

# RETHINKING CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY: ADRIAAN PEPERZAK'S CONTRIBUTIONS

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IN a series of recent works from the past decade, *Reason in Faith*, *The Quest for Meaning*, *Thinking: From Solitude to Dialogue and Contemplation*, and particularly *Philosophy Between Faith and Theology*,<sup>1</sup> Adriaan Peperzak provides a long reflected-upon perspective on Christian philosophy oriented by, nourished on, even indebted both to classical examples of Christian philosophy and to several thinkers involved in the complex and wide-ranging 1930s Francophone debates about Christian philosophy.<sup>2</sup> These debates, eventually drawing in numerous French Catholic intellectuals, still arguably remains a *locus classicus* for serious philosophical discussion of Christian philosophy, providing reference points for his thought. Peperzak accomplishes something relatively uncommon in post-1930s writings on Christian philosophy, making original and substantive contributions going beyond reinterpreting positions and theses already articulated during the 1930s debates.

This study is divided into four sections. The first lays out Peperzak's view of philosophy's contemporary situation, oriented by failures of the modern project of entirely autonomous philosophy, a situation ripe for rethinking and producing Christian philosophy. The second, third, and fourth sections

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<sup>1</sup> ADRIAAN THEODOOR PEPERZAK's works are cited here as follows: *Reason in Faith: On the Relevance of Christian Spirituality for Philosophy*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey 1999 = R; *The Quest for Meaning: Friends of Wisdom from Plato to Levinas*, Fordham University Press, New York 2003 = Q; *Philosophy Between Faith And Theology: Addresses to Catholic Intellectuals*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 2005 = P; *Thinking: From Solitude to Dialogue and Contemplation*, Fordham University Press, New York 2006 = T.

<sup>2</sup> For balanced discussion of these debates, cf. A. RENARD, *La Querelle sur la possibilité de la philosophie chrétienne: essai documentaire et critique*, Éditions Ecole et Collège, Paris 1941; E. A. SILLEM, *Perspectives on Christian Philosophy*, «Philosophy Today», 5, 1 (1961), pp. 3-13; Y. FLOUCAT, *Pour une philosophie chrétienne: éléments d'un débat fondamental*, Téqui, Paris 1981; M. D. JORDAN, *The Terms of the Debate over 'Christian Philosophy'*, «Communio: International Catholic Review», 12 (1985), pp. 293-311; L. BOGLIOLO, *La filosofia cristiana: Il problema, la storia, la struttura*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1986; and for useful background, the essays in Ph. SECRETAN, ed., *La philosophie chrétienne d'inspiration catholique*, Academic Press Fribourg, Fribourg 2006.

focus on three specific themes of Peperzak's work and their implications for Christian philosophy: philosophy as a concrete activity and the relationship between the natural and supernatural; the importance of and modes of affectivity in Christian philosophy; and lastly, Christian philosophy's grounding in dialogue, tradition and community.

### 1. AFTER AUTONOMY, CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

In Peperzak's view, the issue of Christian philosophy must now be reexamined through reflection on philosophy's contemporary historical situation. This is not an entirely new idea, as several of the 1930s debates's participants felt the urgency and saw the usefulness of reflection on the history of philosophy's recent development.<sup>3</sup> But, Peperzak has and presses the advantage of decades of further reflection. Problems of modernity, philosophy, and Christianity that were *becoming* evident have now in Peperzak's view *become* inescapable. Granting that «these questions have been debated before, particularly in France sixty years ago», he indicates several key historical changes: «Neo-scholasticism has disappeared; exegesis and history have shown how many meanings the word "Christian" has; the modern idea of an autonomous philosophy has made room for conceptions according to which philosophy is always rooted in prephilosophical soil and fed by nonphilosophical moods, mores and traditions».<sup>4</sup> Whether Neo-Scholasticism has disappeared depends on precisely what one means by that polysemic term, but it is clear that during the 1930s debates one could hardly *ignore* neo-Thomists, whereas today many philosophers do so, even at many Catholic institutions.<sup>5</sup>

The dogmatic assumption central to modern thought, that philosophy must be fully and entirely autonomous in order to remain philosophy, was critically reexamined by certain of the debate's participants. Some, generally those rationalists and neo-Thomists taking positions against the possibility of Christian philosophy,<sup>6</sup> committed themselves to this eminently modern no-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. in particular M. BLONDEL, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. A. Dru and I. Trethowan, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1964. Cf. also J. MARITAIN, *Antimoderne*, Éditions de la Revue des Jeunes, Paris 1922, and his later clarificatory remarks in IDEM, *A propos de la renaissance thomiste*, «Vie Intellectuelle», 6, 2 (1930), pp. 314-324; R. JOLIVET, *La philosophie chrétienne et la pensée contemporaine*, Téqui, Paris 1932.

<sup>4</sup> R, pp. 106-107.

<sup>5</sup> A criticism that could be raised about Peperzak's work is its dismissal, not so much of Thomas Aquinas, but of the resources and contemporary neo-Thomist thought. For useful contemporary discussion from a Thomist perspective, cf. Th. D'ANDREA, *Rethinking the Christian Philosophy Debate: An Old Puzzle and Some New Points of Orientation*, «Acta Philosophica», 1/II (1992), pp. 191-214.

<sup>6</sup> These Rationalists included Emile Bréhier and Léon Brunschvicg, Neo-Scholastics Fernand Van Steenberghen, Leon Noël, and Pierre Mandonnet.

tion. Some, particularly the most important Thomist interlocutors, seem of two minds; Gilson still speaks of «pure rational critique»<sup>7</sup> as the measure of the philosophical value of Christian philosophy, and Maritain asserts a purely natural and rational essence of philosophy, discoverable through abstraction.<sup>8</sup> Peperzak's position bears closer affinities to those of Blondel and Marcel,<sup>9</sup> but goes even beyond them. His view is that in light of philosophical developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it becomes evident, that the ideal, the demand, and the project of philosophy as *fully and entirely* autonomous was a chimera.

