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## Defending the Handmaid: How Theology Needs Philosophy

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Some of this material was presented at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Defend Conference (2018 plenary, 2023 breakout). It has indeed been an honor and a privilege to be a part of this conference over the past few years. I cannot thank Dr. Bob Stewart enough for allowing me to be a part of the tremendous ministry he has had at NOBTS. Dr. Stewart is not only an accomplished philosopher and apologist, but also a Christlike and virtuous human being. Thanks, Bob, for allowing God to touch my life through you!

### Prolegomena

#### Studying Philosophy

My experiences as a graduate and doctoral student of philosophy as well as a professor of philosophy and apologetics have given me opportunities to view a range of attitudes among my Christian friends regarding philosophy. Some were curious what one could do with a degree in philosophy, perhaps stemming from innocence about exactly what philosophy was. Others recounted their own unpleasant experience slogging through a philosophy class in college. Still other reactions ranged from suspicion (isn't philosophy the problem?) to outright hostility (philosophy is definitely an enemy!). Why would a seminary, designed to prepare men and women for ministry, need to have philosophy in any of its curricula? What need is there for this handmaid?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The handmaid (or handmaiden) imagery goes back at least as far as Philo in his treatment of Sarah's relationship to Abraham. Philo who uses the imagery specifically for "the intermediate instruction of the intermediate and encyclical branches of knowledge" in its service of the virtue of wisdom. [Philo, "On Mat- ing with the Preliminary Studies." [De Congressu Quarendae Eruditionis Gratia] in *The Works of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers,

## Isn't Philosophy an Enemy?

These latter reactions are undoubtedly the same at heart. More than once I was reminded of the Apostle Paul's warning in Col 2:8, where he tells us to "beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."<sup>2</sup> After all, one might say, what else might one make of Paul's admonition? According to them Paul is warning that philosophy is at the root of many of the ideas opposed to Christianity. Clearly, he is telling us to stay away from it.

Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that the common interpretation of this passage is correct.<sup>3</sup> Even given this interpretation,

1993), 304-320 (305). See also: Albert Henrichs, "Philosophy, the Handmaiden of Theology," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 437-450 and David C. Lindberg, "The Medieval Church Encounters the Classical Tradition: Saint Augustine, Roger Bacon, and the Handmaiden Metaphor," in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7-32. Thomas Aquinas uses the term when quoting Prov. 9:3 "Other sciences are called the handmaidens of this one: 'Wisdom sent her maids to invite to the tower'" [Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, Q1, art. 5, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981), vol. 1, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> I think it is unlikely that Paul was thinking of philosophy as the discipline we understand it to be today. Instead, the context suggests that Paul was warning the Colossians about an insidious legalism that threatened their liberty in Christ. Regarding the grammar of Col. 2:8, Henry Alford notes, "The absence of the article before  $\kappa\epsilon\nu\tilde{\eta}\varsigma$  shews the  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  to be epexegetical, and the same thing to be meant by the two." This suggests a translation as "the philosophy which is vain deceit." Alford continues, "This being so, it may be better to give the  $\tau\tilde{\eta}\varsigma$  the possessive sense, the better to mark that it is not all philosophy which the Apostle is here blaming." [Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 3, *Galatians - Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 218.] Alford goes on to observe, "The  $\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\sigma\phi.$  is not necessarily Greek ... As De W. observes, Josephus calls the doctrine of the Jewish sects philosophy: Antt. xviii, 2, 1." [Alford, 218] The citation to Josephus is incorrect. It should be 1, 2 instead of 2, 1. Josephus says, "The Jews had for a great while three sects of philosophy peculiar to themselves; the sect of the Essens [sic], and the sect of the Sadducees, and the third sort of opinions called Pharisees." [Josephus: *Complete Works* "Antiquities of the Jews," trans. William Whiston, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960), XVIII, 1, 1, p. 376] The De W. Alford mentions is Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780-1849). Alford's

I take a cue from a physician friend of mine. As a specialist in infectious diseases, he sounds the alarm about the dangers of such diseases. Being that these diseases are quite dangerous to health and even life itself, they are not to be trifled with. Instead, they should be avoided at all costs. But notice that my physician friend did not himself avoid such diseases at all costs. Indeed, he spent quite a bit of time, effort, and resources mastering the knowledge of them. He did this for two important reasons. He wanted to be able to help others avoid being infected by these diseases; and he wanted to help cure those who were already infected. As such, the greater danger would be if no one ever sought to understand and combat these diseases. Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to these kinds of dangers.

