs are those that are thought to be self-evident, self-evident to the senses and unmistakable, such as, 'I am alive' or 'I am in pain,' but not 'I believe that God exists.' As belief in God here is not self-evident to the senses and unmistakable, such a belief cannot be considered properly basic, and therefore it requires rational - evidential proofs in order to justify it becoming part of the house of knowledge. If belief in God is lacking such proofs it is assumed to be irrational.

An Enlightenment notion of evidentialism or rationality has been embraced by some evangelicals who attempt to meet the criteria for belief in God that evidentialist objectors such as, W. K. Clifford, Bertrand Russell and Antony Flew, have demanded.<sup>28)</sup> Enormous weight is placed on reason and the natural world in the attempt to prove that God exists. Peter Hicks states:

Throughout the history of evangelicalism, there has always been a tendency among thinking evangelicals to capitulate to the demands of the Enlightenment and to seek to justify their beliefs by the use of reason.<sup>29)</sup>

Many complex arguments or theistic proofs for God's existence have proliferated: the ontological, teleological, cosmological, and moral arguments as well as the argument from religious experience. Such a plethora of theistic proofs, however, brings with it even a fuller degree of complexity as each of these proofs or arguments is, in turn, a family of related but

different arguments.<sup>30)</sup>

With this proviso in mind let us briefly consider the Kalaam version of the cosmological argument.<sup>31)</sup> William Lane Craig states:

The argument is basically this: both philosophical reasoning and scientific evidence show that the universe began to exist. Anything that begins to exist must have a cause that brings it into being. So the universe must have a cause. Philosophical analysis reveals that such a cause must have several of the principal theistic attributes.<sup>32)</sup>

One of these central theological characteristics is formulated in the following manner. If anything begins to exist it has a cause. The universe has a cause in that God created it. It is more credible to believe this than to believe that the universe came into being uncaused, out of nothing. This is a simplified version, but it legitimately represents one form of the cosmological argument.<sup>33)</sup> In the minds of some evangelicals, if this or another type of theistic argument does not prove God's existence, it would be unreasonable to accept that God exists.<sup>34)</sup>

A second response to Enlightenment evidentialism is Reformed epistemology. Plantinga, Wolterstorff,<sup>35)</sup> and others challenge the necessity of evidential proofs for belief in God's existence to be rational. They propose a different perspective of rationality. Nicholas Wolterstorff, for example, argues:

A person is rationally justified in believing a certain proposition which he does believe unless he has adequate reason to cease from believing it. Our beliefs are rational unless we have reason from refraining; they are not nonrational unless we have reason *for* believing. They are innocent until proved guilty, not guilty until proved innocent.<sup>36)</sup>

A return to reason, in Reformed epistemology, means a refusal to let Enlightenment criteria decide what is required for belief in God to be rational.<sup>37)</sup> This view does not attempt to meet the standards of evidentialism, but in contrast questions the legitimacy of its demands. Belief in God, it is argued, does not need evidential proof to be rational. Wolterstorff comments:

Deeply embedded in the Reformed tradition is the conviction that a person's belief that God exists may be a justified belief even though that person has not inferred that belief from others of his beliefs which provide good evidence for it. ... We have to start somewhere! And the

Reformed tradition has insisted that the belief that God exists, that God is the Creator, etc., may justifiably be found there in the foundation of our system of beliefs. ... We are entitled to reason *from* our belief in God without having first reasoned *to* it<sup>38)</sup>

In addition to a different perspective of rationality, Reformed epistemology sets out to examine what beliefs may be considered properly basic beliefs in one's foundation. In accord with foundationalism Reformed epistemology accepts that one is rational to include basic beliefs that are self-evident, self-evident to the senses, and unmistakable in a belief structure, yet it disputes that it should only be restricted to these. Plantinga, for example, includes memory beliefs, testimony beliefs, and belief in God. These sorts of beliefs, he contends, are basic beliefs in that they are not dependent on reason, evidence or other beliefs.<sup>39)</sup>