Despite its bankruptcy, however, it remains a governing assumption and ideal of philosophical practice in many quarters. Philosophy represented to students, and self-presented as such by many practitioners and teachers, as ideally and entirely autonomous, as «emancipated, free thinking of individuals who defend universally valid theses and relations with regard to reality insofar as it is accessible to all normal people»,<sup>10</sup> makes and relies on promises that remain, and cannot but remain unkept. Peperzak devotes considerable space and attention to detailed and systematic meta-philosophical critique of current-day practices and institutions, indicating how modern philosophy's autonomy project functions as a sort of ideology. Brevity precludes full analysis of Peperzak's critique, but one passage may stand as representative: That even the practice of modern philosophers is not averse to authorities and heteronomous institutions can be easily demonstrated by looking at (1) the role of keynote speakers at conferences, (2) the authority ascribed to recommendations for jobs and publications, (3) the exaggerated respect for references and citations... (4) the power of committee and board members in philosophical associations, and (5) the political games played with respect to appointments, programs, and grants.<sup>11</sup>

Essential to modern philosophy from its beginnings was the project of generating and validating an autonomy it assumed for itself. Peperzak remarks: «if it does not even partially succeed in the course of four or five centuries, the autarky of philosophy becomes unbelievable, more wishful than truthful». <sup>12</sup> Philosophy did emancipate itself, and develop «[a]dmirable advances in formal, analytical and technical skills», but it also «lost much of its vitality by severing its connections with the wealth of nonscientific experience, including contemplation, poetry, good taste, the search for wisdom, and deep-

<sup>7</sup> *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, Session of 21 March 1931 (henceforth cited as *BSfP*), pp. 49, 50, 59.

<sup>8</sup> *BSfP*, pp. 59-61.

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of Blondel and Marcel in this respect, cf. H. DE LUBAC, o.c., cf. also M. BLONDEL, *Le problème de la philosophie catholique*, Bloud & Gay, Paris 1932, his further clarifications in *IDEM*, *Le problème de la philosophie catholique: Seance of 26 Nov 1932*, «Les Etudes Philosophiques», 7, 1 (1933) pp. 13-44, and *IDEM*, *Pour la philosophie integrale*, «Revue Néo-scholastique de Philosophie», 37 (1934).

<sup>10</sup> R, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> T, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> P, p. 47.

rooted faith in God». <sup>13</sup> An inescapable, if misunderstood and truncated, religious dimension nevertheless remains in thinkers' human lives, ultimately grounding and orienting every philosophy. «[A]ll philosophers are guided by some unproven convictions that can be called 'faiths' in a broad sense of this word». <sup>14</sup> What Peperzak means by faith here is «any attempt to concretize the ultimate meaning in words, images, rituals, feelings, practices, concepts, etc.» Even some kinds of «atheism, agnosticism, skepticism, and nihilism... testify to a passion, a stance, a deep conviction, and a style of movement similar to the ones that are operative in Christian faith, Jewish, or Muslim faith». <sup>15</sup> A similar institutional character remains as well, evident by putatively autonomous philosophy's «appeals to particular traditions and authorities» its «rituals», «standards and the forums by which it protects its orthodoxy... the scholasticism of its questions and answers», and lastly «its excommunication of dissidents». <sup>16</sup>

Given the modern autonomy project's failure, what options are open for philosophers? Several, including Christian philosophy, but, Peperzak indicates, their conclusions vary greatly. The first option is carrying on as if the modern project remained viable. In Peperzak's eyes, that is not a genuine option. «The dream of an autonomous philosophy has reached a dead-end», he writes. «It has become a generally accepted point of departure that our living and our thinking are rooted in the soil of unconscious and unprovable assumptions, traditions and customs». <sup>17</sup> Another option limits philosophy's activity, discipline, and objects, abandoning its traditional aims and self-understanding. One can «withdraw from any search for wisdom in order to concentrate exclusively on the formal aspects of reflection», resulting in «philosophy... los[ing] all impact on the reality of human life», <sup>18</sup> becoming, as Peperzak is unafraid to say, *boring*, noting that «[a] philosophy without roots dies from irrelevance and disinterest». <sup>19</sup>

This is also the fate when philosophy is allowed to turn into «a museum in which we stroll from one sophisticated opinion to the next», <sup>20</sup> when philosophy becomes simply «a critical assortment of plausible interpretations», <sup>21</sup> a product of post-modern irony and deconstructionist virtuosity, but also a consequence of the history of philosophy's degeneration when the actual significance of the doctrines, figures, and movements studied is lost from view. Post-modern philosophy remains within the modern project's horizons, exploiting

<sup>13</sup> P, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> P, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> P, p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> P, p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> R, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> P, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> P, p. 12. For Peperzak, this boredom is itself philosophically significant and revelatory, although «boredom, the inevitable result of this sort of rationalism and empiricism, was not allowed to have a say in [modern] philosophy» (RF, p. 111).

<sup>20</sup> P, p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> P, p. 49.

its insights and resources against it. «The very modes in which we react to the discovery of other civilizations and to the decline of our own culture», Peperzak remarks, «is a typical expression of Western modernity... even our versions of relativism and nihilism are nothing but variants of our own brand of universalism». <sup>22</sup> Late or post-modernity has also opened new opportunities:

«Growing insight into the prephilosophical conditions of philosophy – its emergence from desire, language, temporality, and so on – inevitably transforms its practice and its nature. By itself, however, this insight is insufficient for answering our question about the compatibility of philosophy and faith, because faith cannot be understood as just another dimension alongside language, structure, time, or the unconscious». <sup>23</sup>

Christian philosophy involves taking another possible option in post-modernity, one avoiding modern and post-modern thought's dead ends and aporetic impasses, and restoring to philosophy its *traditional* aims and scope, drawing on the resources of past and present thought, and doing so within the horizon afforded by Christian faith. In Peperzak's view, «it has again become possible to treat the question of Christian philosophy seriously, and we are invited to retrieve a long tradition of Christian thought in a post-modern or post-post-modern way». <sup>24</sup>

