

QUEER ADVICE TO CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHERS¹

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I. INTRODUCTION: PLANTINGA'S ADVICE

Thirty-eight years have passed since the publication of Alvin Plantinga's "Advice to Christian Philosophers" in 1984. In that paper, Plantinga famously encouraged Christian philosophers, including Christian philosophers of religion, to explore their faith with philosophical boldness:

Philosophy is many things. I said earlier that it is a matter of systematizing, developing and deepening one's pre-philosophical opinions. It is that; but it is also an arena for the articulation and interplay of commitments and allegiances fundamentally religious in nature; it is an expression of deep and fundamental perspectives, ways of viewing ourselves and the world and God. The Christian philosophical community, by virtue of being Christian, is committed to a broad but specific way of looking at humankind and the world and God. Among its most important and pressing projects are systematizing, deepening, exploring, articulating this perspective, and exploring its bearing on the rest of what we think and do. But then the Christian philosophical community has its own agenda; it need not and should not automatically take its projects from the list of those currently in favor at the leading contemporary centers of philosophy. Furthermore, Christian philosophers must be wary about assimilating or accepting presently popular philosophical ideas and procedures; for many of these have roots that are deeply anti-Christian. And finally the Christian philosophical community has a right to its perspectives; it is under no obligation first to show that this perspective is plausible with respect to what

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is taken for granted by all philosophers, or most philosophers, or the leading philosophers of our day. In sum, we who are Christians and propose to be philosophers must not rest content with being philosophers who happen, incidentally, to be Christians; we must strive to be Christian philosophers. We must therefore pursue our projects with integrity, independence, and Christian boldness.²

Key to Plantinga's account is *a view of Christians as a group with special interests*. These interests are religious in nature, but also personal: "ways of viewing *ourselves* and God." It is because Christians have these particular interests that they are entitled to forego full assimilation into the broader, non-theistic philosophical culture. In later work, Plantinga identifies materialism, the view that persons are identical to their bodies (or some part of their bodies), as an example of such a commitment, and argues that Christian commitments have bearing on materialism. Indeed, argues Plantinga, Christians should *reject* materialism precisely because of their Christian commitments.³

A second critical component to Plantinga's account is a conception of *Christian philosophy as a political force*. Some of this is suggested by his language in the above quote: of philosophy as an "*arena* for the *articulation* and interplay of commitments and *allegiances*." Here, Plantinga makes clear that Christian philosophy is not simply a series of propositions, but something that is *articulated* in an *arena* that displays *allegiances*. Of course, one can express allegiance to various propositions, but doing so in a social context in which those propositions are not only philosophically contested but politically loaded — particularly if you dig in your heels, insist on a "right" to your own perspectives, and proceed to defend them with "boldness" — *is* a political action. It is political precisely because it is an explicit resistance to a culture of affirmation with respect to various philosophical propositions: There is social (i.e., political) pressure to affirm *p*, but Christians must deny *p* — boldly, publicly — showing their philosophical independence. And it is not only in this passage that Plantinga affirms the politicization of Christian philosophy. The very first paragraph of his essay begins thusly:

Christianity, these days, and in our part of the world, is on the move. There are many signs pointing in this direction: the growth of Christian schools, of

2 Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers", *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1984), 271.

3 Alvin Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief", in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007).

the serious conservative Christian denominations, the furor over prayer in public schools, the creationism/evolution controversy, and others. There is also powerful evidence for this contention in philosophy.⁴

Notice how *decisively* political these developments are. The growth of Christian schools, like Plantinga's own Calvin College, along with K-12 Christian schools, and of "serious *conservative*" Christian denominations (as opposed to *liberal* ones), is evidence of Christianity's movement. Then come the next examples: prayer in public schools and creationism. While perhaps more contentious in 1984 than 2020, these issues remain politically controversial. Plantinga claims all of these are evidence of Christianity's growth. A more progressive Christian philosopher in 1984 may have identified these as *anti-Christian* developments, a kind of perversion of Christianity. Where conservative Christian denominations thrive, it is usually at the expense of various vulnerable groups: religious minorities, people of color, queers, and women. Private Christian schools, especially publicly-funded ones, eat up funding from public schools, often to the detriment of low-income and non-white students. When sectarian prayer is a *de facto* requirement in public schools, as in cases where a teacher leads students in prayer in a classroom, her role as an agent of a non-sectarian state is compromised. Of course, the more progressive Christian philosopher may be *mistaken* about each of these claims and Plantinga may be right. But the fact that Plantinga chose *these* examples as evidence of Christianity's (positive) rise is itself highly political.

Within philosophy, Plantinga explains that these social developments occur against a backdrop of anti-Christian philosophy within the academy. As Plantinga sees things, from the 1940s through at least the 1960s, Analytic Christian philosophy was dead without the prospect of resurrection.⁵ Logical positivism was dominant and philosophers like Bertrand Russell beat a steady anti-Christian drum.⁶ However, as Plantinga notes,

4 Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers", 253.

5 Cf. Michael C. Rea, "Introduction", in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "How Philosophical Theology Became Possible Within the Analytic Tradition of Philosophy", in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).