Plantinga and Wolterstorff, along with C. Stephen Evans, Kelly James Clark, and Stephen Davis have produced insightful and detailed work on the problematics raised in this section.<sup>40)</sup> Reformed epistemology with its different definition of rationality and its refiguring of the notion of properly basic beliefs is funding much of the epistemological discussion today. In this view, it is not wrong to attempt to give reasons or evidence for belief in the existence of God, but these are not necessary for one's belief in God to be considered rational. There is no interest in attempting to prove God's existence on the basis of reason or evidence, yet those who hold this epistemology forcefully maintain that God exists and that belief in God is rational.

The question of belief in God and the role of reason and evidence in such belief remain acute matters for philosophical investigation in our times. Have evangelicals too often drunk from the intoxicating well of the Enlightenment? If Enlightenment criteria and assumptions are now fading or have failed, it may indeed be the moment for evangelicals to reassess their epistemology. In contrast to a succession of barricades, which too often characterize our evangelical heritage, the aim of reassessment should be serious dialogue with the hope of coming to fecund conclusions for the Christian faith.

#### ii) Realism versus Anti-Realism.

As Plantinga has noted, this is an important issue for Christians in philosophy.<sup>41)</sup> Realism and anti-realism are philosophical positions directly connected to the understanding and shaping of one's world-view. When we make a statement about the world are we speaking of the real world outside of us or merely using language to construct a world, which is dependent on human interaction?<sup>42)</sup> This controversy is clearly linked to other domains of inquiry, such as metaphysics, epistemology and language, but my aim is to present this philosophical issue in



the context of the question of our relation to the world.

Immanuel Kant, a prolific philosopher of the modern period, may still be one of the most influential and thought provoking participants in this discussion.<sup>43)</sup> The philosophy of Kant is extremely complex, yet I believe it is possible to draw some basic conclusions that pertain to this issue. Kant, is seen by some, as attempting to have the best, or the worst as the case may be, of two worlds. That is, by the time of Kant, the empiricism of David Hume had brought a significant challenge to a rationalist approach and through Hume's trajectory Kant was awakened to what he envisioned as new possibilities for philosophy.<sup>44)</sup> This jolt is referred to by Kant as a Copernican Revolution. What was it? Basically, Kant found himself in agreement with the rationalist notion that knowledge related to concepts formed by the mind, while at the same time he held that knowledge came from the senses.

What does this have to do with the question of the world and our access to it? Kant, as some propose, divided the world in two: the noumenal, which is the realm of things in themselves and the phenomenal, which is the world as we experience it in terms of categories we impose on it. The latter world is the world we are restricted to having knowledge about. J. Andrew Kirk puts it this way:

The dilemma began when the culture in general accepted (following the arguments of Hume and Kant) that intellectual probity necessitated the assumption that the uniformity of natural causes required a closed-order universe. The dilemma is acute. No longer is there a sufficient reason for believing with certainty that anything exists, or that there is an adequate correlation between the observer (subject) and the thing observed (object)...<sup>45)</sup>

The radical post-Kantian question, highlighted by many a postmodernist is the following: can one access the world as it is? As Kirk has pointed out above, there is a dilemma with regard to the object / subject interface. Christian philosophers continue to wrestle with these Kantian or reality types of questions. I shall briefly examine two responses to Kant. Alvin Plantinga, the analytic philosopher, claims that Kant's idea of creative anti-realism in the first *Critique* is "incompatible with Christianity."<sup>46)</sup> A realist perspective assumes that our access to the world must conform to objects and not vice-versa. Plantinga points out:

But the fundamental *thrust* of Kant's self-styled Copernican Revolution is that things in the world owe their basic structure and perhaps their very existence to the noetic activity of our minds.<sup>47)</sup>

Plantinga is highly suspect of anything profitable coming from the Kantian notion of creative anti-realism. He seems to argue that we either perceive the world as it is, or that we create it as it appears, and if the latter is the case, there is no connection between the noumenal and the phenomenal. On this second scenario of creating the world, the result would be that the things in the world owe their existence to the subject. Plantinga's interface of object and subject suggests there is only one world, that is, the world that the subject sees, is the world as it is.