Philosophy must become again robust seeking of wisdom and truth, embracing fundamental questions raised about and within living, acting and thinking, and even loving, feeling, speaking, hearing, and praying, «becom[ing not] less, but more exact and rigorous», <sup>25</sup> through reflection on concrete experience. It must also recover lasting philosophical achievements of previous thinkers, particularly those of Christian traditions. Peperzak urges, with an Ezekialian metaphor: «We must, so to speak, swallow the texts to discover their strength and worth», and he cautions that «[i]n destroying the force of philosophical or literary texts with cynicism or petty 'corrections', one renders them even more dead than they already are; an inspired civilization or a living faith, on the contrary, gives them a new fecundity». <sup>26</sup>

Religion inevitably confronts any philosophy striving to be truly comprehensive, faithful to philosophy's own requirements, with an unavoidable problematic:

«If religion, like art and morality, is an essential phenomenon, it cannot be excluded from philosophy. For within philosophy, all exclusions are arbitrary – or rather they are impossible, because the horizon of philosophy is unlimited... If it is genuine and irreducible to anything else, philosophy will have to confront the rivalry that emerges from this fact. An autonomous philosophy necessarily submits religion to its own

<sup>22</sup> P, p. 46.

<sup>23</sup> P, p. 116.

<sup>24</sup> R, p. 106.

<sup>25</sup> R, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> P, p. 177. *The Quest for Meaning* carries this project out in detail.

perspective and principles. If philosophy is indeed autonomous, it takes itself to be the highest tribunal for questions of meaning; if not, it remains open to the possibility that the ultimate judgement might come from another, deeper, or higher realm. If there is such a realm, philosophy would have to accept the subordinate, relative, and provisional character of its "autonomy", whereas in the first case, it is philosophy that knows the extent of religion *and more...*».<sup>27</sup>

The Christian philosopher cannot accept philosophy's claims to entire autonomy, nor philosophy as a merely limited enterprise, disconnected from the rest of life, but must raise and engage «the question of what philosophy has to do with confessing and living the Christian faith», a question «accompan[ying] the entire thought-life of any Christian philosopher who is serious about both the philosophical and the Christian aspects of his or her existence. The question must constantly be posed, clarified, and analyzed in new ways».<sup>28</sup>

One strong point of Peperzak's reflections is that he makes explicit the often overlooked fact that the question of Christian philosophy is by its very nature not one resolvable simply on the side, or within the sphere, of philosophy alone. «If simultaneously being a Christian *and* involved in philosophy is a philosophical problem for Christian philosophers, it is *also* a theological problem of course. Any Christian concerned about the destiny of philosophy joins the theological quest for a renewed alliance between theology and philosophy».<sup>29</sup> Christian philosophy is not simply absorbed into theology, however; both are grounded on something deeper. Peperzak asserts that theology must not be taken as coinciding with faith, for a reason similar to that governing philosophy and other reflective activities: «No theory is equivalent to the life that is expressed in it. This thesis is true of all academic disciplines, but especially the most universal and 'totalitarian' ones: philosophy and theology».<sup>30</sup> Both bring needed illumination and structure to the life of faith and the desire for knowing and thinking; even make definitive and lasting contributions, but must not be confused with faith, which he cautions is «a gift of grace; as trust in God, it can never be completely transparent; though very certain of itself, it remains an incomprehensible mystery. Theology, on the other hand, is a historically and culturally conditioned interpretation of faith, which depends on old and new insights of philosophies, sciences, literature, habits and opinions».<sup>31</sup>

Grounding both philosophy and theology in concrete human lives, and determinately characterizing and orienting those lives, according to Peperzak is faith and spirituality. «[N]either philosophy nor theology can be genuine un-

<sup>27</sup> P, p. 78. This is essentially a Blondelian articulation of the problem. Cf. M. BLONDEL, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, cit., p. 168; and IDEM, *Le problème de la philosophie catholique*, cit., pp. 163-165.

<sup>28</sup> R, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> P, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> P, p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> P, p. 38.

less they are intimately connected with the emotional, intellectual, and ethical elements of an authentic Christian spirituality»,<sup>32</sup> he writes, providing a characterization of spirituality: «Each human life is led by a mentality or “spirit” that gives it some sort of orientation. The unfolding of this mentality into a characteristic style of feeling, acting, imagining, practicing and thinking can be called spirituality». <sup>33</sup> Every spirituality is rooted in something very basic, which every human being, and every pattern of human life and thought requires: «the depth of a fundamental trust or distrust or suspicion or certitude or enthusiasm or melancholy with regard to the most fundamental events and problems of human life». <sup>34</sup>

In philosophizing about faith and spirituality, care must be taken not to reduce them to abstractions. «[S]pirit, inspiration, spirituality do not float above the real world of real lives; they penetrate and stylize all our deeds, words, gestures, thoughts and emotions». <sup>35</sup> Spirituality is, on the one hand, intimately particular, which precisely why it is real and basic, and on the other hand, precisely because it is real and basic, spiritualities can be shared, entered into, compared, opted between. Christian spirituality and faith makes certain demands on Christian philosophers, but also allows certain possibilities, even gives certain aids for philosophizing. Peperzak repeatedly makes the point that Christian philosophy develops from responses to exigencies facing a philosopher who is also Christian. On the one hand, the Christian's philosophy will be inevitably affected by one's Christian faith. «The traditional and comprehensive significance of Christian faith implies... that neither their thinking nor other activities will be able to avoid the inspiration of their faith. If that faith is genuine, their participation in the philosophical endeavor will bear the marks of a Christian way of engaging God, people, things and the world». <sup>36</sup> This raises a need for philosophical reflection on this grounding and conditioning of philosophy by Christian faith in the life of the Christian philosopher; otherwise «a philosopher who is also a Christian would not be reflective enough or would not be sincere, if he did not think about the relevance of his faith for his philosophy». <sup>37</sup>

This reflection eventually presents an unavoidable option: Adequately reflect on and articulate the complicated relationship between philosophy and Christian faith, or reject or ignore it as a pseudo-issue, attempting to maintain one's faith and philosophy separate, inevitably cutting short one's philosophy or one's faith. In our contemporary situation, many philosophers who are Christians attempt the second option. Peperzak remarks: «it does seem odd that Christians who are engaged in philosophy express a greater affinity with those modern and post-modern thinkers whose commerce with truth seems

<sup>32</sup> *P*, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> *P*, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> *P*, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> *P*, p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> *P*, p. 92.