6 Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian: And Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (Touchstone Press, 1967). For a critical appraisal of Plantinga's historical claims, see

[T]hings have changed. There are now many more Christians and many more unabashed Christians in the professional mainstream of American philosophical life.⁷

Here again, Plantinga's allusion to Christian boldness — in this case, by reference to “*unabashed* Christians,” as opposed to shy or ashamed ones — is political. He continues:

But even if Christianity is on the move, it has taken only a few brief steps; and it is marching through largely alien territory. For the intellectual culture of our day is for the most part profoundly nontheistic and hence non-Christian — more than that, it is anti-theistic. Most of the so-called human sciences, much of the non-human sciences, most of non-scientific intellectual endeavor and even a good bit of allegedly Christian theology is animated by a spirit wholly foreign to that of Christian theism.⁸

This portion of Plantinga's essay tells us not only what normative Christian philosophy does, but who its enemies are. And they are listed plainly: contemporary intellectual culture, “so-called” human sciences, non-human sciences, non-scientific fields of inquiry (including philosophy), and even portions of Christian theology.⁹ According to Plantinga, these enemies are “animated by a *spirit*” that is anti-Christian, and it is against these forces and into these enemy territories that Christianity must march. So it is, to a limited extent, with Christian philosophy. Mainstream philosophy, at least in the twenty-first century, is overwhelmingly non-Christian. To a non-trivial extent, it is also *anti-Christian* in the sense that much of it critiques Christian theism, despite Christianity remaining culturally dominant in most of the Western world. Plantinga leaves unaddressed the extent to which non-Christian philosophers find themselves standing in opposition to a broad swath of, for example, North American Christian culture, where most of their students, family members, and government representatives affirm (or claim to affirm) some flavor of Christianity. But within philosophy, Christians are in the minority. Plantinga's hope is that Christian philosophers will be recognized *as*

Graham Oppy, “Philosophy, Religion, and Worldview,” in *Christian Philosophy: Conceptions, Continuations, and Challenges*, ed. J. A. Simmons (Oxford Univ. Press, 2018).

7 Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers”, 253.

8 Ibid., 253–54.

9 Cf. Alvin Plantinga, “Two or More Kinds of Scripture Scholarship,” in Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 374–421; Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

philosophers within the broader philosophical community, and that their work will be recognized as *Christian* within the narrower Christian community:

Philosophy is a social enterprise; and our standards and assumptions — the parameters within which we practice our craft — are set by our mentors and by the great contemporary centers of philosophy. From one point of view this is natural and proper; from another, however, it is profoundly unsatisfactory. The questions I mentioned are important and interesting. Christian philosophers, however, are the philosophers of the Christian community; and it is part of their task as *Christian* philosophers to serve the Christian community. But the Christian community has its own questions, its own concerns, its own topics for investigation, its own agenda and its own research program.¹⁰

Because Christian philosophers are part of the broader Christian community and because the latter community has philosophical needs and interests, it falls to philosophers who are Christian to be philosophers *for* the Christian community. Talk of philosophy as a *social enterprise* further politicizes the nature of philosophy. Where philosophical practice begins is where contemporary, mainstream philosophers begin: with a large set of metaphysical, ethical, epistemological, logical, stylistic, and procedural assumptions and questions. However, argues Plantinga, these should take a back seat to the assumptions of questions of the Christian community. This kind of identity politics is an implicit critique not only of contemporary, mainstream philosophical practice, but of the mainstream *philosophical canon* in which questions of particular interest to Christians are (thinks Plantinga) underrepresented. Plantinga concludes with the following:

So the Christian philosopher has his own topics and projects to think about; and when he thinks about the topics of current concern in the broader philosophical world, he will think about them in his own way, which may be a *different* way. He may have to reject certain currently fashionable assumptions about the philosophic enterprise — he may have to reject widely accepted assumptions as to what are the proper starting points and procedures for philosophical endeavor. And — and this is crucially important — the Christian philosopher has a perfect right to the point of view and pre-philosophical assumptions he brings to philosophic work;

10 Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers”, 255.

the fact that these are not widely shared outside the Christian or theistic community is interesting but fundamentally irrelevant.¹¹

The call to think differently, both in terms of rejecting fashionable views and metaphilosophical assumptions, is hardly unique to Christian philosophers. Plantinga recognizes that theistic philosophers of many stripes may need to do this. But it is not just *religious* philosophers who feel called to do this. This is the case because the assumptions and questions that dominate contemporary, mainstream philosophy don't exclude the interests of Christians, but also the interests of people of color, queer people, and disabled people. For example, in her critique of the philosophical canon, Anita Allen asks the following:

With all due respect, what does philosophy have to offer Black women? It's not obvious to me that philosophy has *anything* special to offer Black women today. I make this provocative claim to shift the burden to the discipline to explain why it is good enough for us; we should be tired of always having to explain how and prove that we are enough for the discipline.¹²

Citing Allen approvingly, Kristie Dotson argues that the refrain, "How is this paper philosophy?" so often asked of her and other philosophers of color daring to discuss non-mainstream questions, "points to the prevalence of a culture of justification"¹³. This culture of justification is a culture of *political legitimation*, "is both a charge and a challenge" to demonstrate "conformity with relevant justifying norms of philosophical engagement"¹⁴. The historical shaping of the Western philosophical canon by white, cisgender, heterosexual white men has resulted in a legitimization of *their* metaphilosophies, whether procedural or interrogative. The result is one in which, Dotson argues, we must question whether mainstream philosophy "provides a good working environment for black women"¹⁵. Dotson, a black woman, notes that joining the ranks of mainstream philosophers is a "burden I would never wish upon my younger sister"¹⁶. Dotson then cites Sally Haslanger on the problem:

11 Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers", 256.

12 George Yancy, ed., *African-American Philosophers, 17 conversations* (Routledge, 1998), 172.

13 Kristie Dotson, "How Is This Paper Philosophy", *Comparative Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2012), 5.

14 *Ibid.*, 8.

15 *Ibid.*, 15.

16 *Ibid.*, 15.

