

GUEST EDITORIAL:
PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY, AND
PHILOSOPHICAL-THEOLOGICAL BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

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In its etymology, 'philosophy' means something like *the love of wisdom*. 'Theology' means something like *the word with regard to God*. Wisdom is an abstract universal, but the God with regard to whom theology seeks the word cannot be construed this way. A philosopher can love wisdom, but wisdom cannot love him back. The God of the major monotheisms, however, can seek a theologian and love her before she seeks or loves him. It makes a great difference to one's method of seeking understanding and one's view of the nature of depth in understanding whether what one is seeking is an abstract universal such as wisdom or is rather a personal being. It is therefore a central question for philosophical theology what it means to know God: what type of knowledge the theologian seeks, how she seeks or receives it, and how she assesses both it and herself in its light.

Philosophical theologians in the analytic and continental traditions come to this question with complementary resources. For continental philosophers of religion, it has long been a central concern to try to make sense of the fact that if there is a God, then definitionally he is not just an object of enquiry, but the source and end of all being. Humans' relations with God (as Søren Kierkegaard and many others have argued) are necessarily subjective and personal, because God defies objectification. From the continental point of view, to assume an 'objective', disengaged standpoint from which to investigate God's existence and character misses an essential part of what one seeks to understand, namely, that there is no such standpoint.

Continental philosophers of religion have therefore tended to approach the question of God through the practice of hermeneutics, which begins from questions about the character of the object of enquiry, the relation of the enquiring subject to that object, the form that knowledge or understanding takes within this relationship, and the appropriate acquisition and expression of such knowledge. Asking such questions in relation to God presents God as a transformative subject directly affecting our vision not only of the world, but also of ourselves, our modes of knowledge, and the ways in which we are to live, act, and speak in the world.

This approach is complemented by the recent, scientifically informed work on second-person knowledge in analytic philosophy. In that tradition, there has been a recent upsurge of interest in the knowledge of persons as a special non-propositional kind of knowledge. Much of this new work has been fueled by the voluminous scientific research in psychology and neurobiology prompted by the spread of autism spectrum disorder in the US and elsewhere. One of the most salient features of this disorder across its spectrum is some impairment in the cognitive capacities enabling empathy and what has come to be called 'mindreading'. The foundational knowledge which is impaired for a child with autism spectrum disorder cannot be taken as knowledge *that* something or other is the case. What is primarily impaired is not propositional knowledge but rather a direct and intuitive knowledge of persons. In typically functioning human beings, mind-reading consists in this kind of cognition, namely, a non-propositional knowledge of persons and their mental states.

New work in neuroscience has convinced many researchers that the capacity for this kind of knowledge of persons is subserved by embodied processes of cognition, potentially including what is known as the mirror neuron system. Discovered by a group of Italian neuroscientists, mirror neurons are neurons that activate when we *perceive* actions in others and when we *perform* those actions ourselves. Although their precise function is a matter of debate, it is clear that mirror neurons and other embodied processes contribute to enabling one person's knowledge of the mental states of another person, and that this knowledge can be described as analogous to perception. Like the perception of color, for example, the knowledge of persons in empathy and mind-reading is direct, intuitive, and hard to translate without remainder into knowledge *that* (though it is very useful as a basis for knowledge *that* of one sort or another).

Philosophers have been quick to see the importance of this new scientific work, which itself builds on continental phenomenology of perception. In analytic philosophy of mind and epistemology, there has been an outpouring of work on the knowledge of persons, with correlative work on social cognition and shared agency. This work includes several recent anthologies of articles on shared attention, where the knowledge of persons is crucial. In analytic philosophy of religion, new work has highlighted the centrality of the knowledge of persons for understanding such long-standing philosophical problems as the problem of evil. Where the subject for philosophical or theological study is a personal reality, including Jesus Christ or even God, it has become increasingly clear that these disciplines have to be sensitive to the fact that the knowledge of persons is not reducible to propositional knowledge.

One of the noteworthy things about such non-propositional knowledge of persons is that it can be transmitted by means of stories. And so the new scientific research with its focus on the non-propositional knowledge of persons has also illuminated the importance of narratives for philosophy and theology. While a person cannot express the distinctive knowledge of her second-personal experience of empathy or mind-reading with others as a matter of knowing *that*, she can do something to re-present the experience itself in such a way that it becomes available to others who were not part of that experience; at least some of the knowledge of persons garnered from the second-personal experience can be shared with others because it can be transmitted through stories. So although the knowledge of persons is different from ordinary knowledge *that* something or other is the case, it can be communicated by means of narratives. One might say then that a narrative is to the knowledge of persons what arguments are to propositional knowledge, so that one might even speak of narrative cognition, as distinct from the kind of knowledge ordinarily sought, for example, by the sciences. For these reasons, the study of narratives, which can yield such narrative cognition, can function in philosophy and theology to deepen and enrich research in both disciplines.

