

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 16 | Issue 2

Article 4

4-1-1999

On Heresy, Mind, and Truth

Alvin Plantinga

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Plantinga, Alvin (1999) "On Heresy, Mind, and Truth," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol16/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

ON HERESY, MIND, AND TRUTH

Alvin Plantinga

In this article I thank Eleonore Stump, Peter van Inwagen, and Merold Westphal for their gracious and insightful comments on my "Advice"; then I try to reply.

First, my thanks to Eleonore, Peter and Merold for their thoughtful reactions to my advice. I'm certainly pleased and flattered that three such terrific Christian philosophers would take the time and effort to comment, in this way, on that advice. I'll try to respond, and will respond to their comments in alphabetical order.

I have little to say to Eleonore Stump's comments. That is not because I think her topic unimportant or her reflections without insight or worth: absolutely not. The topics of heresy, and how to treat those who fall into it, are of great importance. I deplore the tendency of some Christians to suppose that the whole idea of heresy is an outworn relic of an earlier age, an idea whose time is past. Clearly the idea of heresy has obvious application at a time, like the present, when allegedly Christian theologians claim, for example, that there really is no such person as God, or that God really isn't a person but is instead the historical evolutionary process that has brought us into being. It's just that I don't myself have much of interest to say on the topic beyond what Stump says.

However I do have (a) a mild disagreement and (b) an additional caveat. First, Stump says "Although it seems to me important to keep the notion of *heresy*, I think the notion of *heretic* should be discarded for any purpose other than historical description. That's because a heretic is supposed to be someone who is committed to a heresy and who because of his heresy is worthy to be thrown out of the orthodox community" (p. 147). Here it looks like a heresy is a *belief* of a certain sort. One can speak, for example, of the Arian heresy; and anyone who accepts that belief accepts a heretical belief. On the other hand, says Stump, a person who accepts a heretical belief is not to be accounted a heretic, since this latter means that she is fit to be thrown out of the orthodox community, which Stump thinks is wrong. But later she says "... more than the rejection of a belief which is orthodox is required for heresy. For a belief to count as heretical, it is also necessary that the person holding that belief recognize that it has been rejected as unorthodox by a long-established consensus of the accepted experts in the religious community" (p. 158).



These two passages don't seem to me to fit together well. According to the first, we can think of a belief *simpliciter*, or perhaps a proposition *simpliciter*, as heretical. According to the second passage, though, a belief as such isn't heretical; to rise (or fall) to the level of heresy that belief must be held by someone in a certain way. But that means then, that the Arian heresy is not necessarily heretical; if your friend Paul holds it in ignorance of its having been rejected as unorthodox by a long-established consensus of the accepted experts in the religious community, then with respect to him, anyway, it doesn't constitute heresy. I'm not sure how to put these two ideas together. I'm inclined to concur with Stump's earlier passage: it seems that some beliefs, e.g., the Arian heresy, are in fact heretical just in themselves. When it is held in the sort of ignorance I mentioned above, then the thing to say, I think, is that *Paul* is not a heretic, although this belief he holds is indeed heretical. On the other hand, if Paul arrogantly holds this belief in full knowledge that it has been rejected by the relevant experts and the Christian tradition, but says he doesn't give a fig either for the experts or the tradition, shouldn't we say that Paul is a heretic? Of course that still leaves open the question whether Paul should be thrown out of the orthodox community.

That's the mild disagreement: here's the *caveat*. Sometimes it is exceedingly hard to determine what is and what isn't heresy. No doubt God protects his church from error—sure enough; at any rate he protects it from certain kinds of error. But everything we human beings do is infected by sin and by the results of sin. So even in the formulation of our most cherished beliefs, even in the formulation of our creeds, we can't expect anything like perfection. The creeds are not written by God, but by us human beings.

