

What Is Christian Philosophy?

Within its 66 books, the Bible contains a complete system of thought. Paul tells us that “*All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Christ Jesus*” (*Colossians 2:3*). “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (*2 Timothy 3:16-17*). The Bible tells us how we may know truth, what reality is like, how we should think and act, and even what governments should do. Philosophers usually call these studies (1) epistemology: the theory of knowing; (2) metaphysics: the theory of reality; (3) ethics: the theory of conduct; and (4) politics: the theory of government. The first of these, epistemology, is the most important, for it is the most basic.

Knowledge: The Bible Tells Me So

Christianity holds that knowledge is revealed by God. Christianity is propositional truth revealed by God, propositions that have been written in the 66 books of the Bible. Divine revelation is the starting point of Christianity, its axiom. The axiom, the first principle, of Christianity is this: “The Bible alone is the Word of God.”

An axiom, by definition, is a beginning. Nothing comes before it; it is a first principle. All men and all philosophies have axioms; they all must start their thinking somewhere. It is impossible to prove everything. To demand proof for everything is an irrational demand. Christianity begins with the 66 books of the Bible, for knowledge—truth—is a gift from God.

Truth is a gift that God by his grace reveals to men; it is not something that men discover on their own power. Just as men do not attain salvation themselves, on their own power, but are saved by divine grace, so men do not gain knowledge on their own power, but receive knowledge as a gift from God. Man can do nothing apart from the will of God, and man can know nothing part from the revelation of God.

That does not mean that we can know only the actual statements in the Bible. We can know their logical implications as well. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, written in the seventeenth century and one of the oldest Christian statements of faith, says:

The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed

and obeyed, depends *not* upon the testimony of *any* man or church, but *wholly* upon God (who is Truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God.

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men.

Notice the words of the *Confession*: "The *whole* counsel of God" is either expressly set down in Scripture or may be deduced from it. *Everything* we need for faith and life is found in the propositions of the Bible, either explicitly or implicitly. *Nothing* is to be added to the revelation at any time. Only logical deduction from the propositions of Scripture is permitted.

Logic

The principles of logic—reasoning by good and necessary consequence—are contained in the Bible itself. Every word of the Bible, from *Bereshith* ("In the beginning") in *Genesis* 1:1 to *Amen* in *Revelation* 22:21, exemplifies the fundamental law of logic, the law of contradiction. "In the beginning" means in the beginning, not a hundred years or even one second after the beginning. "Amen" expresses agreement, not dissent. When God gave his name to Moses, "I am that I am," he was stating the logical law of identity. The laws of logic are embedded in every word of Scripture. Deductive reasoning is the principal tool of understanding the Bible.

The Bible is our only source of truth. Neither science, nor history, nor archaeology, nor philosophy can furnish us with truth. A Christian must take seriously Paul's warning to the Colossians: "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. For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in him..." (*Colossians* 2:8-10).

Salvation: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ

The doctrine of salvation is a branch of the doctrine of knowledge. The doctrine of salvation is not a branch of metaphysics, for men are not changed into gods when they are saved; saved men, even in the perfection of Heaven, remain temporal and limited creatures. Only God is eternal; only God is omniscient; only God is omnipresent.

The doctrine of salvation is not a branch of ethics, for men are not saved by doing good works. We are saved in spite of our works, not because of them.

The doctrine of salvation is not a branch of politics, for the notion that salvation, either temporal or eternal, can be achieved by political means is an illusion. Attempts to bring Heaven to Earth have brought nothing but blood and death.

Salvation is through faith alone. Faith is belief of the truth revealed by God. Faith, the act of believing, is itself a gift of God. "For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (*Ephesians 2:8-9*).

Peter says that we have received everything we need for life and godliness through knowledge (*2 Peter 1:2-4*). James says we are regenerated by the word of truth (*James 1:18*). Paul says we are justified through belief of the truth (*Romans 3:28*). Christ says we are sanctified by truth (*John 17:17*).