I don't think we need to scratch our heads and wonder what on earth is going on that keeps women out of philosophy. In my experience, it is very hard to find a place in philosophy that isn't actively hostile toward women and minorities, or at least assumes that a successful philosopher should look and act like a (traditional, white) man. And most women and minorities who are sufficiently qualified to get into graduate school in philosophy *have choices*. They don't have to put up with this mistreatment.¹⁷

To combat these exclusionary methodologies, Dotson recommends that we adopt what she calls a "culture of praxis" wherein we assign value to "seeking issues and circumstances pertinent to our living, where one maintains a healthy appreciation for the differing issues that will emerge as pertinent among different populations"¹⁸. Thus, the contemporary canon should be shaped, at least to some extent, by the special interests of groups. This is not unlike Plantinga's suggestion that the philosophical canon be shaped, at least to some extent, by the special interests of one group: Christians. That is compatible with, and bears some motivation similarities to, Dotson's suggestion that the interests of people of color *as people of color* are both philosophically significant and deserving of a bigger place within contemporary philosophy.¹⁹

This brings me to the central question of this essay: *What does Analytic philosophy of religion offer queers?* As things stand presently, it offers them an array of arguments and views about traditional topics in philosophy of religion. It tells them much about divine foreknowledge, about the Christian Incarnation, about the problem of evil, and so on. But it offers them these things as much as it offers *anyone* these things, and so doesn't really offer them anything *qua* queers. Indeed, in these respects, philosophy of religion appears to have continued its age-old trajectory, relatively unaffected by recent political developments and moral growth within societies. Today's discussions of the Trinity and divine hiddenness occur in a political and moral

17 Sally Haslanger, "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone)", *Hypatia* 23, no. 2 (2008), 212.

18 Dotson, "How Is This Paper Philosophy", 17.

19 I should note that I reject the view that Christian philosophy shares in any or all of the same dimensions of oppression that, say, Black philosophy or LGBTQIA+ philosophy does. Due to the fact that Christianity is so culturally dominant in places where contemporary Analytic philosophy flourishes (e.g., North America, the U.K., and Australia), and due to sheer philosophical dominance of Christianity in medieval Europe, it's difficult to believe that Christian philosophy is not significantly empowered in ways that Black philosophers and LGBTQIA+ philosophers are simply not.

vacuum of sorts: Were all the dates and references removed from these discussions, one could be forgiven for possessing uncertainty as to whether they were published in 2020 or 1990.

Of course, it's true that things are changing, albeit slowly. Renewed attention has been given to the place of nonhuman animals in philosophy of religion.²⁰ Feminist philosophy of religion, long a Continental stranger in Analytic lands, has been grafted into the fold and brightened the subdiscipline's future.²¹ The introduction or promotion of these discussions mirrors other developments in ethics, political philosophy, and feminist philosophy, where attention to the status of nonhuman animals and the nature of gendered oppression are booming. Then again, philosophy of religion is still lagging even in this respect. Serious ethical reflection about nonhuman animals, along with widespread activism in their defense, have been occurring since at least the 1970s.²² The same is true of the advent of contemporary feminist philosophy. And philosophy of religion, construed to include both philosophical theology and religious ethics, has evidenced responsiveness to political controversies concerning gender identity and sexual orientation. One thinks, for example, of the new natural lawyers, codified in Alexander Pruss's *One Body: An Essay in Christian Sexual Ethics* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). Pruss defends a Thomistic of marriage and sexuality that condemns non-heterosexual sex and marriage. Pruss's book, while a reaction to contemporary debates, is nevertheless a resuscitation of a medieval way of thinking about ethics. Sherif Girgis and Ryan T. Anderson defend religious exemptions to anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTQIA+ citizens.²³

20 See, for example, Trent Dougherty, *The Problem of Animal Pain: A Theodicy for All Creatures Great and Small* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Bethany N. Sollereider, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering: Theodicy Without a Fall* (Routledge, 2018); and the three contributions by Dustin Crummett, Faith Glavey Pawl, and Blake Hereth in: Blake Hereth and Kevin Timpe, eds., *The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion: New Perspectives on Disability, Gender, Race, and Animals* (Routledge, 2019), 139–208.

21 For example, see Kathryn Pogin, "Social Sin, Social Redemption", *Religious Studies* 57, no. 1 (2021), 1–8; Elizabeth D. Burns, "Is There a Distinctively Feminist Philosophy of Religion?", *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 6 (2012), 422–35; Marjorie H. Suchocki, "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy", *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994), 57–68; Michael Rea, "Gender As a Divine Attribute", *Religious Studies* 52, no. 1 (2016), 97–115.

22 For example, Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (Harper Collins, 1975) was published in 1975.

23 John Corvino, Ryan T. Anderson, and Sherif Girgis, eds., *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017).

These developments are shaped as much by contemporary political discourse as anything else.

Thus far, my purpose has been to highlight the extent to which Analytic philosophy of religion has political undercurrents. This should neither surprise nor disappoint us. People of all persuasions want the world to *be* a particular way and they often strive to make it so. And the shape of the philosophical canon, while at many times pernicious in its formation, is not always so: The canon, while shaped by those occupying (often unjust) power, was shaped to reflect *their* interests. That is not to say that the interests of Plato, Kant, and Plantinga are unimportant. Far from it. Rather, it is to say that the somewhat narrow array of social identities that shaped the Western philosophical canon have shaped it in a way that *dominates* the discussion, to the exclusion of less dominant (and sometimes oppressed) perspectives. This includes a lack of queer perspectives within philosophy of religion. These political undercurrents in philosophy of religion have therefore served to *focus*, but also to *limit*, contemporary philosophy of religion. We hear much about the afterlife but little about justice for women or trans persons in Heaven.²⁴ Doubtless this reflects the small number of queer philosophers of religion, but we should ask ourselves *why* philosophy of religion has so few queers.²⁵ It also has few pantheists and even fewer Molinists, but there is no shortage of work on those topics.²⁶ We should also ask ourselves why there are so few *non-queer*

24 A recent edited collection on T. R. Byerly and Eric J. Silverman, eds., *Paradise Understood: New Philosophical Essays About Heaven* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017), includes essays on skepticism, perfection, virtue, emotions, nonhuman animals, bodily survival, resurrection, personal identity, moral desert, freedom, and welfare, but *nothing* on issues of gender. For reflections on gender and the afterlife, see Hilary Yancey, "Heavenly (Gendered) Bodies? Gender Persistence in the Resurrection and Its Implications", in *The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion: New Perspectives on Disability, Gender, Race, and Animals*, ed. Blake Hereth and Kevin Timpe (Routledge, 2019); Kelli D. Potter, "A Transfeminist Critique of Mormon Theologies of Gender", in *The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion: New Perspectives on Disability, Gender, Race, and Animals*, ed. Blake Hereth and Kevin Timpe (Routledge, 2019); and Blake Hereth, "The Shape of Trans Afterlife Justice", in *Voices from the Edge: Centring Marginalized Perspectives in Analytic Theology*, ed. Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea (Oxford Univ. Press, 2020).