Consider, for example, the development of Christological doctrine culminating in Chalcedon (451 AD). (What comes next is a bit of church history, at which I am no expert; it is also so short as to run the risk of falling into caricature. But here goes anyway.) It looks as if two quite different views of the Incarnation were (perhaps confusedly) present before Chalcedon and represented at Chalcedon. One was the view of Cyril of Alexandria and his followers: on this view, when the second person of the Trinity became incarnate and assumed human nature, what happened was that he, the second person of the Trinity, acquired the property of being human; he acquired whatever property it is that is necessary and sufficient for being human. (Of course he also had properties no other human has or has had, and even properties no other human being could have had, just as you and I do.) The human nature he assumed, then, was a property. This view has the advantage of fitting well with the scriptures, which seem to suggest that the preexistent Logos did indeed empty himself and become a human being; on this view, also, it is the second person of the Trinity, the pre-existent Logos himself, who is tempted, and suffers and dies on our account.

On this first view, therefore, the second person of the Trinity assumed *human nature*, i.e. assumed a property which is necessary and sufficient for being a human being. On the second view, by contrast, what he assumed was *a* human nature, a specific human being. What happened when he became incarnate is that he adopted a peculiarly close and intimate relation

to a certain concrete human being, a 'human nature' in the sense of a human being. That is, there is or was a concrete human being—a creature, and a creature with will and intellect—to whom the Logos became related in an especially intimate way, a way denoted by the term 'assumption'. On this view of the matter, in the incarnate Christ there were two wills, one human and one divine, and two intellects, one human and one divine. This view is thought to protect the divinity of the second person of the Trinity. "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32)—i.e. (on this view), the human nature (the human being) the Son has assumed does not know the day and the hour, although the Son Himself, presumably, does know. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Hebrews 4:15)—i.e., the human nature (human being) the Logos assumed was tempted in every way, just as we are, although the Son himself, presumably, was not.

What shall we call these two views of the Incarnation? We could call them 'Alexandrian' and 'Antiochene' respectively, thus honoring the fact that the first is that of Cyril of Alexandria and his friends, and the second associated with Eustathius of Antioch and *his* friends. Or, we could name them after the heretical positions they ascribed to each other: the Antiochenes claimed the Alexandrians were Apollinarians, and the Alexandrians returned the compliment by calling the Antiochenes Nestorians. All of this is a bit too much for a poor ahistorical analytic philosopher, however, and I shall therefore name these positions by reference to the essential difference between them. In this context, the terms 'nature' and 'human nature' get used in two analogically related but very different senses: in the first sense, the term 'human nature' denotes a *property* (or, if you like, group of properties): the property P which is such that necessarily, every human being has P, and necessarily, whatever has P is a human being. In the second sense the term 'human nature' denotes a *concrete human being* rather than a property. In this second sense, the thing denoted by 'human nature' and that gets assumed is a human being, a concrete object, not an abstract object like a property.¹ I'll therefore call the first view the 'abstract nature' view, and the second the 'concrete nature' view. Aquinas apparently endorses the concrete nature view; Augustine appears to accept the abstract nature view, although he also sometimes speaks as if it is the concrete view he holds. John Calvin follows Augustine in being a little ambiguous here, usually suggesting the abstract view, but sometimes falling (or ascending, depending on your preferences here) into the concrete view.

Now at Chalcedon, the project was to hammer out a consensus, produce a document everyone could sign and live with. Of course there were representatives of both views present, each contending for its understanding of the matter. What we actually get, so it seems to me, is a sort of compromise: some terms and sentences pleasing to the ears of the concretists, and others pleasing to the ears of the abstractists. Apparently most scholars think the abstractists were perhaps at least slightly favored,² but the Chalcedonian formulation seems to point in both directions. It is therefore far from easy to find a completely coherent account of the incarnation in

Chalcedon (i.e., a coherent account different from each of the abstract and concrete nature views). It is as if the Chalcedonians, speaking with one voice, had said something like, "We somewhat prefer the abstract view, but we do not propose to read out of the party those who hold the concrete view, so long as they avoid the heresy of holding that the Incarnation consists in the union, somehow, of two separate persons, so that in the Incarnate Lord, there is both a human person and a distinct divine person".