On the other hand, Merold Westphal, who is a more continental type of philosopher, argues that creative anti-realism is to be defended and that Christian philosophers should be favorably inclined to Kantian idealism.<sup>48)</sup> Westphal suggests that Plantinga may have under-read Kant, arguing that there are "four types of Kantianism"<sup>49)</sup> only one of which contains a negative humanist orientation which would be pejorative for a Christian point of view.

In his discussion of Kant, Westphal uses the example of the difference between watching a black and white TV and seeing the real color of something in the TV studio. He wishes to make the point that Kant sees the mind as a "receiving apparatus" whose "spontaneity" allows things to appear in a particular way, whether they are this way or not. This, in Westphal's view, should not be understood as two worlds, but rather as two modes of a subject seeing the same object. If this is the case, the object remains what it is even though the receiving apparatus may modify it and Kant's position, Westphal argues, is more closely represented by this type of realism.<sup>50)</sup>

How are we to understand these two Christian responses to Kant? What type of people are human beings and what sort of world is it that we live in? These questions are at the heart of the Christian faith. Plantinga seems to make the relation between the world and our access to it exactly the same, while Westphal aims to defend the distinction. That is, he is more concerned with our "receiving apparatus" which may in fact, he contends, not receive things exactly the same way they actually are in the world.

Both these views concerning this arduous question, from a Christian perspective, seem to have valid points. Thus, I suggest the appropriateness of a configuration which respects *both* the relation and the distinction of the object/subject interface. There is indeed a complexity in tension that cannot be resolved by opting for *either* relation *or* distinction alone. Furthermore, it may be an opportune time for evangelicals in philosophy to acknowledge, to a greater degree, a place for human subjectivity with respect to the object/subject relation and distinction, without however, capitulating to modes of subjectivity that seek to remove or deny any objectivity whatsoever.

In my view, evangelicals who work in philosophy cannot ignore Kant and are obliged to further interact with his work, especially the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is not to say that one must be overly pre-occupied with Kant, but only to argue that this crucial debate needs further illumination if we are to come to increasingly fecund and clear conclusions. A greater precision in the understanding of whether we are talking about reality or knowledge, and what we mean when we use the terms realism and creative anti-realism will prove, I believe, profoundly useful for a Christian understanding of God, self and world.

iii) Philosophy versus Theology.

The relationship between philosophy and theology has long been a debated issue. How are we to configure this relation? This is a massive and complex question, impossible to do full justice to here, yet it is important to bring some elements of a response into light. I shall first explore the views of two contemporary philosophers: Paul Ricoeur<sup>51)</sup> and Alvin Plantinga.<sup>52)</sup> Ricoeur and Plantinga are post-modern: both are aware, in their own ways, of the pitfalls of classical - strong foundationalism. These philosophers, Plantinga the evangelical, and Ricoeur not, both merit a close reading.<sup>53)</sup> Evangelicals in philosophy, or theology for that matter, have much to learn from them as they each offer, in the twilight of modernism,<sup>54)</sup> something of a way forward to a truly post-modern philosophy.

Plantinga and Ricoeur are opposed to any notion of a Cartesian self-authenticating self and steer clear of modernist forms of postmodernism. Ricoeur has been extremely sensitive about meshing together his philosophical work and his theological beliefs and understandings, although he readily admits some effects of the latter on the former.<sup>55)</sup> Plantinga is much less cautious in this area and deliberately acknowledges Christian presuppositions as classifying and influencing his philosophical work. Plantinga, the philosopher of religion, attempts to relate theology to philosophy, and dares to articulate a *Christian* philosophy, whereas Ricoeur, the philosopher, strives to keep the two distinct and would be reluctant to embrace any notion of *Christian* philosophy, as for him, this would amount to something like a round square.<sup>56)</sup>