25 Helen de Cruz, "Philosophy of Religion From the Margins: A Theoretical Analysis and Focus Group Study", in *The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion: New Perspectives on Disability, Gender, Race, and Animals*, ed. Blake Hereth and Kevin Timpe (Routledge, 2019).

26 See, for example, Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, eds., *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2016); Ken Perszyk, ed., *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

philosophers of religion working on issues of importance to queer people (*qua* queer people). Do they not care about our fate in the afterlife, or perhaps care about it less than the metaphysics of the Trinity? Do they assume a progressive perspective on our fate and regard more negative appraisals as unworthy of serious philosophical attention? Do they wish to avoid being presumptuous by speculating on what queers care about? It is unpleasant to wonder.

What I propose to do now is chart a new, queer-friendly and queer-inclusive trajectory for philosophy of religion. The proposal is *normative* rather than predictive: It is about where Analytic philosophy of religion *should* go, rather than where it *will* go. Here is what I shall argue: First, given some of the unique ways Christian philosophy and philosophers have unjustly harmed queers, *Christian philosophers as a group have a responsibility to communities their group has oppressed to prioritize the interests of the oppressed.*²⁷ Thus, even if Plantinga is correct that Christian philosophers should prioritize the philosophical interests of the Christian community over the interests of the broader (and largely non-Christian) philosophical community, they should also prioritize the philosophical interests of the queer community over the interests of the (largely non-queer) Christian community. As Christians make up a disproportionate cross-section of philosophers of religion, their doing this will significantly re-orient philosophy of religion as a whole. Second, when Christian philosophers do this, they must do more than simply step aside, and instead *Christian philosophers must prioritize queer voices by creating or furthering academic space (e.g., at conferences, in journals and books, and in academic posts) for those who publicly and professionally identify as queer.* This coincides with a more general obligation of universities, and the administrations and professorates within them, to pursue broad affirmative action policies in hiring. But it is also a special, identity-based obligation for “Christian philosophers” in Plantinga’s sense: that is, philosophers who identify as Christians and bear the special obligations of the Christian community. This is especially true (although, I suspect, not *uniquely* true) of Christian philosophers who *volunteer* themselves to be agents of Christian philosophy — to, as Plantinga put it, “pursue [Christian] projects with *integrity*, independence, and Christian boldness”²⁸. Moral

27 Christian philosophers who *are* queer will have these duties, as well, but their duties will be generally *weaker* given their oppressed status. I defend this claim further in section 2.

28 Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers”, 271, emphasis mine.

integrity is a necessary component of academic pursuits as it is with all other pursuits, and a commitment to be a Christian philosopher *of moral integrity* entails, minimally, doing one's part to meet the obligations of the group. Finally, and most controversially, *Christian philosophers must mitigate their criticisms of queers where such criticisms would undermine their efforts toward compensatory/reparative justice*. Where Christians have overstepped in their critical oppression of queers, this can make impermissible what would have otherwise been permissible criticism of queers. While I deny that there *are* permissible criticisms of queers (*qua* queers), I shall defend the more modest claim — that whereas these criticisms would have been permissible in a moral context in which queers did not experience severe oppression at the hands of Christians — that does not assume a general moral embargo on criticisms of queers *qua* queers. The normative result of these changes will be a *queerer* philosophy of religion where queers are welcomed in the sub-discipline with their philosophical interests being both prioritized and respected. It is, then, one blueprint for *queering* philosophy of religion.

II. DOING JUSTICE FOR THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Christian philosophers as a group have a responsibility to communities their group has oppressed to prioritize the interests of the oppressed.

A defense of this claim requires a defense of four claims: (1) that Christian philosophers and the Christian community are groups and have group obligations; (2) that the Christian community has a group obligation of compensatory/reparative justice to queers, whom they have historically oppressed; (3) that Christian philosophers share in the obligation of compensatory/reparative justice to queers in the academy; and (4) Christian philosophers should prioritize the philosophical interests of those their group has oppressed (e.g., queers) over their group (i.e., Christians). I shall speak to each of these claims but defend only (2), (3), and (4).

Plantinga's defense of Christian philosophers includes a partial defense of (1). Christian philosophers are the philosophers *of* their community, and they should be philosophers *for* their community. Why should they do this? Arguably because the Christian community has *philosophical needs* and Christian philosophers are best equipped to meet those needs. Moreover, Christian

philosophers are themselves Christians, and it falls to Christians to meet the needs of their community. Indeed, this has been precisely the role played by towering philosophers like Augustine, Aquinas, and Plantinga. It is also why Plantinga points to the importance of Christian schools, which (he thinks) serve the Christian community by providing a *Christian* education. All of this shows that the Christian community has *intellectual* interests that can and should be met by Christian philosophers. But there is further reason to believe (1): because being a Christian, in the non-doxastic sense, is to *voluntarily* become a member of a group with needs, and voluntary membership of a group with needs obligates one to serve the group's needs. Groups may set reasonable requirements for membership, and one obvious (if rarely spoken) condition is that members will serve the interests of the group. Joining a university faculty tacitly commits one to serving the interests of the university and the student body, for example, and joining a charity tacitly commits one to refrain from pocketing the charitable donations. This duty is even more clearly true in cases where one *believes* one is working on the group's behalf, as Plantinga and other Christian philosophers believe.