By analogy, even if Paul was warning us that philosophy poses a great danger to our spiritual health, it does not follow that no Christian should seek to understand it. At the very least, it would seem that some Christians need to understand philosophy enough either to help other Christians avoid being “infected” by toxic ideas or, having already been infected, to help them be “cured.” As C. S. Lewis observed, “Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.”<sup>4</sup> Lewis’s advice echoes that of Thomas Aquinas who said, “But seeing that a teacher of sacred Scripture must at times oppose the philoso-

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reference is to de Wette’s *Exegetisches Handbuch: Eph., Phil., Col., Philem.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leipzig 1847).

A. S. Peake makes the same argument that Paul is not repudiating philosophy. He argues, “The second noun [deceit] is explanatory of the first, as is shown by the absence of the article and preposition before it and the lack of any indication that Paul had two evils to attack. The meaning is ‘his philosophy, which is vain deceit.’ The word has, of course, no reference to Greek philosophy, and probably none to the allegorical method of Scripture exegesis that the false teachers may have employed. Philo uses it of the law of Judaism, and Josephus of the three Jewish sects. Here, no doubt, it means just the false teaching that threatened to undermine the faith of the Church. There is no condemnation of philosophy in itself, but simply of the empty but plausible sham that went by that name at Colossae” [A. S. Peake, “The Epistle to the Colossians” in W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 3, “Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians” (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 521-522].

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Learning in War-Time” in *The Weight of Glory: A Collection of Lewis’s Most Moving Addresses* (London: Harper Collins, 2013), 59.

phers, it is necessary for him to make use of philosophy.”<sup>5</sup> Norman L. Geisler summed it up well when he said, “We cannot properly beware of philosophy unless we be aware of philosophy.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, even if Paul’s words are to be taken as an admonition to avoid philosophy, there remains the need for some among us to delve into its subject matter.

Hence, we have at least one task for which philosophy is needed for theology. Answering certain philosophical objections to Christianity might very well require an appeal to philosophy itself. In saying this, I am not suggesting that other disciplines are irrelevant. Undoubtedly the biblical scholar is aided by, for example, the archeologist who confirms the Bible’s historical reliability. Examples from other disciplines are numerous. I contend that there are aspects of Christian truth that also unavoidably involve philosophy. What that role for philosophy will look like will depend upon one’s philosophical orientation. No Christian philosopher would be satisfied with just any philosophical approach. There are, to be sure, appreciable differences among Christian philosophers as to what constitutes sound philosophy. But it would not be necessary for me to take sides in order to prove that theology needs philosophy of some sort in some way.

### Voices from History

At the risk of seeming to commit the fallacy of appeal to authority, I should like to begin my defense of philosophy by showing that this view is not without its precedence. A number of luminaries from church history have extolled the benefits philosophy affords Christian thinking. The Church Father Clement of Alexandria (150-215) remarked, “There is then in philosophy, though stolen as the fire by Prometheus, a slender spark, capable of being fanned into flame, a trace of wisdom and an impulse from God.”<sup>7</sup> Augustine (354-430) urged, “Moreover, if those who

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, Q. 2, art. 3.6, published as *Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I-IV of His Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987), p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> Norman L. Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42/1 (March 1999): 3-19 (18).

<sup>7</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, I, 17, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02101.htm>, accessed 02/23/24. For an examination of Clement’s use of philosophy, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *Clement’s Use of Aristotle: The Aristotelian*

are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said aught that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it.”<sup>8</sup> The reader will perhaps recognize the all-truth-is-God’s-truth sentiment here.

Skipping later in church history, the Augustinian Canon Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562), who defected to the Protestants very early on, argued:

With such words [from Col 2:8] he seems to frighten Christians away from the study of philosophy. But I am sure that if you properly grasp the meaning of the Apostle’s statement you will not be disturbed. Since true philosophy derives from the knowledge of created things, and from these propositions reaches many conclusions about the justice and righteousness that God implanted naturally in human minds, it cannot therefore rightly be criticized: for it is the work of God, and could not be enjoyed by us without his special contribution.<sup>9</sup>