Plantinga lacks no zeal, and rightly so, in reminding Christian philosophers that they need not be favorably disposed to non-believing philosophies and that theologians and biblical scholars should not see themselves as indebted to the ideas and projects of unbelievers. Plantinga's work has clearly had a tremendous influence on philosophers and the philosophy of religion, especially in North America. The resurgence of philosophical inquiry in the evangelical and wider Christian community is to be applauded and Plantinga is to be given due credit for his

outstanding contribution in making this venture philosophically credible and convincing.<sup>57)</sup>

Ricoeur is heralded as one of the most important and versatile philosophers of the twentieth century. He attempts to avoid the accusation of crypto-theologizing<sup>58)</sup> his philosophical work, yet his hermeneutically centered philosophy is theologically sensitive. Ricoeur's notion of philosophy is that it is basically an anthropology. In his perspective there is a difference between solving a question posed or responding to a call.<sup>59)</sup> One may speak of law, conscience, guilt and so on in philosophy, although in Ricoeur's view, neither love nor the confession of sin for example, are philosophical ways of speaking as both go beyond the limits of philosophical inquiry.

How shall we evaluate the views of these two philosophers? Ricoeur seems to begin with philosophy, recognize its limits and then turns to theology. Does he leave the two too far apart? Plantinga, on the other hand, seems to begin with theology, and from this, work out his philosophy.<sup>60)</sup> Does he too quickly integrate the two? The questions concerning Ricoeur's distance and Plantinga's integration are not intended to be rhetorical, but inquisitive.

With these questions in mind, I shall now examine the perspective of two theologians, Kevin Vanhoozer and Craig Bartholomew, who are both well attuned to the importance of philosophy. In his recent treatment of the subject Bartholomew is concerned with the question of whether recent formulations of theological hermeneutics have sufficiently taken philosophy into account.<sup>61)</sup> While he *affirms* these new formulations of a theological orientation, the pressing *question* of the relationship between philosophy and theology remains. I concur with Bartholomew's endorsement and with his query.

The complexity of this issue has also been explored by Kevin Vanhoozer.<sup>62)</sup> In putting forward what he terms a Chalcedonian view of the relationship, Vanhoozer argues for the individual integrity, the relative autonomy and the mutual accountability of philosophy and theology. Bartholomew, in dialogue with Vanhoozer, grants that precision on this problematic is difficult, but he remains cautious about Vanhoozer's framing of Christ (theology) and concept (philosophy). The concern, for Bartholomew, is that there seems to be a residue of the modernist distinction between philosophy and theology that is "somewhat restlessly present throughout" Vanhoozer's point of view, although Vanhoozer is careful to relate the two.<sup>63)</sup>

Bartholomew proposes an intriguing and valuable modified typology for elucidating the relationship between philosophy and theology. His query with some formulations of theological hermeneutics seems to be the unwitting or deliberate emphasis on keeping the two apart.

Bartholomew's useful typology, which he readily admits is tentative, aims to integrate the two through an appeal to Christ as the *clue* to philosophy and theology. A Christian hermeneutic, he argues, is to be viewed as faith seeking understanding in both spheres of research.<sup>64)</sup>

This proposal points us in a helpful direction, yet my concern is whether it relates theology and philosophy<sup>65)</sup> in such a manner that it leaves little room to continue to *really* view them as distinct. If Christ is the *clue* to philosophy how does philosophy remain distinct from theology?<sup>66)</sup> The suggestion that Vanhoozer has been modernist in leaving philosophy and theology too distinct is countered by Bartholomew in more expressly relating the two. Does this proposal equally result in a modernist configuration in that it moves awfully close to dissolving a tension through seeing philosophy and theology as too related? If this is the case, Bartholomew's point of view seeks to perhaps resolve a tension of relation and distinction that should be embraced and left intact.