However, the Christian community has more than intellectual needs and interests. It also has *moral* needs and interests. These include the moral interest in being forgiven by God and moral need for reconciliation. Priests, pastors, and counselors serve many of these needs, but not exclusively. Generally speaking, the Christian community has a moral interest in *justice*, including the mitigation of injustices for which it (as a community) is responsible. For example, where Christianity has wreaked economic injustice, there is a responsibility of Christians to reform economic policies and provide for the economically underserved.

Returning to the topic of this essay, it is difficult to dispute that the Christian community has wreaked injustice against queers. It goes beyond the scope of this essay to consider *all* of the wrongs Christians have committed against queers, or even to *defend* that claim, but a small sampling serves as an illustration and a partial defense of (2). Consider first the decrees of the Council of Nablus, convened in 1120 C.E., which governed Christian Jerusalem during the Middle Ages and made homosexuality a capital offense:

Eighth Decree

If anybody were tried as an adulterer had defiled him/herself with sodomy and wickedness by their own free will, let both the one doing and the one receiving be burned.

Eleventh Decree

If anyone accused as a sodomite before he comes to his senses and having been led to penance for abominable wickedness (by oath swearing) rejects, let him be received in a church and be judged according to the sentence of the canons. If, however, the accused fell into it and secondly wishes to do penance, indeed let him be allowed to do for penance but be sent abroad from the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Signatories to these horrific decrees included three bishops (Bernard of Nazareth, Ansqutinus of Bethlehem, and Roger of Ramla) and an archbishop (Ehremar of Caesarea).²⁹ Nor was this the only occasion capital punishment was legalized against queers. The *Codex Theodosianus*, or Theodosian Code, expressed the laws of the Roman Empire under the Christian emperor Theodosius I. One of the codes reads as follows:

Code 9.7.6: All persons who have the shameful custom of condemning a man's body, acting the part of a woman's to the sufferance of alien sex (for they appear not to be different from women), shall expiate a crime of this kind in avenging flames in the sight of the people.

These, of course, are hardly recent examples of anti-queer oppression. But they show that such oppression is long-standing and that prominent Christians within the Church hierarchy and within various governments have promoted it. More recently in Uganda, in 2014, the Ugandan parliament passed the "Anti-Homosexuality Act," the text of which reads as follows:

2. The offense of homosexuality.

(1) A person commits the offense of homosexuality if—

(a) he penetrates the anus or mouth of another person of the same sex with his penis or any other sexual contraption;

(b) he or she uses any object or sexual contraption to penetrate or stimulate [the] sexual organ of a person of the same sex;

²⁹ Benjamin Z. Kedar, "On the Origins of the Earliest Laws of Frankish Jerusalem: The Canons of the Council of Nablus, 1120," *Speculum* 74, no. 2 (1999).

(c) he or she touches another person with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality.

(2) A person who commits an offense under this section shall be liable, on conviction, to imprisonment for life.

The bill's effects were swift and dramatic for Ugandan queers. According to one report at the time, there was an increase of between 750% and 1,900% in anti-queer hate crimes.³⁰ The motivation behind the bill was religious. Indeed, it was *Christians* who initially promoted the bill and was signed into law by Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, an Evangelical Christian.

The broader Christian community condemns these policies and practices as injustices. Burning queers at the stake, exiling them, or imprisoning them for life are morally wrong. They are, moreover, moral wrongs perpetrated by Christians who claimed to work on behalf of the broader Christian community. Everyone has an agent-neutral duty to reject and fight against injustice, but groups whose members commit prominent and grievous injustices have special group-relative duties to amend those wrongs. As an example of this, consider the rampant sexual abuse of minors by priests within the Catholic Church. It was a moral failing of the ecclesiastical hierarchy not to remove and prosecute abusive priests. While it is true that any non-Christian would have had a duty to speak out against such abuse, the duty to prevent such injustices falls even more heavily on the shoulders of a hierarchy who empowered (culpably or non-culpably) priests to prey on children and in whose name the abuse was carried out. If one believes, as many Christians do, that the power of the Church is reserved exclusively for executing the will of God, and if the will of God is incompatible with injustice, then those who use the power of the Church to commit injustice are abusing the power of the Church and it falls to the Church to reclaim that power.

There are two further reasons to believe that the Christian community has a special duty to amend these wrongs. First, because Christians like Museveni and Theodosius *use the social power of Christianity to accomplish their anti-queer ends*. When the social power of Christianity is used, a *group's* power is used, and it is the responsibility of groups to ensure their power is used in

30 Owen Bowcott, "Uganda Anti-Gay Law Led to Tenfold Rise in Attacks on LGBTI People, Report Says", *The Guardian*, May 11th, 2014.

morally permissible ways. Second, because the social power of groups is positively correlated with increased membership, members of groups are sometimes obligated to *leave* a group if their presence contributes to the group's social power and the group's social power is wielded impermissibly. To take an obvious example, membership in the Ku Klux Klan is morally impermissible both because of their racist, queerphobic social agenda and because membership within the group gives them greater social power. In cases where a group's explicit and implicit aims are not morally impermissible but the group's social power is nevertheless wielded impermissibly, continued membership may be permissible but entails a residual duty to pursue moral reformation within the group. The choice to leave a group mitigates (though not altogether removes) the extent to which the group's moral problems are your responsibility. This entails that group members have *greater* responsibility to ensure that the group acts in morally permissible ways. Additionally, groups typically grant greater formal and informal recognition to their members than to non-members. For example, members of some Christian churches can vote (and withhold their vote), tithe (and withhold their tithe), and appeal to church leadership as members. Indeed, by opposing unjust group practices, they weaken the extent to which the unjust practices are *group* practices.

