

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY AS AN EXISTENTIAL *HABITUS*¹

Francisco Plaza
PhD Candidate
University of St. Thomas, TX
Editor, REALITY

ABSTRACT: In this paper we shall explore Jacques Maritain’s definition of “Christian philosophy” with regard to how it is practiced, how it is to be distinguished from non-Christian philosophy, how it differs from theology, and what in particular Christian philosophy offers to the search for truth. Maritain explained that the key to understanding Christian philosophy is to think of it not as a separate science, but as a reference to the existential state of the Christian who practices philosophy. In other words, it points to the *habitus* of philosophy within the Christian philosopher as a person, which is the lived experience and intellectual virtue of philosophy on the part of the Christian in connection with faith. Thus, while “philosophy” itself (as a science in the abstract sense) remains the same, the outcome is different depending upon the philosopher, and this is not because the science itself changes, but because of the particular differences and existential considerations on the part of the philosophers themselves. More importantly, from the Christian standpoint, there are certain truths which the non-Christian philosopher will miss precisely on account of these existential considerations. We shall consider moral philosophy as an example for Maritain in this regard.

¹ Correspondence to editors@realityjournal.org.

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I. Introduction

Around the 1930's, there was a debate beginning in France as to whether "Christian philosophy" truly exists in a meaningful way or if the term implies a kind of category error.² While those hostile to the faith attacked the notion, there have also been critics within Catholicism as well.³ The typical challenge, by and large, lies in the use of the term "Christian"; how exactly does "Christian" modify "philosophy"? Is it a separate branch, such as ethics or metaphysics? If that is the case, what is the object or scope of this science? Here, it is easy to see the seeming absurdity of such a proposal by analogously comparing Christian philosophy to a "Christian mathematics" or "Christian biology." To overcome this difficulty, we could suggest instead that Christian philosophy refers to a different method for engaging in philosophy. In this case, how does it remain as philosophy if faith is introduced at the starting point? Are the advocates of Christian philosophy guilty of covertly transforming philosophy into theology (i.e., "theologizing" philosophy)?⁴ Does Christian philosophy devolve into apologetics? Is it intellectually restrictive?

While these were the traditional concerns regarding Christian philosophy (primarily seeking to maintain the purity of either philosophy or theology taken in isolation), we would suspect now that most who hear the term would grant

² R.F. Aldwinckle 1967: "Is There a Christian Philosophy?" *Religious Studies*, 2.2: 233: "It was Émile Bréhier, the French historian of philosophy, who initiated the debate in 1928 with three lectures entitled *Is there a Christian Philosophy?*"

³ Aldwinckle *ibid*, 234-35: "Thomists were quite prepared to accept the thesis of M. Bréhier that it was nonsense to speak of a Christian philosophy as it would be of Christian physics or mathematics. Such believed it possible to show on purely philosophical grounds the inadequacy of the interpretation of philosophy given by M. Bréhier and M. Brunschwig and to offer instead a metaphysical defence of theism by the employment of the strictest reasoning without any recourse to insights specifically taken from Christian faith. They agreed that, technically speaking, there was not a Christian philosophy but that it was possible to frame a rational metaphysic of a theistic kind which was perfectly compatible with the Christian faith but not directly dependent upon it and which could stand, metaphysically speaking, on its own feet."

⁴ *Ibid*, 234: "They [(i.e., those who first debated the issue and were critical of Christian philosophy)] did not deny that in the Christian era, whether patristic, mediaeval or modern, there have appeared philosophical systems which have been influenced by Christianity. The point at issue, they insist, is not the historical phenomenon but whether such 'Christian philosophies' were not in fact disguised theologies or illegitimate mixtures of incompatible elements."

the existence of Christian philosophy, understanding it to signify in a basic sense the outcome of a Christian philosophizing. However, the contemporary acceptance of this would be akin to the acceptance of any other apparent subcategory of philosophy, such as “Indigenous philosophy,” “Feminist philosophy,” “Jewish philosophy,” “Hindu philosophy,” etc. The real issue now would be in the claim that Christian philosophy is superior to others, as Christianity alone can offer the fullness of the truth. This is an especially contentious claim now as the traditions of Christianity and the West have come increasingly under attack. While at one point the hyper-modernist would have been content to see Christian philosophy as no better or no worse than any other kind, one would be more likely to find today the view that Christian philosophy and Western philosophy in the traditional sense is inferior to others, inherently oppressive, and inexorably linked with injustice.