The principal difference between Bartholomew and Vanhoozer can be summed up in the following way. Bartholomew's theological orientation of relating philosophy and theology seems to promote an interaction with philosophy for the purpose of assessing its negative impact on theology. He rightly wants theology to be better able to critique anti-Christian philosophies, but to do so theology has to be more aware of how it may be pejoratively influenced by such points of view. Vanhoozer's relation and distinction of philosophy and theology on the other hand, seems willing not only to assess a potential negative impact, but also to rightly affirm the possibility that philosophy might make a positive contribution to and offer a critique of theology.<sup>67)</sup>

My main concerns are the following. If these two disciplines are too related is there a real possibility for one to offer the other a contribution or critique? Does relating philosophy and theology together too rapidly, in a unrestricted union, suggest a modernist underplay of a dialogue in tension? Should our aim be to preserve a place for philosophy to assert a relative autonomy for the sake of offering an affirmation / critique to theology, while at the same time to equally hold on to theology's task of providing the same for philosophy?

In conclusion, I would argue that as we move into the future evangelicals should aim to avoid unnecessary polarizations (realism and anti-realism; philosophy and theology) where they are not called for. This is not, in general, to propose a form of synthesis, nor to discount that some key issues will rightly remain in opposition, but only to suggest that discovering a relation and distinction perspective on some issues, as Evans notes,<sup>68)</sup> in acknowledging a tension-filled alliance, may bring us closer to Christian truth.

### 3) Trajectories for the Future

Any attempt to sketch out lines for the future may prove problematic, yet it is necessary for Christian philosophers to be aware of a number of topics that require attention. Several other issues, in addition to those already addressed, may prove worthwhile to investigate.

Plantinga has given us an excellent overview of the current state and future concerns of Christian philosophy.<sup>69)</sup> His assessment is that Christian philosophers have done fairly well in a variety of areas, but that there is more work to be done. Pluralism, in Plantinga's opinion, will be a major question that must be addressed. He also posits that there are a diversity of positive arguments for the Christian position that should be developed and that theistic arguments are in need of greater development. Other concerns would be a vibrant cultural criticism, and a deepening philosophical theology, where major Christian doctrines are examined and better understood for the Christian community.

Plantinga has also declared that perennial naturalism and creative anti-realism are the "hydra heads" that have arisen in the wake of the demise of logical positivism. He argues that each is pervasive in its own way, and it is essential for Christian philosophers to pay close attention as to how they infiltrate Christian thought in negative ways.<sup>70)</sup>

In addition to the issues mentioned by Plantinga, others may also be relevant and merit further reflection. The philosophy of language remains an important subject.<sup>71)</sup> There has been some, but not enough work done here. Wolterstorff,<sup>72)</sup> Thiselton<sup>73)</sup> and others<sup>74)</sup> have explored the potential of speech act theory and produced excellent contributions. As the residues of positivism fade and postmodern queries proliferate, Christians have a new opportunity to join in and contribute to, a theory of language.<sup>75)</sup>

In light of the collapsing foundations of modernism the role of communicating the gospel may become more acutely significant. What are Christian modes of communication in a postmodern world? How might philosophers help in moving us from the more abstract to insightful and practical ways of communicating the truth of the Christian worldview? A practical philosophy, not only related to thinking but living, is essential.

A pertinent question, closely connected to our three core issues above, is the relationship between faith and understanding. Faith seeking understanding and understanding seeking faith? Philosopher Paul Helm has recently investigated this relationship and made a fine contribution

to moving us further along.<sup>76)</sup> Where, when and how do we begin? In my view, this pivotal issue deserves more reflection. The statement, 'faith seeking understanding' seems to be frequently cited in Christian contexts, but not always with a great deal of focus and clarity.