All of this establishes that Christian philosophers *qua* Christian philosophers have duties of compensatory/reparative justice to queers. But claim (3) — i.e., that Christian philosophers share in the obligation of compensatory/reparative justice to queers in the academy — has not yet been established. In other words, I haven't yet shown that Christian philosophers *qua* Christian philosophers have this duty. Fortunately, that is fairly easy to show. As Christians, Christian philosophers have an existing duty to do justice on behalf of their group (i.e., the Christian community). If there are injustices in the academy against queers for which the Christian community is responsible, then Christian philosophers — as much as *any* Christian — should oppose those injustices. Why Christian philosophers are *especially obligated* to rectify these injustices is because *they are academics* and thus are ideally positioned to effect change within colleges, universities, seminaries, etc. As Christian academics, their duty to rectify Christian-perpetrated academic injustices against queers is (other things being equal) greater than non-Christian academics, since the latter are less responsible for those particular injustices than the former. As Christian philosophers, their duty to rectify Christian-perpe-

trated academic injustices *within philosophy* is greater than non-philosopher academics (including Christian ones), since the latter are less responsible for injustices within philosophy than the former.

The final component of my first main claim is (4): Christian philosophers should prioritize the philosophical interests of those their group has oppressed (e.g., queers) over their own group (i.e., Christians). This is arguably the most controversial component of the first main claim, but it occupies solid moral footing. In cases where I wrong someone else and their interests are placed at risk as a result of my wrongdoing, justice requires that I prioritize their interests over mine. The same is true of groups. Even for those who reject reductive individualism about group duties can find group-based analogies. For example, when Nazi Germany impermissibly wronged Austrian civilians, they were morally required to rectify the harms to Austrian citizens *prior to* caring for their own citizens. Indeed, even if many German citizens were not themselves responsible for the actions of the Nazi Germany as a group, it remains true that *the group* bears that responsibility, and thus German citizens should support the group acting on its moral priorities. Importantly, since groups can't act without a sufficient number of their members, it follows that German citizens should assist their group in fulfilling its duties. It follows from all this that Christian philosophers *qua* Christians should prioritize the interests of those oppressed by the Christian community over the Christian community.

III. MAKING SPACE FOR QUEERS

Christian philosophers must prioritize queer voices by creating or furthering academic space (e.g., at conferences, in journals and books, and in academic posts) for those who publicly and professionally identify as queer.

Having now defended a special duty for Christian philosophers to prioritize the philosophical interests of queers within the academy, the exploration of two further things is critical: (5) the nature of the academic wrongs for which Christians are responsible and (6) morally appropriate ways of rectifying those wrongs.

What, if anything, are the wrongs Christians have perpetrated within philosophy? Here I have in mind philosophical practices that adversely affect queers. This includes, among other things, practices that unjustly exclude,

ridicule, accuse, stigmatize, or otherwise mark queers for unjust treatment. The queers affected need not be professional philosophers. They include queers who considered careers in academic philosophy but chose not to for fear of mistreatment. They include queers who never entertained professional philosophy, but are unjustly harmed as a result of Christian philosophy. We should further consider wrongs Christians have perpetrated within the academy generally that create disaffected queers, as well as wrongs Christians have perpetrated against queers that has affected their presence, participation, and success within academic contexts.

Historical injustices committed against queers serve to explain the *closeting* of queer identities. Where queerness is condemned, stigmatized, or viewed with skepticism, a common practice is to leave one's queer identity undisclosed. With the concealment of one's identity typically comes the concealment of one's experiences, fears, hopes, and questions — including philosophical questions. Speaking anecdotally, there was many occasions in college when I refrained from inquiring about the nature of sexual orientation because I worried my curiosity would seem *personal*, threatening to reveal *why* I was curious. It is very plausible that widespread stigma against queers, perpetrated in part by the Christian community, is partially responsible for an underrepresentation of queer intellectual interests, including within philosophy. There is, furthermore, empirical research to suggest that gay students in Christian colleges face risks with their identities,³¹ that Evangelical Christians are unusually unaffected by social contact with queers,³² that conservative Christian calls for celibacy³³ or 'conversion therapy'³⁴ have an adverse effect on queer mental health despite the quasi-advocacy of the approach among

31 Lucy E. Bailey and Kamden K. Strunk, "A Question Everybody Danced Around: Gay Men Making Sense of Their Identities in Christian Colleges", *Educational Studies* 54, no. 5 (2018).

32 Ashley A. Baker and Sarah R. Brauner-Otto, "My Friend is Gay, But...: The Effects of Social Contact on Christian Evangelicals' Beliefs About Gays and Lesbians", *Review of Religious Research* 57, no. 2 (2015).

33 Darren J. Freeman-Coppadge and Sharon G. Horne, "What Happens If the Cross Falls and Crushes Me?": Psychological and Spiritual Promises and Perils of Lesbian and Gay Christian Celibacy", *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* 6, no. 4 (2019).

34 "NewsCAP: Conversion Therapy Should Never Be Attempted", *AJN, American Journal of Nursing* 116, no. 2 (2016); Barry S. Anton, "Proceedings of the American Psychological Association 2009: Appropriate Affirmative Responses to Sexual Orientation Distress and Change Efforts", *American Psychologist* 65, no. 5 (2010).

some Evangelicals,³⁵ and that structural stigma against queers is a social determinant of health³⁶ and a predictor of under-involvement in college contexts that limit student success³⁷. All of these negatively impact the extent to which queers are academically engaged and academically open about questions that interest them. Moreover, given the widespread perception among queers that Christianity is unfriendly to their identities³⁸ (Walton 2006; Efird, Cockayne, and Warman forthcoming) that contemporary Analytic philosophy of religion is dominated by Christian philosophers, it should not surprise that so few queers are active in philosophy of religion. Nor should it surprise us that their interests receive less daylight.

When it comes to the sidelining of certain perspectives, a commonly heard excuse is ignorance. For example, in contemporary Analytic philosophy of religion, the work done is mostly *Christian* philosophy of religion. There are hundreds of examples in which philosophers of religion, either at conferences or in print, note that they will focus exclusively on Christian commitments because that is the religious tradition with which they are most familiar. More progressive philosophers of religion often concede that their lack of familiarity with other traditions is a *bad* thing, but they have only so much time and so can't be held responsible. The end effect, of course, is that contemporary Analytic philosophy of religion largely ignores non-Christian perspectives and, while perhaps unfortunate, there is no obligation to change this trend. Perhaps graduate programs specializing in philosophy of religion should graft philosophical work from other Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic traditions

35 Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, "Honest Sex Science", *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 226; Mark A. Yarhouse, "Integration in the Study of Homosexuality, GLBT Issues, and Sexual Identity", *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 40, no. 2 (2012).