<sup>37</sup> *P*, p. 45.

to be un- or anti-Christian than toward the tradition that extends from Clement to Blondel and Marcel, thinkers who did not hide their attachment to the Christian community». <sup>38</sup> For a variety of motives, Christian philosophers in modern and post-modern times have attempted to accommodate their thinking to and within the dominant non-Christian schools or movements, <sup>39</sup> with significant cost. «Christians who exclude their being what they are from philosophical discussions are not genuine; they are at best pale images of the best-non-Christian philosophers». <sup>40</sup> The first option imposes requirements as well, for if all philosophy is rooted in some type of faith and spirituality, reflection on one's Christian faith and one's philosophizing reveals that «Christians who philosophize [...] cannot accept the deepest convictions of non-Christian colleagues as their own». <sup>41</sup>

Peperzak suggests *every* Christian philosopher ought to reflect upon and try to find a solution to the question of Christian philosophy, not only for him or herself, but more generally. «A Christian who philosophizes cannot avoid the question of what philosophy has to do with confessing and living the Christian faith. Our question accompanies the entire thought-life of any Christian philosopher who is serious about both the philosophical and the Christian aspects of his or her existence. The question must constantly be posed, clarified, and analyzed in new ways». <sup>42</sup> Peperzak himself does this in his recent works, working through three themes key to his conception of Christian philosophy in post-modernity: the relationship between the natural and supernatural; the importance of affectivity; and, Christian tradition and community.

## 2. PHILOSOPHY, THE NATURAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL

A contentious issue during the 1930's Christian philosophy debates was the status of the natural and supernatural orders, and the related question of the relationships between faith and reason, philosophy and theology. Many philosophers, anxious to preserve an autonomy they believed necessary to philosophy and to avoid confusing philosophy with theology or apologetics, viewed this as requiring commitment to a subsisting, purely natural order which

<sup>38</sup> R, p. 106.

<sup>39</sup> For pertinent discussions of this, cf. É. GILSON, *The Philosopher and Theology*, Trans. C. Gilson, Random House, New York 1962; J. OWENS, *Towards a Christian Philosophy*, CUA Press, Washington D.C. 1990. For cogent warnings and discussions about the dangers of doing this in an uncritical manner, cf. A. PLANTINGA, *Advice to Christian Philosophers*, «Faith and Philosophy», 1, 3; and M. MCCORD ADAMS, *History of Philosophy as Tutor of Christian Philosophy*, in F. AMBROSIO, ed., *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*, Fordham University Press, New York 1999.

<sup>40</sup> R, p. 129.

<sup>41</sup> P, p. 46.

<sup>42</sup> R, p. 89.

could be philosophy's object. Like certain participants in the debates,<sup>43</sup> Peperzak criticizes and rejects both the notion of any purely and completely natural human reason and that of a purely and completely natural order, to which the supernatural would simply be added or juxtaposed, and he calls these notions «shared by an outdated conception of philosophy and an outdated theology, in which philosophy explains what our natural intellect can discover, while theology adds its supernatural truth to it. Philosophy would then contain the truth everybody can recognize as such, while theology would be reserved for believers. Wrongly appealing to Aquinas, the modern theory of a *natura pura*, to which the order of grace would relate as a *superadditum*, has often been defended by quoting the famous adage "*gratia supponit naturam*" while the more originary truth that "*natura supponit gratiam*" is frequently forgotten or ignored. And yet creation is the effect of God's grace; not the other way around».<sup>44</sup>

This perspective bars the way of Christian philosophy, and is vulnerable to three critical moves. First, from a Christian intellectual perspective, pure nature, whether human nature or nature in general, must be conceded to be merely an abstraction. Second, because its autonomy is only relative, because it is concretely grounded in a life of a philosophizing subject, philosophy opens to theology and to Christian spirituality without simply being absorbed. Third, this opens the way to reflectively resituating Christian philosophy in the present within a community and tradition of Christian philosophy.

Like any reflective discourse, philosophy must engage in abstractions, but must also recognize them for what they are and not confuse them with concrete realities, experiences, human beings. This becomes particularly important when philosophy critiques or appropriates efforts of other philosophers, or reflects on conditions, nature, and possibilities of philosophy itself. During the debates, general recognition emerged among Christian philosophers that philosophy could be Christian with respect to the concrete state or condition of the individual philosophizing human being. For interlocutors opposed to Christian philosophy, that could only be purely subjective, and Christianity could only have an extrinsic relation with one's philosophy. Other interlocutors, Gilson and Maritain in particular, were inconsistent, holding out for and exhibiting intrinsic relations between Christianity and philosophy. Yet, they

<sup>43</sup> In particular, Blondel, Marcel, and Antonin Sertillanges. Cf. M. BLONDEL, *Le problème de la philosophie catholique; Pour une philosophie intégrale*, and also his earlier IDEM, *Une Alliance contre nature: catholicisme et intégrisme*, Lessius, Paris 2000. G. MARCEL, *A propos de L'esprit de la Philosophie médiévale par M. É. Gilson*, «Nouvelle Revue des Jeunes», 4, 3 and 12, pp. 308-315, 1302-1309; IDEM, *Position du mystère ontologique et ses approches concrètes*, «Les Etudes Philosophiques», vol. 7, no. 3 (later translated in *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary*, Trans. K. Farrer, Harper, New York 1965, pp. 116-121). A. D. SERTILLANGES, O.P., *De la philosophie chrétienne*, «La Vie Intellectuelle», v. 24, n. 1 (1933).