In recognizing that, even in our fallenness, humans are still able to discover truth, John Calvin (1509-1564) observed, “Therefore in reading the profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator.”<sup>10</sup> More to the point, Calvin admonished, “But if the Lord has been pleased to assist us by the works and ministry of the ungodly in physics, dialectics [i.e., the method of philosophy], mathematics, and other similar sciences, let us avail ourselves of it, lest, by neglecting the gifts of God spontaneously offered to us, we be justly

*Contribution to Clement of Alexandria’s Refutation of Gnosticism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. from *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Book 2, Chap. 40, §60. From <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/ddc2.html>, accessed 02/12/15.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Introduction to the Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Philosophical Works: On the Relation of Philosophy to Theology*. This is vol. 4 of *The Peter Martyr Vermigli Library*, trans. and ed. Joseph C. McLelland (Moscow: The Davenant Press, 2018), 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 2.2.15, vol. 1, pp. 236.

punished for our sloth.”<sup>11</sup> Lest the mention of dialectics was not clear enough, Calvin adds, “Shall we say that the philosophers, in their exquisite researches and skillful description of nature were blind? ... Nay, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without the highest admiration.”<sup>12</sup> Many other voices whose opinions cannot lightly be dismissed include John Owen (1616-1683), Francis Turretin (1623-1687), Stephen Charnock (1628-1680), Charles Hodge (1797-1878), and James Petigru Boyce (1827-1888).<sup>13</sup> The list would certainly become unwieldy in citing the many contemporary evangelical philosophers among us.

Of course, such appeals do not make my case. Indeed, for some, appeals to the contemporary examples would only fan the flames of the debate that rages today within evangelicalism regarding philosophy’s role in doing theology. What is needed, then, are examples of issues that only philosophy can properly manage in establishing fundamental elements of theology.

## What Can Philosophy Do for Theology?

### Philosophy and the Attributes of God

Two illustrations will help to highlight the need. At least two examples are needed to show the relevance of philosophy to theology: one that makes it easy to see the problem (even if the specific example seems to make the threat far removed from evangelicalism) and one that shows how close to home and how challenging and subtle the problem can be. What both have in common is that disputes regarding the doctrine of God’s attributes will require an appeal to philosophy.

Though perhaps unfamiliar to a general Christian audience, *The Dake Annotated Reference Bible* by Finis Jennings Dake has had its

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.16, vol. 1, pp. 236-237.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, p. 236.

<sup>13</sup> John Owen, “The Reason of Faith,” in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 20; *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, First Topic: Theology, Q. XIII, trans. by George Musgrave Giger, (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1992, vol. 1, p. 44-45; Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 27; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), I, II, §3, p. 24; James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), 47.



influence upon certain Word of Faith teachers.<sup>14</sup> Because of the relative obscurity of the Dake Bible, my appeal to it for an illustration might not worry the average Christian. Certainly, there is no end to the heretical books out there. Why should anyone worry what Finis Jennings Dake had to say about anything? Dake teaches that “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all present where there are beings with whom they have dealings; but they are not omnibody, that is, their bodies are not omnipresent. All three go from place to place bodily as other beings in the universe do.”<sup>15</sup> More startling is Dake’s teaching that God has an assortment of spirit body parts.<sup>16</sup> One should not miss what is specifically grave about Dake’s assertion. For every body part he thinks the Bible teaches God has, Dake has a biblical citation. Every verse he cites does indeed ascribe the body part to God. If Dake were with us today, I suspect that he would protest that we were the ones who were failing to take these verses seriously. If the text says that God has eyes or arms (Dake might argue), then it means that God has eyes and arms even if these parts in Dake’s understanding, are not physical.

No doubt most would scoff at the fact that something as simple as a figure of speech would escape Dake’s notice. After all, surely even Dake does not believe that God has wings (Ruth 2:12) or feathers (Ps. 91:4) or that Jesus is literally bread (John 6:32) or is literally a vine (John 15:1). Perhaps Dake is an extreme case. But

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<sup>14</sup> Finis Jennings Dake, *The Dake Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville: Dake Bible Sales, 1991). Undoubtedly Benny Hinn’s foray into his Trinitarian heresy of there being nine in the Godhead—the video can be seen in numerous places online—came from Dake who said, “What we mean by Divine Trinity is that there are three separate and distinct persons in the Godhead, each one having His own personal spirit body, personal soul, and personal spirit ...” [Dake, *Reference Bible*, p. 280 of the New Testament].