At the heart of all these concerns is the matter of faith and reason altogether, how they are distinct, and how they complement one another. This will allow one to see how Christian philosophy is possible in a distinct way, and how it is poised to offer wisdom beyond the non-Christian. For these purposes, we shall propose Jacques Maritain’s solution to these questions, as his explanation of Christian philosophy remains among the most insightful on the subject.⁵

Maritain explained that the key to understanding Christian philosophy is to think of it not as a separate science, but as a reference to the existential state of the Christian who pursues philosophy instead.⁶ In other words, it points to the *habitus* of philosophy within the Christian philosopher as a person, which is the lived experience and human practice of philosophy on the part of the Christian. As Maritain put it: “to philosophize man must put his whole soul into play, in

⁵ Maritain (among others like Étienne Gilson) was cited approvingly on this point in Pope St. John Paul II’s 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio*, n.74: “We see the same fruitful relationship between philosophy and the word of God in the courageous research pursued by more recent thinkers, among whom I gladly mention, in a Western context, figures such as John Henry Newman, Antonio Rosmini, Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson and Edith Stein and, in an Eastern context, eminent scholars such as Vladimir S. Soloviev, Pavel A. Florensky, Petr Chaadaev and Vladimir N. Lossky.”

⁶ Maritain 1947: *Existence and the Existent*, 140-41: “[Christian philosophy] may be described as Christian, not on account of its essence, indeed, but only on account of its state or conditions of existence. This is the case in the domain of speculative philosophy. Or it may be described as Christian on account of the use which it makes, within its very texture, of truths of another order established in theology by reason of the existential state of its very subject (human conduct). This is the case in the domain of moral philosophy.”

much the same manner that to run he must use his heart and lungs.”⁷ This has more to do with the intellectual virtue (and virtue in general) within the philosopher rather than philosophy as a science in the abstract sense. Thus, while philosophy itself (as a science in the abstract sense) remains the same, the outcome is different depending upon the philosopher as a person, and this is not because the science itself changes, but because of the particular differences and existential considerations on the part of the philosophers themselves.

2. On the Problem of Christian Philosophy

As Aldwinckle summarized, Émile Bréhier's view against Christian philosophy was that:⁸

Christianity is not a set of doctrines which could be contrasted or compared with another set of doctrines, as, for example, in Greek philosophy. This is because Christianity lacked any theoretical or reasoned view of the universe and God. It is not a philosophy, and therefore, cannot be compared on the same level as other philosophies.

Thus, as Christian doctrine is given by revelation rather than naturally acquired knowledge, or cenosopic science, one cannot compare its claims to that of a philosopher who must proceed by explicit argumentation. For this reason, Christian philosophy cannot exist as it would import a set of claims with no logical justification in the manner of science. Léon Brunschvicg went further than this by accepting fully the premise of the Enlightenment, considering the modern separation of faith and reason as a positive development for philosophy since the Renaissance, celebrating man's confidence in his rational ability to understand reality without having to rely on the transcendent to fill the gaps.⁹ Against both views (particularly versus Bréhier), Maritain argued that there are fundamental misunderstandings within this rationalist opposition to Christian philosophy:¹⁰

⁷ Maritain 1955: *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 17.

⁸ Aldwinckle 1967: “Is There a Christian Philosophy?”, 234.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Maritain 1955: *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 7. See also 25-26: “...Mr. Léon Brunschvicg recently suggested that the Scholastic mentality is on the level of childhood—of children from eight to eleven years of age, if I am not mistaken... This assertion might well be described as rash, and rich to boot in mistakes (and to say the least, such as makes a reply in kind all too easy, for to the charge that ‘the thinking

...St. Thomas definitely looked upon the human intellect as the weakest in the hierarchy of spirits; but never did he conceive of reason according to the merely dialectical and pathetically unstable pattern that Mr. Bréhier attributes to him; and never did he debar reason from “the possibility of being its own proper judge” (this does not mean its supreme judge). Never, yet again, did he reduce the relationship of reason and faith to that purely external “censorship,” the workings of which Mr. Bréhier depicts with such naïve abandon.