<sup>44</sup> P, p. 65.

also wanted to hold out for something like an “essence” (Maritain) or “concept” (Gilson) of philosophy, graspable by philosophy through abstraction, the same for all cases, and allowing the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders to be maintained, a distinction they charged Blondel with collapsing.

Peperzak’s position bears stronger resonances with Blondel’s and Marcel’s thought.<sup>45</sup> He questions whether there can be «such a thing as ‘naturalness’, if being, as we experience and think it, is created being, «if creation is permeated by grace from the first to the last moment of its existence».<sup>46</sup> Rigid distinction between a *purely* natural order, and supernatural grace coming from outside as a sort of surplus, an add-on, something optional in the sense of not really being needed, except for human beings to realize a purely supernatural destiny, is not philosophy’s precondition, but rather an unargued-for presupposition. He observes:

*«it is a mistake to make the philosophy of non-believers the standard for philosophy as such. Their perspectives are equally motivated by prephilosophical convictions about the ultimate questions... [If] philosophy can neither replace nor absorb Christian faith, and if this, instead of being a *superadditum*, is “the one thing necessary”, then we must acknowledge that unbelieving philosophers are rooted in something similar: some kind of radical trust or wager, a sort of philosophical faith, some “yes” or “Amen”».*<sup>47</sup>

Commitment to rigid distinction, effectively ontological separation, between natural and supernatural orders entails two other consequences stultifying for philosophy. First, «[t]he attempt to bracket grace in order to first discuss what is common to humans as such can only be an exercise in provisional abstraction. It does not allow for a description of concrete experiences»,<sup>48</sup> which is central to philosophy, and Peperzak, like Blondel and Marcel before him, diagnoses main currents of modern philosophy as deficient in that respect, devaluing the concrete, thereby impoverishing philosophy at its source. There

<sup>45</sup> It also bears resonances as to other thinkers in the debate who were clearly influenced by Blondel, but who also seem to have arrived at their views via other avenues of reflection, through meditation on other sources of Christian inspiration. These thinkers include A. Sertillanges, Aimé Forest, Louis Cochet, Henri de Lubac, Michael Souriau, Blaise Roy-meyer, Louis Augros, Bruno de Solages, and Étienne Borne. <sup>46</sup> *P*, p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> *P*, p. 105. Earlier, he wrote: «Christian ‘faith in search of understanding’ cannot simply adopt a non-Christian philosophy in order to add new truths to it... No philosophy is neutral; every philosophy, Christian or not, even an atheist philosophy, is oriented and ruled by a fundamental affirmation, a “Yes and Amen” that supports and colors all its essential affirmations. The integration of a non-Christian philosophy in a Christian theology demands therefore a radical rethinking of its assumptions and arguments. This rethinking must be inspired by another Amen: God as revealed in Jesus Christ» (*R*, p. 122).

<sup>48</sup> *P*, p. 51.

is a second related problem: «[W]e are not sure where the borderline lies between a 'natural', 'purely philosophical' thought and a life that is shaped by grace. 'Human nature' is an abstraction; not the name for a concrete form of life». <sup>49</sup>

Recovery of philosophy's full scope, eclipsed in modernity, requires relocating philosophy within a more general yet more concrete search for wisdom. «In order to be radically reflective, the philosophy of Christians must develop as an integral part of a discipline that integrates theology and philosophy into one whole: a "philo-theo-logy" that accepts to be challenged by non-Christian philosophers». This challenge, with its requirement of dialogue, requires Christian philosophers «to be as competent as their non-Christian rivals who are committed to a godless, agnostic, relativistic, skeptical, or dogmatically anti-Christian faith». <sup>50</sup> This also prepares the way for contemporary Christian discernment, appropriation, and transformation of intellectual resources afforded by non-Christian modern and post-modern philosophy, for as Peperzak notes, «[t]he Christianization of thinking is neither a marginal business nor a super-added level on top of an autarkic human nature». <sup>51</sup>

A key achievement of previous Christian thought was successful integration and incorporation, or «theological baptism of an originally non-Christian philosophy». <sup>52</sup> Peperzak argues the desirability of reappropriation of, among others, «Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, or Wittgenstein», in which «we, Christians of the twenty-first century, must do with one or more of them what Origen, Augustine, Bonaventure, and Thomas did with Plato and Aristotle». <sup>53</sup> This involves a "conversion" of soul, a "transformation" of elements, and a discernment of spirits. «When confronting Christianity with existing philosophies, we must distinguish the network of theses from their spirit... The spirit of a philosophy – its inspiration and orientation – is more important than the explicit statements in which it unfolds its attitude». <sup>54</sup>

Previous examples of Christian integration of non-Christian philosophy, generating Christian philosophy, provide models for the present. What the philosophically inclined Church Fathers, for example, did was «tr[y] to translate their faith as much as possible into a renewed kind of philosophical language, while remaining convinced that such an enterprise could never reduce the mysterious character of their faith. At the same time, they did not doubt that human reason was enlightened enough to engage in a rational dialogue with other philosophers». <sup>55</sup> As Christian philosophy's proponents during the debates realized, while supernatural and natural orders remain distinguishable, as reflective activity of concrete human subjects, philosophy becomes entangled with, permeated and penetrated by, a supernatural order exceed-

<sup>49</sup> P, p. 51.

<sup>50</sup> Q, p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> Q, p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> P, p. 147.

<sup>53</sup> P, p. 53.

<sup>54</sup> P, p. 51.

<sup>55</sup> P, p. 83.

ing the capacities of reason and philosophy while at the same time making, or revealing, to them demands stimulating reason and philosophy to develop further.