Narratives enable understanding not only of individual persons, but of the personal and interpersonal realm more generally: the complex and embodied ways communities and cultures engage life's questions and challenges. One of the richest sources for such understanding are the foundational narratives of a culture, which shape that culture and its understanding of life's enduring questions. Homer's epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, for example, gave a basic understanding of human life to the Greek world and to subsequent cultures influenced by that world. Foundational narratives provide an aid for philosophy and theology in their exploration of the lasting problems and large questions of human existence, an aid that would be missed if the focus of these disciplines were only on the works of Aristotle and Augustine, Aquinas and Averroes and Maimonides, or Hume and Kant, for example. For three great cultures, animated by the three Abrahamic religions, extending across countries and languages, lasting for many centuries, the foundational narratives are found in texts in the Bible and Quran taken to be canonically revealed. These include some of the most important and influential narratives in human history, shaping human understanding of the biggest questions of human life as lived individually or in social association with others. These narratives have lasted for so many centuries because they offer deep insights into the nature of the human condition and human flourishing. For people of faith, they also, and more importantly, offer a narrative knowledge of God's dealings with his people that is irreducible to propositional knowledge alone.

For philosophical theology, it is therefore vital for a serious approach to God to engage with biblical texts not merely as source material for philosophical propositions but also, and specifically, as narratives. Continental philosophy has developed methods and theories to preserve the integrity of narratives, including hermeneutics and phenomenology. However, it can sometimes seem idiosyncratic in its interpretation of their content. Analytic philosophy has developed methods that allow a rigorous analysis of content; however, it needs to develop tools to integrate a text's form in its analysis. "Interesting things," Thomas Nagel writes, "happen when new methods and their appropriate standards have to be developed to deal with questions that cannot be posed in terms of the already existing procedures of inquiry. Sometimes the questions cannot be fully understood until the methods have been developed."¹

The result of such philosophical readings of biblical texts would be not just a contribution to standard work in philosophy and theology, but, more radically, something like a narrative philosophy or narrative theology. Among the most successful of many recent outstanding innovations in contemporary philosophy and theology has been the analytic theology project. This project has altered the character of the discipline of theology and the correlative field of philosophy of religion in more than one country, more than one culture, on more than one continent, in both Anglophone and Germanic academic discourse. The time is ripe, then, to try to broaden the on-going work in analytic theology with a new focus on narrative and the second-personal in what one might call 'philosophical-theological biblical exegesis'.

The profitability of such an endeavor for analytic theology and philosophy was seen at a pilot workshop on Analytic Theology and at Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem in 2019, funded by a generous grant to Eleonore Stump, Godehard Bruentrup, Moshe Halbertal, and David Shatz from the Issachar Foundation. Participants from a range of countries and disciplines presented papers using theological or philosophical approaches to biblical texts. These included the four grant recipients as well as Dawn Chow, Jim Diamond, Katherine Dormandy, Georg Gasser, Lenn Goodman, Johannes Groessl, Dru Johnson, Charlotte Katzoff, Emmanuel Nathan, Dermot Nestor, Andrew Pinsent, and Shira Weiss. Other discussants included Christof Wolf, Judith Wolfe, and David Worsley. The success of the workshop attracted follow-on funding from Australian Catholic University for one or two additional workshops at Tantur to develop these methodological approaches to biblical narratives further.

Under the direction of Eleonore Stump and Judith Wolfe, a second workshop is planned for 2022 to consolidate and expand this methodology to other topics in analytic and philosophical theology. To lay the groundwork for this workshop, the directors and conference participants conducted a series of online seminars during the pandemic in 2020 to 2021 to clarify methodological questions and add new perspectives. We have assembled these seminar papers as a special issue of *The European Journal of Philosophy of Religion*. Taken together, the six papers in this issue by Godehard Bruentrup, Sam Lebens, Darren Sarisky, Eleonore Stump, Judith Wolfe, and Mark Wynn examine the nature of the methodology at issue and showcase its profitability.

1 Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), X.