Another problematic deserves further research. Since at least the era of Augustine, the issue concerning God and time has produced a diversity of questions. How are God and time to be thought of? Are we to think of God as outside time, in time, or both at the same time? What is time? Who is God in connection to time? These types of questions have begun to draw more widespread consideration. Ricoeur has produced a fascinating and insightful study on temporality and narrative.<sup>77)</sup> He also has argued that if we are going to understand something of time and of God, it is essential to examine the biblical text in its narrative and other forms.<sup>78)</sup> Evangelicals can certainly benefit from Ricoeur's investigations. Other recent work has much to commend it,<sup>79)</sup> but there is more that could be done to address these questions.

The philosophical issues mentioned here, along with others, merit hard and careful thinking at a multiplicity of levels. If evangelicals in philosophy are to continue on the road towards credibility there is a crucial need to face the many challenges ahead. In order to participate in the hope of renewing a thirst for the living God and a living spirituality that touches the whole of life, Christian philosophers must not only track, but also trace their culture, leaving an imprint for others to take notice that the God of Scripture is there and that Christianity is true.

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- 1) Schaeffer, I, 1982, 297.
- 2) Noll 1994. In this insightful work, Noll critiques Christians for similar reasons.
- 3) Schaeffer, I, 1982, 297 and see also 152.
- 4) Schaeffer, published books on philosophy, art, ecology, spirituality, ecclesiology, apologetics, and ethics. See, Erickson, 1998: 63-80, for a discussion on Schaeffer and postmodernism. See also, Naugle, 2002: 29-31, for a positive assessment of Schaeffer's contribution.
- 5) Nash, 1986, 53.
- 6) Schaeffer, I-V, 1982.
- 7) G. H. Clark, 1952. Holmes, 1977.
- 8) Walls, 1994: 107.
- 9) Plantinga, 1995: 29-53. Also, in Sennett, 1998: 328-352. See also, Noll, 1994: 233-239.
- 10) Plantinga, 1998: 340.
- 11) Thiselton, 1992 and Vanhoozer, 1998, whose influences include Gadamer and Ricoeur.
- 12) Plantinga, 1998: 328-352
- 13) Clark, 1993: 9.
- 14) At present, regrettably, there are no similar movements in Britain or continental Europe.
- 15) See about note from Craig and Robin.
- 16) Sennett, 1998: xiv.
- 17) Plantinga, 1984: 253-271. Also in Sennett, 1998: 296-315.
- 18) Plantinga, 1993, 2000.
- 19) Helm, 1997. Evans, 1998. S.T. Davis, 1997, have, in various ways, dealt with this larger question.
- 20) Davis, 1997: x.
- 21) Plantinga, 1998: 102-161.
- 22) Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, 1984. Geisler, 1976. In contrast, Mercer, 1995: 319-338, calls for evangelicalism to shed its rationalistic-modernist framing and become 'post-evangelical.' Also see Tomlinson, 1995; Hilborn, 1997: 56-73, for a discussion of this topic.
- 23) Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds., 1983.
- 24) K. J. Clark, 1990: 46-54.
- 25) Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, 1984: 122-123
- 26) Ibid., 100.
- 27) Wood, 1998: 77-104, for a description of strong foundationalism. See also, Wolterstorff, 1976, 1984, 2nd ed., for an illuminating discussion on the problems with foundationalism.
- 28) Clifford, 1879. Russell, 1957. Flew, 1976.
- 29) Hicks, 1998: 102.
- 30) For a fuller discussion of the perplexity see, Davis, 1997 and Geisler, 1974.
- 31) A more detailed presentation of the cosmological argument can be found in Davis, 1997: 60-77; Clark, 1990: 17-26 and C. S. Evans, 1982: 50-59.
- 32) See Craig, 1994, 77-125, esp. 92 for more detail.
- 33) Geisler, 1974: 190-226 and 1976: 238-239, who presents this argument in bullet form.
- 34) Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, 1984. See also, Geisler, 1976.
- 35) Plantinga, 2000: 247-251; 1998: 328-352, and Wolterstorff, 2001, trace their roots back through Kuyper and Dooyeweerd to Reid and Calvin.
- 36) Wolterstorff, 1983: 163. (Emphasis his).
- 37) See Clark, 1990: 123ff. Wolterstorff, 1984.
- 38) Wolterstorff, 1992: 149. (Emphasis his).
- 39) Plantinga, 1998: 102-161.
- 40) Plantinga, 2000; Wolterstorff, 1984; Evans, 1982 and 1998; Clark, 1990; Davis, 1997.
- 41) Plantinga, 1998: 328-352.
- 42) Kirk and Vanhoozer, 1999: 18-34, have an excellent discussion of the realism / antirealism debate.
- 43) Kant, 1929.