<sup>15</sup> Dake, *Annotated*, in the “Complete Concordance and Cyclopedic Index,” p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Dake asserts: “God has a personal spirit body (Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19); shape (Jn. 5:37); form (Phil. 2:5-7); image and likeness of a man (Gen. 1:26; 9:6; Ezek. 1:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). He has bodily parts such as, back parts (Ex. 33:23), heart (Gen. 6:6; 8:21), hands and fingers (Ps. 8:3-6; Heb. 1:10; Rev. 5:1-7), mouth (Num. 12:8), lips and tongue (Isa. 30:27), feet (Ezek. 1:27; Ex. 24:10), eyes (Ps. 11:4; 18:24; 33:18), ears (Ps. 18:6), hair, head, face, arms (Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-19; Rev. 5:1-7; 22:4-6), and other bodily parts [Dake, *Annotated*, (New Testament), p. 97].

I submit that adjudicating literal descriptions of God from figures of speech is not always as straightforward as it might appear.

The heresies of Dake might seem far removed from evangelicalism and, as such, seemingly posing no real threat except, perhaps, the threat posed by the Word of Faith movement as a whole. However, an illustration from the other end of the spectrum, one that is perhaps more subtle and undoubtedly more controversial, is in order. In his *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, John Sanders says, "There are the occasions where God says 'perhaps' the people will listen to my prophet and 'maybe' they will turn from their idols .... God says, 'I thought Israel would return to me but she has not.' ... In these texts God is explicitly depicted as not knowing the specific future. God himself says that he was mistaken about what was going to happen."<sup>17</sup> The controversy over Open Theism (as the view is known) led certain members of the Evangelical Theological Society to bring charges against John Sanders and Clark Pinnock. These charges were dealt with at the 2003 national meeting in Atlanta, GA.<sup>18</sup> The charges maintained that both were out of compliance with the Society's stance on biblical inerrancy.<sup>19</sup> The charges failed to be upheld for both. While

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<sup>17</sup> John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1998), 74. Additional defenses of Open Theism include David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downer Grove: InterVarsity 1996); Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: Does God Ever Change His Mind?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); and Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> "Regarding the charges against Clark Pinnock, the vote to sustain was 212, or 32.9%, while the vote not to sustain the charges was 432, or 67.1%. The charges against John Sanders were sustained by a 62.7% vote (388), while the vote not to sustain was 231, or 37.3%. ... The result was that neither Pinnock nor Sanders were removed from membership, a two-thirds vote being required for dismissal." [James A. Borland, "Reports Relating to the Fifty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Society," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* vol. 47, no. 1 (March 2004): 171.

<sup>19</sup> Consider what Clark Pinnock thinks is a plausible entailment of Open Theism. "Perhaps God's agency would be easier to envisage if he were in some way corporeal. ... I do not feel obligated to assume that God is a purely spiritual being when his self-revelation does not suggest it. ... I would say that God transcends the world, while being able to indwell it. Perhaps God uses the created order as a kind of body and exercises top-down causation upon it." [Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 33-35]. During the ETS meeting, Pinnock acknowl-

the meeting was called to specifically address the issue of biblical inerrancy and not Open Theism as such, many have concluded that the failure of the Society to oust the two prominent proponents of the view is nevertheless a tacit acknowledgement that Open Theism is compatible with evangelicalism.

Before us we have two illustrations. One is a claim that the Bible teaches that God moves around the universe with his assemblage of spirit body parts, is located in space, and is ultimately a finite being. The other is a claim that the Bible teaches that God cannot know the free actions of his creatures and can be mistaken about what He thought would happen in the future. The first certainly would strike an evangelical as unacceptable while the other has been (at least tacitly) accepted by the world's largest evangelical academic society and has, perhaps, become more acceptable among certain evangelicals.

My point here is not to settle what can be (at least with respect to Open Theism) quite an involved discussion.<sup>20</sup> Rather, my point is to show that, at some critical level, all sides will have to appeal to categories and methods that are characteristically philosophical. The reason is because such debates are clearly not exegetical. Remember that every one of Dake's claims about God are quotes from Scripture. The issue involves, among other things, the question of whether a given description of God in the Bible is literal or

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edged "a degree of ambiguity" regarding his book. It was not clear to me from the report exactly what that ambiguity was. The view that somehow the universe is God's "body" is known as panentheism. It is, more or less, a theological application of the Process Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. [See Whitehead's *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition* (New York: The Free Press, 1978.) Pinnock's chapter "Between Classical and Process Theism," (written many years earlier where Pinnock defends "Freewill Theism," a phrase he borrows from David Basinger (see note 21) and is, for all intents and purposes, another name for Open Theism) provides interesting insights to how his thinking then might have led to his thinking much later. [Clark Pinnock, "Between Classical and Process Theism," in Ronald H. Nash, ed. *Process Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 313-327].