36 Mark L. Hatzenbuehler and Katie A. McLaughlin, "Structural Stigma and Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenocortical Axis Reactivity in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults", *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 47, no. 1 (2014); John E. Pachankis, Mark L. Hatzenbuehler, and Tyrel J. Starks, "The Influence of Structural Stigma and Rejection Sensitivity on Young Sexual Minority Men's Daily Tobacco and Alcohol Use", *Social Science & Medicine* 103 (2014).

37 George D. Kuh, "What We're Learning About Student Engagement from NSSE: Benchmarks for Effective Educational Practices", *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 35, no. 2 (2003).

38 Gerald Walton, "'Fag Church': Men Who Integrate Gay and Christian Identities", *Journal of homosexuality* 51, no. 2 (2006), Joshua Cockayne, David Efird, and Jack Warman, "Shattered Faith: The Social Epistemology of Deconversion by Spiritually Violent Religious Trauma", in *Voices from the Edge: Centring Marginalized Perspectives in Analytic Theology*, ed. Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea (Oxford Univ. Press, 2020).

into their curricula, but that falls to the graduate programs, not to philosophers who have since graduated or whose research agenda has largely been set. In the last section, however, I argued that Christian philosophers — who, again, make up a decisive majority of philosophers of religion — have moral obligations *qua* philosophical representatives of the Christian community to do justice to Christian-oppressed groups within philosophy. This will mean doing justice to the philosophical interests of more than the queer community; it will also mean promoting the philosophical interests of people of color, women, and non-Christian religious traditions. This is further supported by the fact that many queers *are* people of color, women, and non-Christian, combined with the fact that queer people of color and white queers will have importantly non-overlapping interests.

Christian philosophers, therefore, are *without excuse* when it comes to better promoting the philosophical interests of queers. It is their responsibility as representatives of the Christian community to do so. This may involve cutting back on their current research agendas, but minimally it involves *expanding* the sub-discipline's research agenda. Christian philosophers should advocate for philosophy of religion to, as it were, make room for further discussion of queer projects. Even within current academic philosophy, there are ways to do this. In 2018, the Center for Philosophy of Religion at Notre Dame held their annual Logos Workshop, but unlike past workshops it centered on a new theme: "Race, Gender, Ability, and Class: Expanding Conversations in Analytic Theology." A special issue of the journal *Res Philosophica* focused on "New Frontiers in Philosophy of Religion," with special focuses on disability and feminist philosophy. The obligation of Christian philosophers is to expand on these initiatives. Philosophy of religion journals like *Faith & Philosophy*, *Religious Studies*, *Journal of Analytic Theology*, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, and others should prioritize submissions that address issues of importance to queers over more mainstream Christian interests — or, at least, *Christian* editors and reviewers should do this. The same is true of *non-Christian* editors and reviewers should, since they have no duty to prioritize mainstream Christian interests and there is a general duty to avoid complicity in the failure of others to discharge *their* moral duties.

Pursuing the aforementioned proposals does *not* mean Christian philosophers are permitted to badger queers about their interests, force them to 'out' themselves, or otherwise be inappropriately invasive into their lives. Rather, the

pursuit of those proposals should be carried out in a way that *expands opportunities* for queers. This speaks to the importance of *queer leadership* in Analytic philosophy of religion: Queers best understand what their needs and curiosities are and are therefore best equipped to set an agenda for queering philosophy of religion. They will know best what philosophical questions have been overlooked and why, as well as which overlooked questions are worth asking. They will know best which philosophical questions have been overemphasized at the expense of queers, as well as which *answers* have harmed queers. However, there is currently a severe absence of not only queers but queer leadership in philosophy of religion. If queers best understand their interests and leadership in philosophy of religion tends to determine which interests take priority in journals and conferences, then an obligation to promote queer interests is well-served by the promotion of queer leadership. Thus, Christian philosophers should promote queer leadership in philosophy of religion, provided that leading queers publicly and professionally identify as queer. Where this is not reasonably feasible (e.g., due to an apparent shortage of qualified queer philosophers of religion), *allies* — understood to be those committed to and actively defending queer interests — are the second-best choice.

IV. MITIGATING ANTI-QUEER CRITICISM

Christian philosophers must mitigate their criticisms of queers where such criticisms would undermine their efforts toward compensatory/reparative justice.

I arrive now at my most controversial claim in this paper. Thus far, I have argued that Christian philosophers must step aside and allow their interests *qua* Christians to allow for the prioritization of queer interests. This is their duty as representatives of the Christian community, which is morally indebted to queers as a result of oppressing them.

If what I have argued so far is correct, then Christian philosophers of religion should mitigate their criticisms of queers at conferences and in journals because those criticisms, as it were, sucks up oxygen in an atmosphere where queer voices should be prioritized. Thus, for instance, when a philosophy of religion journal publishes a paper or a special issue that defends new natural law arguments against queer sex or queer marriage, we should first ask ourselves whether that paper or special issue promotes queer interests. If it does,

we should ask ourselves whether there were *feasibly better* ways of promoting those interests that were opted against, since a moral obligation to promote queer interests is dubiously fulfilled if one's intent is to *minimize* the extent to which those interests are promoted while still technically promoting them.³⁹ There is much the Christian community owes to queers after centuries of oppressing them, and maximal rather than minimal efforts are required to settle deeper moral debts. If, on the other hand, the published paper or special issue doesn't promote queer interests, we should ask ourselves whether something else should have published in its stead. This will not always be the case, of course, but it will *sometimes* be the case, and it falls to Christian philosophers to ensure that *they* are excused from not publishing papers in defense of queer interests in the place of other papers. Again, this reflects the obligation of Christian philosophers to modify their research to the extent morality requires. This may not require a complete overhaul of one's research plans, but nor does not permit superficial changes. The obligation for Christian philosophers as a group is to prioritize queer interests over (mainstream) Christian ones, and that shift will appear radical in the sub-discipline as a whole if not in the research portfolios of particular Christian philosophers.

