

TITLE:

*Philosophy of God
And Where Jesus Fits*

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ABSTRACT:

This book is a rigorous inspection of the philosophical challenges facing theists in general and Christians in particular in contemporary times. A multidisciplinary work that harvests the latest evidence on near-death experiences (NDE), historical and archaeological discoveries, and new theories for parsing Christian legends, the book looks at whether belief in God remains rational in our time. Is it rational for an educated mind to believe in a soul? What is an intellectual supposed to take as “truth” in the Gospels? Is it a problem that neither God nor devils actually appear in real life? Must one even need to believe that Jesus was resurrected to be a “Christian”?

Equally critical of both atheists and evangelicals, the book argues that a belief in a soul is an exceedingly modest metaphysical posit, hardly something crazy. And that this very reasonable commitment is what then forms the basis for legitimate conjectures about God. Influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein, Wilson argues that our imagination for God can’t be founded upon idolizing any historical figure or setting forth litmus events in human history; it can only be found in our form of life. It is not an insecure psychology that creates God; it is the way humans experience their very existence. Once this is understood, Wilson argues, the Jesus narratives then present a unique complement that can either fulfill or corrupt the God picture, depending upon how ridiculous the believers become.

The real promise of this book is its intellectual defense of God and its reimagination of the Christian landscape. The book unveils new systems of belief, such as *naturalized* Christianity. And it argues that God, like the rest of us, is bound by physics whenever present in the universe, which, by definition, conceals anything that occurs through this presence. And the book forges new ground in New Testament scholarship by using network politics as a primary strategy for parsing “truth” in scripture. At the end of the day what is provided is an updated conception of God for the time in which we live.

CENTRAL QUOTE:

“What inclines even me to believe in Christ’s Resurrection? It is as though I play with the thought. — If he did not rise from the dead, then he decomposed in the grave like any other man. *He is dead and decomposed.* In that case he is a teacher like any other and can no longer *help*; and once more we are orphaned and alone. So we have to content ourselves with wisdom and speculation. We are in a sort of hell where we can do nothing but dream, roofed in, as it were, and cut off from heaven.”

— Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Ed. G.H. von Wright, Trans. Peter Winch, (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 33e.

CHAPTERS:

PART-I: GOD

Chapter 1. Aspect, not Faith

This chapter reviews the grounds for religious belief and argues that “faith” can’t be one of them. There are only three possible behaviors that one can engage in when trying to affirm God: induction (apologetics), relationship (love or trust), or realizing an intellectual *aspect* (framework). While each of these is a behavior, the last also involves a cognitive skill. Seeing any aspect properly requires being good at discernment. The lead authority on aspect propositions is Ludwig Wittgenstein, who is said to have gotten to God “in the wrong way.” This chapter explores how aspect props can make one receptive to the God stories and how the way that the experience of life is perceived can become the basis for belief, instead of pledging loyalty or taking a debate-position about “historical truth.”

Chapter 2. The Soul

This chapter considers both the concept of, and the evidence for, human beings having a “soul.” Contrary to what some may think, this idea is not a crazy machination. In fact, it is one of the most reasonable posits that one can make in the entire field of metaphysics. Belief that you have a soul comes naturally from the human experience of life and is also buttressed by recent evidence about near death experiences (NDE). And what is most important is that this simple posit is what starts everything else that is critical to pondering the God question. The idea of God doesn’t originate as an empty social surrender to any historical person or litmus, but rather the simple recognition that humans have a soul, and that their existence is therefore teleological.

Chapter 3. God and Physics

This chapter does two things. First, it answers popular arguments made by atheist philosophers, such as why God or devils never actually appear. Secondly, it introduces a new kind of Christianity, called *naturalized* Christianity. This chapter argues that God, like all of us, is bound by physics whenever present in the universe. This means that anything God does is forced to have a normal or naturalized explanation in physics. God can only come through our interpretation of dreams, feelings, hallucinations, calamity or phenomena. And this is why, in the Christian imagination, for God to have come otherwise, he had to be “birthed.” Physics always governs everything in the form of life, and this fact is what provides an answer to the argument from non-belief commonly made by atheist philosophers.

Chapter 4. Miracles and Physics

This chapter builds upon the last and is concerned with philosophy of miracles. It argues that miracles can never involve truly supernatural events (magic). Rather, if they ever happen at all, they involve one of two things, each of which is obedient to the laws of physics. They are either miracles of *aspect*, which require connoisseurship and perspicuity to see in the first place, making many of these so-called claims a matter of simple deception. Or, they are “physics-plus” phenomena, which means they involve a part of physics that humans are still unfolding (e.g., string theory, quantum physics). Although Shroud of Turin enthusiasts have argued that the supposed resurrection of Jesus was a physics-plus miracle, a much more common example would be the soul leaving our bodies at death. Looking at the latest data on cardiac NDE, the chapter argues that such a physics-plus experience happens at death about 20% of the time.

Chapter 5. The End & Why?