But then what, exactly, constitutes heresy here? Suppose Chalcedon, as it seems it did, leaned slightly in the direction of the abstract view: would that mean that those, like Aquinas, who adopt the concrete view are really heretical? That seems a bit strong. At the third council of Constantinople, a couple of hundred years later (a council to which Catholics but not Protestants express allegiance), monothelitism (the idea that there was just one will in the incarnate Christ) was condemned. *Now* it looks as if the concretist view is being adopted or at least given a leg up, and the abstractist rejected. That makes the task of being orthodox here even more daunting. And to make things even more complicated, even here the original controversy can be reflected: shall we say that duothelitism is the idea that the will of Christ had both the nature of a human will and the nature of a divine will, in the abstract sense of 'nature'? The partisans of the abstract view would happily accept that. Or shall we say that duothelitism is the idea that there are two distinct concrete wills (supposing that in fact a will is a concrete object of some kind)? The concretists would happily accept *that*, and then it looks as if it's the abstractists that are tugging the laboring oar.

The point here is that it can become extremely difficult to say just what orthodoxy is, and therefore extremely difficult to say just what heresy is. Do we turn once more to the experts, asking some experts₂ to try to figure out what exactly it is that the experts₁ have decided? This is a pretty difficult and complex matter, and those experts₂ are not likely to speak with a single voice; are we going to need experts₃ to tell us what the experts₂ have decided about what the experts₁ said? You can see where this is going. For this reason I think it is important to be extremely chary of charges of heresy. More exactly, the point is that charges of heresy have to take careful account of the clarity, obviousness, or lack thereof, of the proposition that the target view is indeed contrary to orthodoxy.

I turn now to Peter van Inwagen's elegant contribution. His main suggestion, with respect to my original advice, is perhaps this: "It seems to me, therefore, that the positive aspect of Plantinga's advice to Christian philosophers, if it contains nothing that is strictly false, has, as philosophers say, a false conversational implicature: That much of philosophy overlaps Christianity in a significant way" (p. 171). (Well, at any rate it's nice not to have said anything strictly false.) Peter goes on to add, in the spirit of uncontentious docility for which he is so widely and justly known, that "My suggestion that Plantinga's advice embodies a misleading implication about the relation between Christianity and philosophy should, therefore, be regarded not as a thesis I claim to have established, but as a provocation, an attempt to stimulate discussion". I have not been provoked by van Inwagen's suggestion, but I *have* been stimulated to further discussion; perhaps I can clarify my advice a bit.

Now van Inwagen's suggestion is restricted to metaphysics and philosophy of mind; things may go differently, he says, in epistemology (and, we may add, ethics). So I shall restrict what I have to say in the same way, and indeed to only one of the cases he mentions. The first case he raises (and the only case I shall discuss) is that of dualism vs. materialism with respect to human beings. Now I should confess up front that I accept dualism: I believe that I and other (living) human beings are immaterial souls, minds or persons (I prefer the last), related in a peculiarly intimate way to a material body of a certain sort—a human body. The materialist, on the other hand (and of course, it is materialism with respect to human beings, not universal materialism, that is at issue) thinks that a human being is a material object of a certain sort—a highly complex and very impressive material object, to be sure, but a material object nonetheless. It seems to me that dualism comports better with Christian thought than materialism (although I think there is powerful philosophical support for dualism independent of Christian theism). Of course it is true, as van Inwagen says, that the creeds do not explicitly endorse dualism (although, as I shall argue below, it is likely that what some of them do endorse *entails* dualism). I do think, however, that various scripture passages do certainly suggest dualism, and that the apostle Paul seems to accept it.

But here I want to go in a slightly different direction. Consider again the doctrine of the Incarnation, that characteristic and nonnegotiable Christian teaching according to which the second person of the Trinity became incarnate and dwelt among us. As I understand the scripture and the creeds (Nicene, Athanasian, the Chalcedonian formulation), this involves the second person of the Trinity's actually becoming human. The Logos became a human being, acquiring the property necessary and sufficient for being human. Prior to the incarnation, however, the second person of the Trinity was not a material object, but an immaterial being. If, however, as materialists assert, to be a human being is to be a material object, then the second person of the Trinity must have become a material object. If he has remained a human being, furthermore, he is presently a material object. But then an immaterial being became a material object; and this seems to me to be impossible. It is clearly impossible, I'd say, that the number seven or the proposition that $7+5 = 12$, or the property of self-exemplification, all of which are immaterial objects, should become, turn into, material objects. It is less clearly impossible, but still impossible, it seems to me, that the second person of the Trinity—that personal being with will and intellect and affection—should turn into a material object.