Not assimilation, but the combination of critical confrontation and inspired transformation generated a new *philosophia*, whose Christian character could not be denied. Insofar as they were successful, their appropriation of pagan thoughts makes it impossible to separate in their work some elements that would be called 'philosophical' in the modern sense of the work from other, theological and typically Christian elements.<sup>56</sup>

Peperzak's language in this passage is reminiscent of one Gilsonian formulation: «[E]very Christian philosophy will be traversed, impregnated, nourished by Christianity as by a blood that circulates in it, or rather, like a life that animates it. One will never be able to say that here the philosophical ends and the Christian begins; it will be integrally Christian and integrally philosophical or it will not be».<sup>57</sup>

### 3. AFFECTIVITY

Arguably the most significant contributions Peperzak makes to Christian philosophy are his phenomenological descriptions and analyses of affectivity, and its importance for philosophy in general, and Christian philosophy in particular. Four central and interrelated themes recur in particular in his recent work: reality as revealed through affectivity; the connections between affectivity and philosophy in its fuller sense and scope; the affective modes particularly connected with Christian faith; and affectivity's need for purification and orientation.

Phenomenological analysis reveals affectivity continuously involved in our basic apprehension of, reflection on, judgements about, and action within reality. Although we can generate and employ what Peperzak calls «the purely descriptive, normatively neutral language of a non-ethical ontology», this is a product of abstraction and reflection distanced from realities it purports to describe and detail, and a (self-)concealment of the fact that even such putatively non-affective ontologies, conceptual schemes, ways of thinking, knowing and acting in the world, are already affectively cathected.

«[T]o the extent that the consideration of a phenomenon's being expresses or awakens our interest, it has the character of something interesting. This character is specified in a variety of the good, the beautiful, the pleasant, the admirable, the monstrous, the detestable, but it can neither be abolished, nor separated from the being of phenomena... Attention is always a mode of being affected, pleased, or pained, attracted, fascinated, anguished, or astonished. Affective neutrality is impossible if

<sup>56</sup> Q, p. 18.

<sup>57</sup> *BSfP*, p. 46.

one pays enough attention to discover how a given shows itself to be. No theory is disinterested and no being exists for affective indifference». <sup>58</sup>

Affectivity becomes central to the practice of philosophy if a central aim remains that of knowing reality – the realities of objects, the world, oneself, others, and what, if anything, exceeds all of these. «The most immediate dimension of our contact with the phenomena is found in affectivity», he writes, adding «[a]ffection is our basic form of responsivity... admiration and horror, enthusiasm and anxiety, sympathy and avoidance, hope and fear, desire and hatred in many shades correspond to the phenomena's many modes of impressing us». <sup>59</sup> In this particular listing of varied modes of affectivity, different emotions, attitudes, and moods fall under affectivity's rubric, expanded elsewhere in Peperzak's work to encompass virtues and vices, interpersonal relations or actions, e. g. «friendship», «facing and being faced, greeting, addressing, giving, honoring, thanking, forgiving», <sup>60</sup> and the valuations (e.g. «good», «pleasant», etc.) mentioned just above. One other mode of affectivity, permeating all others, is important to mention, namely *desire*, which draws the human subject to engage phenomena, and turns out to be not only «the innermost motor of all that we do», revealing an «ultimate desideratum differ[ing] from all the desiderata of our competing desires, needs, wants, and inclinations». <sup>61</sup>

Another dimension of affectivity is even more central for the philosophizing human being: «a pre-predicative and pre-propositional, rarely self-conscious experience with a primarily affective character: the dim awareness of a fundamental attunement, a basic 'mood'», <sup>62</sup> «rather than... a constellation of particular emotions... a general and diffuse attunement that is so deep and penetrating that often we are not even aware of it». <sup>63</sup> Peperzak calls this «the way in which we let the universe attune us», <sup>64</sup> and provides several examples. «The universe can inspire awe, admiration, gratitude anxiety; we can feel threatened, safe, secure, content, frustrated, nostalgic, and so on». <sup>65</sup> Both fundamental mood and more specific modes of affectivity form part of the dimension of basic faith and commitment involved though not reflectively thematized in every philosophical perspective.

He also discerns a connection between recovery of philosophy's full scope and proper attention to affectivity.

«If modern philosophers had emphasized the role of affectivity and if their epistemology had paid more attention to the ethical and intuitive virtues that condition the way to wisdom, they might have shown that the method of philosophy cannot be

<sup>58</sup> *P*, p. 130.

<sup>60</sup> *P*, p. 157. Cf. also his A. PEPERZAK, *Elements of Ethics*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2004.

<sup>63</sup> *P*, p. 160.

<sup>61</sup> *P*, p. 161.

<sup>64</sup> *P*, p. 160.

<sup>59</sup> *P*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>62</sup> *P*, p. 75.

<sup>65</sup> *P*, p. 75.

reduced to conceptual and observational principia of thought. A logic of the “heart” in the line of Saint Augustine and Pascal would have shown, for example, how our “tasting” (*sapere*), challenged by the taste (*sapor*) of wisdom (*sapientia*) is essential for a real, fully integrated, concrete, and life-permeating knowledge, which otherwise remains abstract, cold, gamelike, and indifferent to the ways and meanings of human existence». <sup>66</sup>

Invocation of Christian thinkers like Pascal and Augustine is pertinent. Peperzak does not suggest that any affectivity whatsoever is automatically good and should be restored and cultivated. Successfully discerning how one’s affectivity should be structured, educated, oriented, and purified requires recourse to those who have successfully scrutinized and grappled with such matters.