The queer interests that Christian philosophers promote should be philosophical in nature and should be guided by queer persons *within* philosophy of religion, since they are better positioned than non-queers and non-philosophers-of-religion to identify critical queer interests in philosophy of religion. To a lesser but non-trivial extent, Christian philosophers should allow philosophy of religion to be guided by queers at large with interests in philosophy of religion, just as they are already guided by lay Christians. However, in promoting queer interests in philosophy of religion, they should remember that their efforts are both morally obligatory and only a small part of a larger moral obligation held by the Christian community to rectify injustices to

39 For example, it may be argued that *criticisms* of queerness—arguments from new natural law, say—are a means of promoting the philosophical interests of queers, for surely queers have an interest in knowing whether their sex, relationships, or marriages are morally impermissible. It is easy to see how this is a *suboptimal* way of promoting queer interests, as queers have a stronger interest in *maintaining* and therefore *exculpating* (rather than inculpating) their sex, relationships, or marriages. Moreover, it is doubtful that Christian philosophers would be sincere if they held this objection, for they believe *their* interests *qua* Christians is to *justify* (rather than problematize) belief in God, the Resurrection, and the like.

queers. Thus, they should be careful to promote queer interests in philosophy of religion without *undermining* efforts towards justice outside of academic philosophy. For example, Christian philosophers defending new natural law theory would be obligated to discontinue their research in that area if their work will be used to justify the continued oppression of “unnatural” queers in Uganda. Indeed, they would then be obligated to modify their research to explain why new natural law theory *prohibits* rather than permits the execution, imprisonment, or exiling of queers simply for engaging in queer sex or being in a queer relationship. In very general terms, Christian philosophers should promote queer interests in philosophy of religion in *queer-positive* ways because queer interests tend to be queer-positive and because queer-negative discussions tend to undermine queer interests in other ways (i.e., outside philosophy, but also by promoting — or failing to undermine — the widespread perception among queers that philosophy of religion is *anti-queer*). This does not altogether prohibit queer-negative ways of promoting queer interests in philosophy of religion, if there are any, but it *does* place a cap on that means of promotion. It should be the rare exception rather than the rule.

Returning to group-level talk, the voice of the Christian community has more often be used to speak out *against* queer interests than for them. Or, at the very least, it has been used far *too* often to suppress queer interests and oppress queers. And it has done this in ways or with results that most contemporary Christians, if not Christian philosophers, find utterly unacceptable: by advocating punitive measures for queers; by stigmatizing queerness that cause them to self-quiet, abandon the Church, drop out of college, or avoid engaging with philosophy of religion at all for fear of what Christian philosophers might say about them. On queerness, the Christian community has spoken too much and listened too little. Its voice has wreaked and continues to wreak grave injustice. Many countries and even continents have a Christian culture, yet queerphobia and queer oppression exists everywhere. It is doubtful this would be the case if the Christian community boldly condemned queer oppression while using its powerful voice to say nothing further about queerness. The unfortunate truth is that in a world where queers are routinely murdered, lynched, silenced, and forced to fight, flee, or hide, *any* criticism of queerness — especially by powerful voices like the Christian community — are used to rationalize this abuse. Had Jesus agreed with the Pharisees that the adulteress *had* sinned, thereby maintaining existing social

focus on the adulteress and whether her punishment was justified, she would have likely been stoned to death. Instead, Jesus chose to do otherwise—to disrupt the social focus on the adulteress and to encourage his audience to look within their own hearts, to remember that we are all sinners in need of mercy, and to encourage them to do unto others as they would have done unto them. In a similar way, the reality of queer oppression tells us that the social focus is on queers and whether various mistreatments of them are justified. Criticisms of queerness, *even if true*, threaten far more harm than is justified, and thus the Christian community should avoid making these criticisms. Christian philosophers, as agents of their group, must do the same.

V. CONCLUSION

Thirty-eight years ago, Alvin Plantinga advised Christian philosophers to pursue their philosophical projects—projects of interest to the Christian community, whom Christian philosophers serve—with “integrity, independence, and Christian boldness” (Plantinga 1984: 271). In this essay, I have argued that philosophy of religion should move in a decidedly more queer-friendly direction and that Christian philosophers bear a special responsibility to make it happen. I have defended three specific claims. First, given some of the unique ways Christian philosophy and philosophers have unjustly harmed queers, *Christian philosophers as a group have a responsibility to communities their group has oppressed to prioritize the interests of the oppressed*. Second, *Christian philosophers must prioritize queer voices by creating or furthering academic space (e.g., at conferences, in journals and books, and in academic posts) for those who publicly and professionally identify as queer*. Third, *Christian philosophers must mitigate their criticisms of queers where such criticisms would undermine their efforts toward compensatory/reparative justice*.

While I have my doubts these changes will be made, I would plead with Christian philosophers, and especially more conservative Christian philosophers who are more likely to object to what I have said here, to receive them in the spirit I intend. Queers are suffering. They are suffering in large part because of the religious group you serve and with which you identify. You can help them in small ways by bearing good news: by throwing open the doors to philosophy of religion and welcoming their projects, helping them (where ap-

appropriate) answer questions of critical importance to them. You can speak less and listen more, opening the mouths your community has long silenced. In doing these things, you serve both Christ *and* queers. You do justice and walk *humbly* with your God. When it comes to the dawn of queer philosophy of religion, a new take on the old adage says it best: *It's here. It's queer. Get into it.*

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