For me, therefore, and for Christians who agree with me on these points, the doctrine of the incarnation is deeply relevant to the question of materialism vs. dualism. "Christians who agree with me"—i.e., Christians who agree with me on two points:

- (1) What the scripture and the creeds teach is that the Logos, the second person of the Trinity, became a human being

and

- (2) It is impossible that an immaterial being become a material object.

(Perhaps I should also add

- (3) The Logos, before the incarnation, was an immaterial object;

but I take it that isn't currently at issue.)

Of course there are Christians who do not accept (1), opting instead for the concretist understanding of the Incarnation, or perhaps remaining agnostic as between the two. They will not take the doctrine of the Incarnation to be relevant, or at least relevant in the same way, to the question of dualism vs. materialism. Perhaps there are also Christians who reject (2); if so, then they too will not take the Incarnation to be relevant in this way to dualism vs. materialism. But (and perhaps this is a needed clarification) it was no part or presupposition of my advice to suppose that a given doctrine will be properly taken to be relevant to a given philosophical problem either by *all* Christians or by *no* Christians. Christians may disagree as to the deliverances of reason (for example, some may be unwilling to assert (2)); this can of course have an impact on what deliverances of faith they take to be relevant to what philosophical questions, and even on what they properly take Christian doctrines to entail. (If P and some necessary proposition Q together entail a proposition R, then P by itself entails R.) Christians may also disagree on the question whether a given proposed deliverance of the faith (e.g., (1)) really is a deliverance of the faith. Of course some faith-philosophy pairs are such that all or nearly all Christians, upon sufficient reflection, will take the former to be relevant to the latter; van Inwagen mentions some. But the relevance of deliverances of the faith to the problems of philosophy extends far beyond that.

Now we might instead think that the right way to describe the situation is to speak of what the deliverances of faith *really are* (as opposed to what someone or other properly takes them to be); and the same for the deliverances of reason. Then we will speak of what really is relevant to what, rather than of what is properly taken to be relevant to what. But here there will be another kind of discussion relevant to philosophical thought: this will be discussion of just what the deliverances of faith really are. (And of course the deliverances of the faith are relevant to *this* discussion.) In the present case, for example, the question whether it is the abstractist or the concretist interpretation that is correct will, coupled with (2) above, be obviously relevant to the question of materialism vs. dualism. As van Inwagen says, the deliverances of the faith must be *interpreted*. This process of interpretation itself, then, will sometimes be relevant to a philosophical problem, and will itself be something to which the faith is relevant.

There are other complications here; a full discussion would take us far afield. Thus, for example, it might be that someone might take it that there are powerful philosophical reasons (reasons I have so far been unable to fathom³) for materialism. Such a Christian might then have a reason for preferring the concretist interpretation of the incarnation, because that interpretation permits her to be a materialist without flouting (2). There is a

complicated, complex, many-faceted reciprocal relation between deliverances of the faith and deliverances of reason with respect to philosophical questions. Furthermore, it isn't merely what you take these deliverances to be that is relevant; also relevant are the questions (a) how *much* intuitive support the alleged deliverance of reason really has, and (b) how clear it is, or how probable it is, that the alleged deliverance of faith really is a deliverance of faith. Thus if you take it that there are powerful philosophical reasons for a given position—materialism, e.g.—and accept (2), and are slightly but only slightly inclined to the abstractist interpretation, you may quite properly, I should think, accept the concretist interpretation, even though you are mildly inclined on hermeneutical grounds to think it mistaken. In this way the deliverances of reason can properly influence what one properly takes to be orthodoxy (assuming that one takes orthodoxy to be sufficient for truth), or what one takes to be what the Lord intends to teach us.

Exactly how this works here, exactly how one properly adjudicates the claims of the faith and the claims of reason, is a venerable topic that in my opinion needs a lot of work. One crucial notion here will be the 'comports with' relation. The limiting case of this relation will be where a deliverance of the faith *F* logically implies a proposition *P*—implies it by way of argument forms that are enshrined in first-order logic (and thus are maximally evident). In other cases *F* doesn't logically imply *P* by itself, but *F* and *Q* together do, where *Q* is an obviously necessary truth (a truth of elementary arithmetic, perhaps). Then of course there will be cases where *Q* is *less* obviously necessary, but still obviously necessary (perhaps *Q* is the proposition that there aren't any things that do not exist), cases where the proposition that it is necessary has only mild intuitive support, and so on. In this way the *comports with* relation will be a matter of degree, the degree to which *P* comports with *F* depending on the intuitive obviousness of the claim that *Q* is necessary, where *F*&*Q* together entail *P*.⁴

There is much more to be said about van Inwagen's thoughtful contribution; for example, there are also his comments on agent causation and the problem of freedom, determinism and responsibility. Here too, I think, Christian belief is importantly relevant, but do not have the space to argue it; I hope to be able to address these and other questions in a book on Christian philosophy.