<sup>20</sup> For critiques of Open Theism and Process Theology, in addition to the Nash text cited above, see Norman L. Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New "Open" View of God—Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997); Norman L. Geisler, H. Wayne House, and Max Herrera, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001); and Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson, eds., *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvests God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

figurative. As I have already suggested, this may not be quite as easy as some might suppose.<sup>21</sup>

I was discussing my concerns about theology's need for philosophy with a friend, and I cited Gen 3:8 to set things up. The text tells us that Adam and Eve "heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." I asked my friend if he believed that God had legs, since it was impossible for God to walk without them.<sup>22</sup> He responded that he did not. I asked him why, and he said that he believed that God was a spirit, appealing to John 4:24 where Jesus told the woman at the well that "God is Spirit." I then asked him what he did with the Genesis 3 passage and he said that it was a figure of speech. I pressed him how he knew, of the two passages, that the John 4 passage was not the figure of speech. Perhaps God was figuratively a spirit and literally had legs. My point was that it is not always obvious what is and what is not a figure of speech and that sometimes further appeals to scriptural texts cannot settle the matter.<sup>23</sup>

Among those fellow Christian philosophers who join me in the rejection of Open Theism, there are two main methods of the cri-

<sup>21</sup> Boyd suggests what I regard as an entirely inadequate method. "There are certainly passages in the Bible that are figurative and portray God in human terms. You can recognize them because what is said about God is either ridiculous if taken literally ... or because the genre of the passage is poetic" [Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 118]. These criteria clearly will not work since, (1) one could not tell the genre of a passage until he understood the meaning of the passage and, thus, cannot use the genre to discover what the meaning is [see Thomas A. Howe, "Does Genre Determine Meaning?" *Christian Apologetics Journal* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 1-19]; and (2) saying that God cannot know the future contingent propositions would strike a proponent of Classical Theology or Molinism as clearly false, if not ridiculous.

<sup>22</sup> Some may suggest that this event was a theophany, i.e., an appearance of Christ before his incarnation in the New Testament. Without delving into the issue of theophanies, it remains that an appeal to a theophany cannot account for every physical description of God in the Old Testament. This would certainly be the case with the above-cited verses describing God's wings and feathers.

<sup>23</sup> One often hears the expression that "Scripture interprets Scripture" sometimes incorrectly labeled as the "analogy of faith." For a brief but helpful discussion of the principle, see Thomas A. Howe, "The Analogy of Faith: Does Scripture Interpret Scripture?" *Christian Research Journal* 29, no. 2 (2006): 50-51. The article is available at <http://www.equip.org/articles/the-analogy-of-faith>, accessed 02/23/24.

tique. My point here is not to refute Open Theism. Rather, my point is that the discussion invariably involves an appeal to the methods and categories traditionally ascribed to philosophy. Indeed, not only does the case against Open Theism involve philosophy, but in some instances, the case *for* Open Theism does so as well.<sup>24</sup>

Broadly speaking, one can find a significant difference between the methods of contemporary Analytic Philosophy and the older method of the classical Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition (henceforth ‘Classical Philosophy’).<sup>25</sup> The analytic approach seeks to conscientiously employ both philosophy and Scripture. Regarding the issue of God’s attributes, by the tools, methods, and categories of analytic philosophy together with the testimony of Scripture, this approach seeks to establish a carefully defined notion of “perfection.” On the basis of this definition, one would then identify what “perfect-making properties” must constitute a “perfect being.” Since God is by definition a perfect being, God must possess these perfect-making properties. Any property that does not clearly appear in the Bible and/or is clearly not perfect-making must be denied of God. This approach is sometimes called “Perfect Being Theology.” William Lane Craig succinctly describes this method:

For thinkers in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of scripture, so that God’s biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God’s greatness. Since the concept of God is underdetermined by

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<sup>24</sup> Open Theists seem divided on this point. Pinnock seems comfortable with employing (at least to some extent) Process Philosophy. Bassinger’s defense is deliberately philosophical. In contrast, Boyd lays the problem of “classical theology” at the feet of the influence of “pagan philosophy” while characterizing his case for Open Theism as “deeply rooted in Scripture” (Boyd, *God of the Possible*, p. 24).