Just as we are regenerated by truth, and justified through belief of the truth, we are sanctified by truth as well.

Science: In Him, Not Matter, We Live

Those who put their trust in science as the key to understanding the universe are embarrassed by the fact that science never discovers truth. If the Bible is the source of all truth, science cannot discover truth.

One of the insoluble problems of the scientific method is the fallacy of induction; induction, in fact, is a problem for all forms of empiricism (learning by experience). The problem is simply this: Induction, arguing from the particular to the general, is always a logical fallacy. No matter how many crows, for example, you observe to be black, the conclusion that all crows are black is never warranted. The reason is quite simple: Even assuming you have good eyesight, are not colorblind, and are actually looking at crows, you have not, and cannot, see all crows. Millions have already died. Millions more are on the opposite side of the planet. Millions more will hatch after you die. Induction is always a fallacy.

There is another fatal fallacy in science as well: the fallacy of asserting the consequent. The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell put the matter this way:

All inductive arguments in the last resort reduce themselves to the following form: If this is true, that is true: now that is true, therefore this

is true. This argument is, of course, formally fallacious. Suppose I were to say: "If bread is a stone and stones are nourishing, then this bread will nourish me; now this bread does nourish me; therefore it is a stone and stones are nourishing." If I were to advance such an argument, I should certainly be thought foolish, yet it would not be fundamentally different from the argument upon which all scientific laws are based.

Recognizing that induction is always fallacious, philosophers of science in the twentieth century, in an effort to defend science, developed the notion that science does not rely on induction at all. Instead, it consists of conjectures, experiments to test those conjectures, and refutations of conjectures. But in their attempts to save science from logical disgrace, the philosophers of science had to abandon any claim to knowledge: Science is only conjectures and refutations of conjectures. Karl Popper, one of the twentieth century's greatest philosophers of science, wrote:

First, although in science we do our best to find the truth, we are conscious of the fact that we can *never* be sure whether we have got it.... [W]e know that our scientific theories *always* remain hypotheses.... [I]n science there is *no* "knowledge" in the sense in which Plato and Aristotle understood the word, in the sense which implies finality; in science, we *never* have sufficient reason for the belief that we have attained the truth.... Einstein declared that his theory was *false*: he said that it would be a better approximation to the truth than Newton's, but he gave reasons why he would not, even if all predictions came out right, regard it as a true theory.... Our attempts to see and to find the truth are not final, but open to improvement:...our knowledge, our doctrine is conjectural;...*it consist of guesses, of hypotheses rather than of final and certain truths.*

Observation and science cannot furnish us with truth about the universe, let alone truth about God. The secular worldview, which begins by denying God and divine revelation, cannot furnish us with knowledge at all.

Ethics: We Ought to Obey God Rather Than Men

The Bible teaches that the distinction between right and wrong depends entirely upon the commands of God. There is no natural law that makes actions right or wrong, and matters of right and wrong certainly cannot be decided by majority vote. In the words of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, "sin is any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God." Were there no law of God, there would be no right or wrong.

This may be seen very clearly in God's command to Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Only the command of God made eating the fruit sin. It may also be seen in God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. God's command alone made the sacrifice right, and Abraham hastened to obey. Strange as it may sound to modern ears used to hearing so much about the right to life, the right to health, and the right to choose, the Bible says that natural rights and wrongs do not exist: Only God's commands make some things right and other things wrong. In the Old Testament, it was a sin for the Jews to eat pork. Today, we can all enjoy bacon and eggs for breakfast. What makes killing a human being and eating pork right or wrong is not some quality inherent in men and pigs, but merely the divine command itself.