I turn finally to Merold Westphal's interesting contribution. There is much in what he says with which I enthusiastically concur—for example, what he says about Art Holmes, and also what he says about the Wheaton College Philosophy Conference. I also believe that Westphal's 'two hats thesis' is correct and important; indeed, I think the Christian philosopher, or at any rate the Christian philosophical community, must wear more than two hats. Furthermore, I endorse his suggestion that the Christian philosophical community should do a good deal more than it has by way of writing for a wider and less technically proficient audience, although this is much easier said than done.⁵ And I applaud Westphal's approval of philosophical ecumenism.

But there is also one point of reasonably significant disagreement. This has to do with *propositions*. Here Merold unaccountably joins forces with W. V. Quine, not ordinarily one of his chief allies, in thinking of proposi-

tions as creatures of darkness. Indeed, although Quine has used that term to refer to properties, propositions and other perfectly respectable entities, Westphal has a better reason for thus stigmatizing them. After all, from Quine's perspective, all that's wrong with these things is that their conditions of identity are obscure, and they clutter what would otherwise be an austere pleasing desert landscape. According to Merold, however, the problem with these allegedly disreputable entities is that believing in them is a manifestation of sinful human pride!

Now what is the problem with propositions, or more exactly with thinking there are propositions? The first problem, according to Westphal, is this: we ordinarily think of propositions as not belonging to any natural language; but "this is to presuppose the highly controversial philosophical claim that meaning is independent of language, that natural languages are externally related to the meanings they convey" (p. 177). Now I should think propositions themselves are not meanings. Rather, meaning is what determines that a given sentence (in a given context or set of circumstances) expresses a given proposition. The proposition *London, England, is larger than London, Ontario* is expressed by the sentence 'London, England, is larger than London, Ontario'; that is by virtue of the meaning that sentence in fact enjoys (in English). In this case, nearly every use of the relevant sentence (or at any rate nearly every use in which it expresses a proposition at all) expresses the same proposition. The meaning of this sentence, then, is like a constant function: it takes pairs consisting of a use of the sentence and ambient circumstances to a given proposition, and always to the *same* proposition. In this way it differs from a sentence like 'I am happy', which takes pairs consisting of uses of the sentence and circumstances to *different* propositions. (When *I* use the sentence, it expresses the proposition that *I* am happy; when *you* use it, the proposition that *you* are happy.) But my point is that it isn't the *propositions* that are meanings; it is rather those functions. And of course these meanings *are* intimately dependent upon natural languages, in that a natural language is, among other things, a matter of assigning such functions to items of natural language such as sentences.

But perhaps this doesn't really address Westphal's worry. Perhaps he could agree with all this, but then put his worry as follows: "On the propositional picture, what gets expressed, i.e., these *propositions*, are thought to be only externally related to the natural languages and linguistic entities that express them. And that's wrong." Well, perhaps on this scheme the relation between the proposition *London, England, is larger than London, Ontario*, and the sentence 'London, England, is larger than London, Ontario' is indeed external to each; each could have existed, let's suppose, without standing in that relation to the other. But what's the matter with that?

Perhaps the following. What really bothers Westphal about the proposition picture, I think, is that he believes it implies, or leads to, or suggests that the language we speak has no bearing on the range of meanings (i.e., propositions) we can express or entertain. I base this on his saying "This is a much stronger claim than the one that in natural languages signs (graphemes and phonemes) are arbitrarily related to the meanings they signify; for meanings could easily be a function of the language games in which they are embedded (as Wittgensteinians, Heideggerians, structural-

ists, and post-structuralists agree) without disturbing the arbitrary relation of signs to meanings" (p. 177). Here I take it Westphal means to concur with the thesis about the arbitrary relation of sign to meaning, but also endorse the view that meanings are indeed "a function of the language games in which they are embedded . . .", i.e., that what meanings (i.e., which propositions) we can entertain, express, grasp depends upon our language and linguistic resources.