<sup>25</sup> In the interest of full disclosure, I am an Existential Thomist in the tradition of Etienne Gilson and Joseph Owens. This means that, for me, it is not enough to defend that theology needs philosophy as such. In saying that the body needs to eat, one does not mean that one could just eat anything. Rather, one means that the body needs to eat food. But even more, one does not mean just any food (broadly defined) but nutritious food. By analogy, theology needs philosophy, but not just any philosophy but “nutritious,” which is to say, sound philosophy. I have my ideas of what that looks like while acknowledging that there are God-loving, Bible-believing Christian philosophers who will disagree.

the biblical data and since what constitutes a ‘great-making’ property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, the Classical approach, by the tools, methods, and categories of Classical Philosophy—a tradition that employs the thinking of Plato, Aristotle up through the thinking of Aquinas—seeks to discover what the nature of God must be like as the First Cause.<sup>27</sup> On the basis of this discovery, it identifies what attributes must be true of God. It then identifies those attributes as the definition of what it means to be ultimately and infinitely perfect. One will find some significant differences in the two lists of Divine attributes as well as some significant agreements.<sup>28</sup>

From this point, one could explore the various options to see the specifics of how they bear upon the question of God’s attributes. In the case where an evangelical adamantly denies the heresies of Dake, it seems that it would be impossible for him to avoid such misuse of Scripture regarding God’s attributes without some antecedent data and methodology arising from philosophy.<sup>29</sup> But

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<sup>26</sup> William Lane Craig, “Theistic Critiques of Atheism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71-72. More specifically, Craig shows how this method will lead to the rejection of the doctrine of Divine Simplicity and other attributes of God one finds in Classical, Thomistic Theism. He goes on, “most Christian philosophers today deny that God is simple or impassible or immutable in any unrestricted sense, even though medieval theologians affirmed such divine attributes, since these attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible and are not clearly great making.”

<sup>27</sup> Such categories would include substance and accidents, Aristotle’s Ten Categories or Predicates, universals and particulars, act and potency, form and matter, teleology, Aristotle’s Four Causes, analogy of being, and essence and existence.

<sup>28</sup> Simplicity is rejected by many Perfect Being theologians. Many also reject the traditional understanding of immutability and impassibility, particularly as understood by Thomists. All agree that God is without beginning, is the Creator of the universe, is not material or spatial, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good.

<sup>29</sup> There are, unfortunately, some who think that they can settle these issues without philosophy. Certain contemporary Presuppositionalists, while not at all sympathetic to Open Theism (much less the heresies of the *Dake Annotated Reference Bible*), nevertheless repudiate any role that philosophy might play regarding our understanding of God’s attributes. “The first notable difference between Philosophical Classical Theism and Biblical Classical Theism ... is the

even given the different philosophical approaches one will find today within Christianity, the point still stands about philosophy. So, while there might be strong disagreement as to which philosophical approach is better or closer to the truth, it should be clear that theology, with regard to certain attributes of God, needs, to an important extent, philosophy.

What about other theological concerns? Are there other aspects of theology besides the attributes of God that also need the application of philosophy? Space does not allow anything here beyond a list of topics critical for theology that could, in some circumstance, require an appeal to philosophy to define or defend. A partial list includes: the definition and nature of truth; the relationship of faith and reason; the sanctity of human life; the nature of human knowing; the existence of God; the nature of morality and its relationship to God; miracles; and principles of hermeneutics. With so many touchpoints that philosophy has with theology, it would seem that, until the Second Coming, there is quite a bit of job security for Christian philosophers.

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epistemological foundation in which they are rooted. ... Revelation comes by the way of *authority*, while philosophy comes by the way of *demonstration*. Revelation is a sure foundation for knowledge because it is received by humbly submitting to the wisdom of God. At the same time, Greek philosophy is a faulty foundation for knowledge because it is built on the autonomous and contradictory notions of man's wisdom" [Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Revealed God: An Introduction to Biblical Classical Theism* (Greenbrier: Free Grace Press, 2023), 17-18, emphasis in original].