- 44) See Scruton, 1982: for a helpful introduction to Kant.
- 45) Kirk, 1999: 170.
- 46) Plantinga, 1998: 331
- 47) Plantinga, 2001: 129, emphasis his.
- 48) Westphal, 1993: 162.
- 49) Ibid., 163, for the detailed argument.
- 50) Ibid., 166.
- 51) See Laughery, 2002, for a full and detailed account of Ricoeur's work on biblical hermeneutics in the context of modernism and postmodernism.
- 52) Noll, 1994: 235, points out the radical resurgence of an evangelical interest in philosophy in North America is largely due to the fecund influence of those connected to the Dutch reformed heritage. Two of the leading contributors to this renewal are A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff.
- 53) Recent works by Plantinga include 1993, 2000, Ricoeur, 1984-1987; 1991; 1992; 1998.
- 54) Green, 2000: 25.
- 55) Ricoeur, 1990: translation 1992: 24.
- 56) Ricoeur, 1992: 39-40.
- 57) See section 1, 'The Resurgence of Christian Philosophy' above.
- 58) Ricoeur, 1990: translation, 1992: 24.
- 59) Ricoeur, 1990: translation, 1992: 23-25 and 1992: 39.
- 60) Plantinga, 1998: 146-147, suggests following Reformed thinkers and starting with God.
- 61) Bartholomew, 2000: 1-39, presents this in a concise and fecund manner.
- 62) Vanhoozer, 1991: 99-145.
- 63) Bartholomew, 2000: 1-39, esp. 31. In my reading of Vanhoozer's proposal he is careful to attempt to address both the 'distinctness' and 'relatedness' of theology and philosophy.
- 64) We have no space here to enter into the fascinating and crucially important debate concerning faith seeking understanding. Where do we really begin? See section 3 'Trajectories for the future' below.
- 65) Bartholomew refers to Milbank, 1999: 23-24. See also Milbank 1999: 32 and footnote, 49, which offers another argument along these lines. He points out that philosophy cannot give an account of being human on its own. 'Theologyca evaluate philosophy.' While this is true, I would wager the reverse may also, at least in some contexts, have a role: Philosophy can also evaluate theology.
- 66) Following Newbigin, Bartholomew, (2000: 33-34) writes that Christ is the clue to all creation. In my view, theologically, the Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, is its clue.
- 67) This may be closer to Bartholomew's (2000: 32) notion of 'double truth' where, I would say, *differen* not always conflicting views 'sit in uneasy tension.'
- 68) Evans, 1982: 25.
- 69) Plantinga, 1995: 29-53. Also in Sennett, 1998: 328-352.
- 70) Ibid., 1998: 328-335.
- 71) Laughery, 2001-2: 171-194.
- 72) Wolterstorff, 1995.
- 73) Thiselton, 1992.
- 74) Bartholomew, Greene and Möller, eds., 2001-2, has some excellent contributions. See also, Vanhoozer, 1998.
- 75) Bartholomew, Greene and Möller, eds., 2001-2.
- 76) Helm, 1997.
- 77) Ricoeur, 1983-1985: trans. 1984-1987.
- 78) Ricoeur, 1985. Also in Wallace, 1995: 167-180.
- 79) Ganssle, ed., 2001: Helm, Padgett, Craig, Wolterstorff. See the helpful bibliographical listings in this book, 24-27.