So his real concern is that if we accept the proposition picture, we will be committed to supposing that our languages, language games, lifestyles, positions in history, and the like, have no bearing on the range of propositions we can entertain and express. But once we get a clear look at this latter thesis, it is apparent that it is false. Even if propositions are independent of natural languages, it doesn't for a moment follow that the range of propositions we can entertain and express is also independent of our linguistic resources and other historically contingent circumstances. There are plenty of propositions I can entertain and express that my grandchildren cannot. It is also entirely possible that some propositions are language specific, in the sense that there are languages A and B and propositions P such that those who speak or know only A cannot entertain or express P, while those who speak B can.

Still further, it is entirely consonant with the propositional picture that there be many propositions, in fact all but a finite few of them, that we human beings cannot so much as grasp or entertain no matter what our linguistic resources; indeed, I believe this is no more than the sober truth.⁵ Still further yet, it is entirely consonant with the propositional picture that for many or all of the propositions we *do* grasp, our grasp is imperfect, halting, poor, nasty and brutish even if not short, infected with error and misconception. Even if propositions themselves are not denizens of the cave, our grasp of them is just what you might expect of cave dwellers. Westphal says, "if our meanings [i.e., propositions] are free from embeddedness in the traditions and practices that make up natural language games, why should we not think them free from all the contingencies and particularities that make up the cave?" But even if propositions *themselves* are free from such embeddedness, it doesn't follow that our grasp and apprehension of them are; and of course they are not. Indeed, it is consistent with the propositional picture (although not with advocacy of it) that we believe only *false* propositions.

So I don't see that "The language game of proposition talk presupposes, with Descartes, and Locke, and sense data theorists . . . that we begin in the ether of Pure Meaning and that the only task is to distinguish true propositions from false ones" (p. 177). I don't propose to take up the cudgels on behalf of sense data theorists (or even Descartes and Locke), but a proposition theorist can certainly think that an extremely important function of philosophical thinking is just trying to get a better look at certain crucial propositions, not just distinguish true propositions from false. Perhaps certain 'analytic' philosophers have mistakenly thought this the *only* function of philosophy; but I should think it is at least *one* of its functions.

I turn finally to Westphal's worries about realism. This is not, as he sees it, just the view that there is a way things are ('in themselves'); for even Kant

held that. What the realist also believes, says Westphal, is that we human beings "(sometimes) know the real as it truly is, as it is in itself, as it is independently of human modes of apprehension" (p. 178). If I espouse realism, am I not improperly minimizing the difference between my intellect and God's, my knowledge and divine knowledge? The realist, he says, can acknowledge that God knows a lot *more* propositions than the rest of us, "But when we do know a proposition to be true, that piece of our knowledge is fully on a par with God's knowledge of the same proposition" (p. 178). Again, it seems to me the realist is not committed to anything nearly so strong. First, there is that matter of depth of grasp of a proposition; I might know a set theoretical truth, but not have nearly as firm a grasp on it, might not see nearly as deeply into it, as someone who is expert in the area. Second, as Westphal points out later, your knowledge of a given proposition can be qualified by what else you know; I know (let's suppose) that electrons have a negative charge; someone who knows how this proposition is connected with a lot of others, I should say, knows the same thing better. And of course God's knowledge vastly, unimaginably, excels ours along both of these dimensions. Still further, it isn't even possible (in the broadly logical sense) that God err; our possibilities along those lines are all too evident.

But perhaps there is an even greater difference between God's knowledge and ours (a difference entirely consistent with the propositional picture). Propositions exist in serene independence of us and our activities; they don't depend in any way upon us, and if we didn't exist, that would be no skin off their nose(s). But most Christian thinkers have not thought that they are related in that way to God. Beginning at least with Augustine, most have thought propositions dependent upon God. Indeed perhaps the way to think of them is as divine thoughts; they depend upon God in just the way thoughts depend upon their thinker.⁷ God's thought is thus creative: in thinking, he creates propositions. Our thought is at best recapitulative: it consists in a grasp (and perhaps a halting and infirm grasp) of things, i.e., propositions, which exist in serene independence of us, and indeed have existed for an eternity before we so much as put in an appearance. This difference between our intellect and God's is enormous.