Certain modes of affectivity are especially central to Christian faith, and are thus of key interest to Christian philosophy. Peperzak develops phenomenological analyses in particular of trust, gratitude, wonder (or awe), trust (or faith), hope, love (sometimes articulated by Peperzak as charity, sometimes as compassion), peace, and joy. All of these are positive modes of affectivity, but that does not mean that negative modes, such as sorrow, anxiety, or even anger are unconnected or unimportant to Christian faith and philosophy, nor that they do not merit study, cultivation, or direction. <sup>67</sup> But, the thinking and acting of the Christian philosopher will always be imbued or colored to some degree by positive modes of affectivity, components of the basic mood of Christian faith. He writes: «[a] philosopher cannot avoid meditation on the question: Who, how, what am I? In Christians, such meditations are characterized by gratitude, hope, patience, and adoration». <sup>68</sup> These modes of affectivity central to Christian faith are correlated to and evocative of each other. «Trust is justified by the experience of having received everything, including faith, from God, who – I am convinced, cared for me, for us. It includes gratitude for the splendor of creation and history, even if the many scandalous forms of evil continue to outrage us. Faith also includes hope... Gratitude, trust, and hope belong together and overlap». <sup>69</sup>

Christian philosophy must also cultivate proper and fruitful affective attitudes as an integral part of the philosophical enterprise itself. «A phenomenology of radical gratitude, hope, trust, delight, wonderment, and inner peace discovers their basic and irreplaceable significance when it understands

<sup>66</sup> T, p. 119.

<sup>67</sup> His treatment of desire comes to a head in his discussion of what is correct in apophatic theology, which reveals to us the unlimitedness of our desire and the unfigurability of the ultimate object of our desire, God, giving us «the pain of never being able to grasp, see, touch, embrace, or feel the Sought itself... the deepest form of suffering. What apophatic theology points to in words, affectivity experiences as an overwhelming emptiness» (P, p. 163).

<sup>68</sup> R, p. 128.

<sup>69</sup> T, p. 146.

them as modes of contact with the truth of reality». <sup>70</sup> Each of these modes of affectivity, when paid proper attention, is revelatory of phenomena which can then receive rational, reflective, philosophical treatment further unfolding the phenomena's intelligibility, its specific forms and contours, its relations with other phenomena, and its essential conditions. This allows Peperzak to discern and display the deeper moral dimension transcending goodness and freedom reductively understood in modern terms of rights, so that he can assert that «[h]ere and now, the promised life comes about in the mode of hope and gratitude», <sup>71</sup> affections that «are more radical experiences than autonomy». <sup>72</sup>

Connections between Christian doctrine and revelation and affective states got little attention from interlocutors during the 1930s debates <sup>73</sup> Peperzak emphasizes such connections:

«To what extent is belief in creation, incarnation, the trinity, and eschatology equivalent to the attitudes of gratitude, hope, adoration, joy, and peace that characterize genuine Christianity?... To what extent can Christianity be understood as a work of radical desire, and, at the same time, as an undeserved gift through which this desire receives an answer? What is the affective source of the Christian form of life?» <sup>74</sup>

Lacking adequate experience of and attention to these modes of affectivity stymies adequately conceptualizing, investigating, and engaging in Christian philosophy. A practical dimension is also involved. «If reflection completely isolates itself from prayer and praxis, it reverts to the stance of an outsider, thereby losing the attitude that is necessary for understanding faith on its own terms, and thus obscuring its relationship to reflection». <sup>75</sup> Both affectivity and

<sup>70</sup> R, p. 86.

<sup>71</sup> P, p. 144.

<sup>72</sup> P, p. 145.

<sup>73</sup> A prime example would be Maritain's treatment, developed and reworked repeatedly from 1931-1934, which argued that Christianity provided objective contribution (*apports objectives*) and subjective reinforcements or strengthenings (*confortations subjectives*) to the Christian philosopher and thereby to philosophy in a Christian state or "regime," but which did not particularly thematize the determinate correlations between these two orders of aids.

<sup>74</sup> R, p. 69.

<sup>75</sup> P, p. 115. Here Peperzak's thought again approaches very close to Blondel, Marcel, and Sertillanges. Cf. in particular part 5 of M. BLONDEL, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, Trans. O. Blanchette, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1984. Aime Forest, discussing prayer in Blondel's thought, writes: «Blondel is not content to say that philosophy is an approach, an imperfect outline of prayer. He wants to recognize that the spirit of prayer is interior to philosophy itself and allows it to be thought when we seek to define it in its integrality and its self-coherence» (A. FOREST, *Une philosophie orante*, «Etudes Philosophiques», 16, 3 (1961), p. 320).

During the debates, two philosophers particularly discussed the relevance of prayer to Christian philosophy: Y. SIMON, *Philosophie chrétienne: Notes complémentaires*, «Études Carmélitaines», April 1934; P. WUST, *L'homme et la philosophie*, «Revue de Philosophie», 6 (1936); A.D. SERTILLANGES, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*, trans. Mary Ryan C.U.A. Press, Washington D.C. 1987, antedating the debate by a decade, exemplifies the closeness of the relation between reflection, prayer and practice.

practice are deeply intertwined with faith, with intellectual and conceptual articulation, understanding, and judgement of faith's objects, for «particular tenets or 'articles' of faith express and refer us back to a unified affective nucleus»,<sup>76</sup> and «faith unfolds in a constellation of dispositions, virtues, practices, beliefs», as well as in «theologies and philosophies».<sup>77</sup>

Emphasizing this necessity of affectivity – not to mention prayer and practice – in Christian philosophy may raise anxieties about subjectivism. Peperzak anticipates this and provides several responses. One of these consists in noting that «proclaim[ing] that the 'objective' attitude is the only trustworthy one expresses a fundamental bias», crippling to philosophy, given the range of philosophically thematizable data that does not readily «fit into the framework of such objectivity, for example, smiling, speaking, thinking, feeling, moods, trust, love, confidence, friendship, engagement, concentration, action, motivation, person, and least of all God».<sup>78</sup> Another response is to realize that

«[t]he remedy to the dangers and distortions of emotional responses must not be sought in conceptuality or in disinterested observation of empirical facts, but in more appropriate responses emerging from a more appropriate, more open and authentic, truthful, and pure affectivity. Purification of the ways in which we let ourselves be affected, and – more primordially – purification of our being tuned to the various levels and instances of phenomenality, are necessary conditions for thinking in accordance with reality».<sup>79</sup>

Purification of affectivity can only happen when affectivity is given proper attention, when one undergoes the right kind of experiences, and when one enters an apprenticeship educating one in discernment, direction, and cultivation of affectivity. These experiences for Peperzak involve not only positive modes of affectivity, but also suffering, desire, lack, and experiences of our moral and intellectual failures.