This chapter considers why conscious life in general and humans in particular are here. It isn’t concerned with scientific explanations (cause and effect), but rather with big questions about the meaning of life and “afterlife.” What exactly is an afterlife, and what must it entail for the God stories to be true? Must it

involve humans retaining their physical forms and continuing identity? The chapter explores two competing paradigms: a dualist view where souls transcend and “leave” physics, versus a theory of perfected-reality, called Eden-theory, where God supposedly intervenes upon the universe, corrects physics itself, and resurrects certain people. The chapter is harshly critical of the latter view and argues that only a dualist view of Christianity is defensible. The purpose of life is simply for humans to develop character and virtue – to become, as it were, a good soul. Reality will always be sovereign in human life, and God can do very little about that. But those who do manage to properly develop character by the time death comes can “live on,” while those who don’t simply are given what science provides: an end.

PART-II: JESUS

Chapter 6. Philosophy of Scripture

This chapter is concerned with when, philosophically, a proposition can be formed from reading a religious scripture. The chapter covers the literary approaches – mythicists and allegory-centered reading – as well as the techniques that historians deploy. The chapter is fundamentally descriptive. It sets forth the inherent challenges of ancient writing, the use of scribes, and the problems of interpolation, backstories and external validity. The chapter argues that an integrative perspective, philosophical in nature, is needed for when an honest proposition can be formed from reading text in a so-called “bible.”

Chapter 7. Network Politics: Decoding the New Testament

This chapter presents a thesis about reading the New Testament through the lense of network politics. It argues that the Gospels are best understood as interest groups products rather than as works of literature or fables. The primary Jesus organization had both internal political rivalries as well as collective external threats when producing key products. What ultimately became sanctioned was a social account of Jesus that not only involved grandiose interpolation and backstory, but also infused passages specifically concerned with leadership rivalries within the Jesus organization and also among the political constituencies the products were being distributed within. None of this is put forward to deny the central teachings of Christianity, but rather is meant as a guide for deciding what these “central teachings” are. The chapter is promoting revisionist Christianity, not atheism or mythicism.

Chapter 8. Why Jesus Remains Relevant

This chapter argues that, properly understood, Jesus was a good person and a good teacher who provided the rudiments of a universal god message from whom any person of any faith interested in the ethics of humanity can benefit from. This is referred to as “the uncorrupted Jesus.” The chapter is harshly critical of evangelicals who use Jesus’ name for political objectives or for strictures that themselves derive from corrupted or possessed intellectual states (ideology and orthodoxy). The chapter is also critical of liberal “educates” who have lost their heart for both theism in general and seeing Jesus the person as a force for good.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusion of the book. The sense that humans get about God comes from their form of life (existential), not from anything else. God can be seen in the experience of life, which makes “belief” an aspect proposition. Intellectuals needn’t believe in magic or fairytales from the Bronze age to believe in God; they need only accept that they have a soul, which is an extremely modest posit in metaphysics. And out of this opening the Jesus stories, properly understood and uncorrupted, present an inspiring complimentary and universalist picture of what we are to strive for: virtue ethics and good character. And that the best defense one can make for this entire ideal is a dualist paradigm where the cruelty of physics always remains the sovereign force in our life, but where the promise of redemption, or “escape,” is nonetheless afforded to the conscientious soul when finality naturally arrives.

WHY UNIQUE:

This work is unique in the scholarly literature for the following reasons.

Scholarly Integration

The work integrates most strongly with three scholars: Ludwig Wittgenstein (philosopher), James Tolbert (historian) & John Shelby Spong (theologian). Spong was a bishop in the Episcopal Church who became known as a “liberal” theologian seeking to modernize the Christian imagination of God. Although this book has attitudinal similarities with Spong, it differs most remarkably in method. Spong’s works largely appear as “policy speeches” addressed to Christendom; his method at times seems to be a campaign for policy change within the church. Because of this some of his detractors have suggested that his works lacked scholarly rigor.

Method

This work does not attempt to delineate what is truthful in Christian religious texts. Instead, it uses a philosophical method through which *versions* of truth are critiqued for their assertability conditions (internal logics). This method is sometimes called “hinge epistemology” and descends from Ludwig Wittgenstein. The point is to treat truth arising from scripture as already being contingent upon other commitments, some of which are enthymematic, and to flush those things out for overall inspection of the competing systems in social imagination. This treatment of truth as being both contingent in nature, as well as having comparative value to rivals, is a post-analytic method. It results in a descriptive project that keeps the author above explicit endorsements.

Network Politics.

The book is novel in the application of interest group and network politics to the products produced by the Jesus organizations (ancient writings). This effort builds upon fundamental insights of James Tolbert. Specifically, that the Jesus family held political power in the Jesus organizations, and that these operations had to confront different political publics when producing the organization’s products. It also had to confront rival products emerging in secondary publics as spin-offs (Gnosticism in Egypt and Apollonius in Greece). And there were internal rivalries between John, Paul, Peter and forces of “Jewish Christianity.” All of this affected what the Jesus organizations produced as a work product. Where this book is novel is that it sees the New Testament in political science terms, as an interest group publication, rather than a literary work or collection of social fables. Like any interest group – e.g., AARP or the AAUP – work products convey mission-based messages and are specific products of both internal and external politics.

Wittgenstein

The work takes certain bedrock ideas of Wittgenstein and uniquely applies them. These include: (a) the idea of outer-worldliness as inexpressible (Tractarian); (b) an emphasis upon hinge epistemology and quietism in religious discourse; and (c) seeing the darkness of humanity as an impetus for religious belief, and seeing such belief as an aspect proposition.

Transdisciplinary.

The book offers a transdisciplinary intersection of philosophy, first century historians, NDE literature, and even developments in physics and astronomy.

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