So I can't see that Christian philosophers "have a special reason for rejecting" realism. Indeed, I think the shoe is on the other foot: Christian philosophers and Christians generally have a real stake in *affirming* realism, in Westphal's sense. For in that sense I am a realist if I think I believe or know at least one truth—one truth, perhaps we should add, that is about things as they are in themselves, independent of human ways of knowing. (Of course my *knowledge* of this truth will not be independent of human ways of knowing, those being the only ways of knowing I have.) Well, it seems to me Christians are committed to thinking they know or believe several such truths. The gospel, after all, is good news; and if good news, then *news*, i.e., something *true*. (There's no such thing as false news.) It is magnificent good news that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself; hence it is also *true* that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. And in knowing this, do I not know something about God, and God as he is in himself? If Westphal thinks this isn't true, or isn't a truth about God, how does he think of its status? Well, perhaps some continen-

tal super sophisticate (and I don't mean Merold) might be able to come up with some way in which this isn't a truth about God (perhaps she could give us a new gloss on *about*), but why bother? What is the problem?

But I don't want to end on a note of disagreement. There is much in what Westphal says, and much in what he says is his motivation for anti-realism, to which I can only say "Yea and Amen". Thus of course it is important to see that "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9); God is unimaginably different from us, and his thoughts unimaginably above, higher than, beyond ours. When Paul was caught up into the third heaven, he "heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell" (2 Cor. 12:4). Furthermore, I agree that "making assertions of fact . . . is just one of the many things we can do with words" (p. 178), and that it is important to "remember that when God speaks to us we are more likely to be dealing with promises, warnings, commands and the like than with mere assertions of fact" (p. 178). Still further, I too want to challenge the primacy of theoretical reason; and of course I wholeheartedly reject the idea that our chief end is to collect a pocket full of propositions about God. Of course not; our chief end is to glorify God—i.e., perceive and celebrate and delight in His marvelous beauty and glory—and enjoy Him forever. On all of these points we are in solid concord; our disagreement is only as to whether this agreement is incompatible with accepting the propositional picture.⁸

University of Notre Dame

NOTES

1. If we like, we can use the term 'human nature' in both senses in the same sentence: Jesus Christ was a single nature, but had two distinct natures, one human and the other divine.

2. Commenting on the "leading ideas" of the Chalcedonian formulation, Philip Schaff says, "The Logos assumed, not a human person (else we would have two persons, a divine and a human) but human nature which is common to us all; and hence he redeemed, not a particular man, but all men as partakers of the same nature" *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), vol. I *The History of Creeds*, p. 30. J. N. D. Kelly makes a similar but somewhat more reserved judgment (*The Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 340 ff.)

3. Some might claim (indeed, some *have* claimed) that a reason for materialism is the fact that human beings are *visible*, thus having a property which no immaterial object has. But of course if dualism is true, human beings *are* visible, although in an extended, analogical sense; they are visible because their bodies are. We are playing monopoly; you ask me what color my token is; I reply "I'm the red jeep". What I say is true, but you could hardly use it as reason for denying that I am an immaterial entity citing the fact that I have the property *being the red jeep*, a property no immaterial object has.

4. And where there is no other proposition Q* such that F&Q* entail P, and the necessity of Q* is intuitively more obvious than the necessity of Q. Still other conditions are necessary; this is not the place to propose them.

5. Still, it *is* being done, to at least some extent, by for example Richard Swinburne (*Is there a God?*), Kelly Clark (*When Faith is Not Enough*), and the authors of the essays in Michael Murray's *Reason for the Hope Within*.

6. Thus most propositions of the form *r is greater than 0* (r a real number) are beyond our grasp. Of course that doesn't preclude our knowing something about them; indeed, perhaps we can pick out specific propositions that are beyond our grasp, and predicate properties of them.

7. This is consistent with their being necessarily existent; what it requires is that God be a necessary being and that it be part of God's nature to think them.

8. My thanks to Brian Daley and Neal Plantinga.