Human Rights

If we had rights because we are men—if our rights were natural and inalienable—then God himself would have to respect them. But God is sovereign. He is free to do with his creatures as he sees fit. So we do not have natural rights. That is good, for natural and inalienable rights are logically incompatible with punishment of any sort. Fines, for example, violate the inalienable right to property. Imprisonment violates the inalienable right to liberty. Execution violates the inalienable right to life. The natural right theory is logically incoherent at its foundation. Natural rights are logically incompatible with justice. The Biblical idea is not natural rights, but imputed rights. Only imputed rights, not intrinsic rights—natural and inalienable rights—are compatible with liberty and justice. And those rights are imputed by God.

All attempts to base ethics on some foundation other than the Bible fail. Natural law is a failure, because “oughts” cannot be derived from “ises.” In more formal language, the conclusion of an argument can contain no terms that are not found in its premises. Natural lawyers, who begin their arguments with statements about man and the universe, statements in the indicative mood, cannot end their arguments with statements in the imperative mood.

The major ethical theory competing with natural law theory today is utilitarianism. Utilitarianism tells us that the moral action is one that results in the greatest good for the greatest number. It furnishes an elaborate method for calculating the effects of choices. Unfortunately, utilitarianism is also a failure, for it not only commits the naturalistic fallacy of the natural lawyers, it requires a calculation that cannot be executed as well. We cannot know what is the greatest good for the greatest number.

The only logical basis for ethics is the revealed commands of God. They furnish us not only with the basic distinction between right and wrong, but with detailed instructions and practical examples of right and wrong. They actually assist us in living our daily lives. Secular attempts to provide an ethical system fail on both counts.

Politics: Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land

Christian political philosophy is grounded squarely on divine revelation, not on natural law, nor on majority rule, nor on the exercise of mere force.

Attempts to base a theory of government on secular axioms result in either anarchy or totalitarianism. Only Christianity, which grounds the legitimate powers of government in the delegation of power by God, avoids the twin evils of anarchy and totalitarianism.

Government has a legitimate role in society: the punishment of evildoers, as Paul put it in *Romans* 13. That is the only function of government that Paul mentions. Education, welfare, housing, parks, roads, retirement income, health care, or any of the other programs in which government is involved today are illegitimate. The fact that government is involved in all these activities is a primary reason why government is not doing its own job well: The crime rate is rising, and the criminal justice system is a growing threat to a free people. The innocent are punished and the guilty remain unpunished.

The Bible teaches a distinctly limited role for government. The Biblical goal is not a bureaucracy staffed by Christians, but no bureaucracy. There should be no Christian Department of Education, no Christian Housing Department, no Christian Agriculture Department—simply because there should be no Departments of Education, Housing, and Agriculture, period. We do not need and should oppose a Christian Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms or a Christian Internal Revenue Service. Some so-called Christians are engaged in a pursuit of political power that makes their activities almost indistinguishable from the activities of the social gospelers in the early and mid-twentieth century. This sort of political action has nothing to do with Scripture.

The Philosophical System

Each of the parts of this philosophical system—epistemology (knowledge), soteriology (salvation), metaphysics (reality), ethics (conduct), and politics (government)—is important, and the ideas gain strength from being arranged in a logical system. In such a system, where propositions are logically dependent on and

logically imply other propositions, each part mutually reinforces the others. Together they make an impregnable fortress that can withstand and defeat whatever other philosophies and religions may say. Historically—though not in this decadent century—Christians have been criticized for being “too logical.” The criticism is silly. If we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, if we are to bring all our thoughts into conformity with Christ, we must learn to think as Christ does, logically and systematically.

Christianity is a complete philosophical system that proceeds by rigorous deduction from one axiom to thousands of theorems. It is a whole view of things thought out together. It meets all non-Christian philosophies on every field of intellectual engagement. It offers a theory of knowledge, a way to Heaven, a refutation of science, a theory of the world, a coherent and practical system of ethics, and the principles required for political liberty and justice. It is our hope and prayer that Christianity will conquer the world in the next century. If it does not, if the church continues to decline in confusion and unbelief, at least a few Christians can take refuge in the impregnable intellectual fortress that God has given us in his Word.

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