Affectivity's purification requires a determinate practical and intellectual framework, «an ethics of emotions and moods».<sup>80</sup> This in turn will involve abandoning or at least bracketing reductionist modern conceptions of philosophy and of autonomy, admitting one's need for guidance in these matters, and turning to resources provided by the intellectual traditions better equipped to address affectivity.

«[T]here are various degrees of authenticity and purity in being human and in the knowledge of what that means. If we assume that people can make progress or regress in authenticity, it also implies that the truth of desire is best known by those who are very sincere and advanced in desiring. As ancient and medieval thinkers knew, all emotions must pass through several purifications to be radical enough to orient our understanding».<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> *T*, p. 144.

<sup>77</sup> *T*, p. 145.

<sup>78</sup> *P*, p. 157.

<sup>79</sup> *R*, p. 112.

<sup>80</sup> *P*, pp. 160-161.

<sup>81</sup> *P*, p. 50.

## 4. DIALOGUE, COMMUNITY, TRADITION IN CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

These conditions for purification of affectivity, even for adequate reflection on and understanding of it, requiring orientation by lights supplied by others, lead naturally to Peperzak's third timely contribution to rethinking Christian philosophy: articulating the roles of interpersonal dialogue, and participation in community and tradition, in Christian philosophy's constitution. The 1930s debates' interlocutors did not entirely overlook this, but there was a marked tendency towards conceptualizing Christian philosophy either in terms of the philosophizing *individual* and his or her use of human reason in relation to Christian faith, doctrines, revealed Scripture, and divine grace, or alternately in more abstract terms of the relations between the *discipline* of philosophy, the discipline of theology, the Christian faith, revelation, and Church. Left out, only implicit, or only sketched in passing, was the fact that philosophy, both as a discipline and in its concrete exercise particularized in individual philosophers, is carried out dialogically and collaboratively, formed, supported, and sustained by traditions and communities both intellectual and not explicitly intellectual. Many likewise overlooked that supernatural grace, revelation, and order repeatedly, determinately and inexhaustibly enter into, transform, open up possibilities and freedom within what appears to be a merely natural, human, rational order. When the philosopher, or philosophy, comes into fruitful contact with Christian faith, it is not the case that something purely natural now and for the first time encounters and enters into relations with something supernatural and transcendent to it. The Christian philosopher, and the Christian philosophy he or she works out and through, are already products of a nature elevated and perfected to some degree by grace, but also marked by that nature's wounded, even perverse condition, lacking, refusing, or appropriating for its own limited ends supernatural grace, and understanding in imperfect ways the means and channels of grace's mediation.

Neither philosophers or philosophies develop in a *vacuum*, but rather in dialectic between Christian and philosophical communities, specifically *in those subjects* who are members of both communities, particularly in interaction with and formation *by and with other such subjects*, who are likewise formed and formative.

«A Christian who has become a philosopher shares a world of arguments with other philosophers, Christian as well as non-Christian. As a philosopher, one must be at home in the ongoing ways of argumentation, possess expertise in the skills that are required or in vogue, have experiences similar to others, and look at things from comparable perspectives. At the same time, a Christian is at home in a community of faith that does not belong to any specific period of time, culture, language, race, or country. This community is not an abstraction, however; on the contrary, it is the most fundamental and encompassing, and this the most concrete, community of all.

Grace, faith, hope, and gratitude pervade the entire life of Christians... uniting them in one *communio*, even if their authenticity and innocence is hampered or damaged by the difficulties of human life». <sup>82</sup>

Christian philosophy at its heart involves philosophy coming and remaining in fruitful contact with Christianity, doing so in *multiple* types of dialogue between Christian thinkers, in which one addresses and is addressed by others, learning from them not only particular information, but how to assess, interpret, and understand what they and others say, even what is vital and fruitful to study and to think upon. The problem, the issue, the possibility, the nature, the traditions, of Christian philosophy exist and are philosophically assimilable for us precisely *because many other* Christian thinkers have occupied themselves with them, and continue to offer their reflections to us, if we are ready to listen. Peperzak himself acknowledges at one point: «I could not utter any of these words if they had not been handed down to us by the Christian tradition, as keys for the interpretation of our history». <sup>83</sup> And, at another: «I speak because others have spoken to me out of a common heritage». <sup>84</sup> Contemporary Christian philosophy can and should systematically reflect on and thematize the dependency of the Christian philosopher's thinking not only on God, on Christianity, and not only on a discipline, activity, system, or method of philosophy, but also on their involvements in constitutive dialogues with other particular Christian thinkers (for each individual philosopher will be formed more by some sources, less or not at all by others), and within a Christian Tradition and community.

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper argues that Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak's recent writings make substantive contributions to rethinking the issue of Christian philosophy today. I present Peperzak's view of philosophy's contemporary situation and the failures of the modern project of an entirely autonomous philosophy. Christian philosophy reflects on the relationship between philosophy and Christian faith, focused on all aspects of concrete human existence, reorienting philosophy towards recovery of its fuller scope. Three key contributions Peperzak makes are: reexamining the relationship between philosophy, the natural and the supernatural; highlighting and phenomenologically describing affectivity's importance; and, indicating Christian philosophy's grounding in dialogue, tradition and community.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Affectivity, Christian philosophy, Community, Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Supernatural, Tradition.*

<sup>82</sup> Q, p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> P, p. 20.

<sup>84</sup> P, p. 178.