Faith does not confine philosophy; on the contrary, true faith in Maritain’s view will elevate philosophical reason, as we shall see below. Furthermore, the rationalist position given by Bréhier and Brunschvicg proceeds from a misreading of St. Thomas and the broader history of Christian philosophy (a point which Gilson will address in greater detail).

Étienne Gilson famously entered this debate in defense of Christian philosophy, expounding on not only its historical basis in Medieval philosophy, but also suggesting that there was a unique level of insight offered by the Christian philosopher that is peculiar to Christian philosophy itself:¹¹

He [Gilson] was not concerned to defend the autonomous powers of the intellect to arrive at a knowledge of God independent of revelation. Rather his thesis implied that insights derived from Christian faith enabled Christian thinkers to arrive at a Christian philosophy far more adequate to human needs and also more true than any constructed without such insights.

This of course runs parallel to Maritain’s own thinking on the matter, and Maritain himself stated explicitly his general agreement with Gilson.¹² Maurice Blondel, however, went in a different direction than Gilson in his own

preceding the XVII Century never reached maturity,’ what is to prevent the equally gratuitous retort that that following the XVII Century is *over-mature* or senile?). And yet in another sense I find his appraisal quite gratifying. Happy indeed is the philosophy which has not lost touch with childhood, and which preserves not the levity but the vitality thereof, as well as those primordial assurances fashioned in our souls from the first dawn of reason by the Word enlightening every man coming into this world. These assurances it will verify and judge, it will never forfeit them.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Maritain 1955: *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 4: “Recently Mr. Gilson gave a vigorous impetus to this debate, and set forth the question in its clearest terms. In fact, he did more than simply pose the question; he contributed to it an invaluable historical elucidation in his work, *L’Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale*. Let me indicate straightway my basic agreement with him. However, whereas he has intentionally adopted the historical standpoint, I should like to attempt to bring together some elements of a solution on the doctrinal level.”

explanation, arguing that Christian philosophy “must denote a philosophy which has the courage to think through to a logical conclusion the results of its claim to complete rational autonomy.”¹³ The Christian would then be in a special position due to his faith to understand a truth about philosophy that applies universally (that is, to philosophy *simpliciter*), namely, “to acknowledge the insufficiency of autonomous reason.”¹⁴ As a result of this, philosophy “will arrive at the point where it itself demands the supernatural for its proper completion, and then the philosopher can no longer escape the necessity of the option, the decisive choice, for or against the supernatural.”¹⁵ Maritain would agree with part of this claim (namely, the insufficiency of philosophy alone to fully understand its object), but he (alongside Gilson) disagreed with Blondel on creating a “philosophy of insufficiency,” which seemed to deny real knowledge of the object without the import of supernatural data.¹⁶

As stated prior, not all Christians have accepted the idea of Christian philosophy. John Deely, for example, comes to mind as a more recent critic of the term. Deely’s view could be seen as similar to Bréhier, but unlike these first critics of Christian philosophy, Deely acknowledged the history of the term in Medieval thought beginning with St. Augustine:¹⁷

For Augustine and those who followed him closely, Christian faith was the absolute presupposition for understanding anything worth understanding. For them, philosophy was Christian philosophy, “Christian science”, nothing more, nothing less.

This was the view that Aquinas rejected. The whole difference between philosophy and theology, he saw, is precisely that philosophy *does not*

¹³ Aldwinckle 1967: “Is There a Christian Philosophy?”, 235.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Maritain 1955: *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 8: “How could we fail to applaud Mr. Blondel’s endeavors against the *separated* philosophy? Rightly he states that this conception of a *separated* philosophy is completely contrary to the spirit of Thomism.” And 10: “There is, after all, a considerable difference between affirming the insufficiency of philosophy and constructing a philosophy of insufficiency. Mr. Blondel is convinced that if philosophy is to take cognizance of its limitations it must become cognizant also of the inadequacy of concepts of ‘notional knowledge’ for reaching reality. This amounts either to defining notional knowledge as using notions in a way that does violence to their nature, or else to disparaging the normal use of the proper instruments of intellectual cognition.”

¹⁷ Deely 2010: *Medieval Philosophy Redefined*, xxxiv.

presuppose the adoption of a sectarian stance. To the extent that philosophy is made so to depend, to that extent it ceases to be philosophy by becoming rather theology in the sense of a *sacra doctrina*: sectarian-based cenoscopic analysis, in contrast to philosophy proper.

Thus, Deely's understanding of Christian philosophy was that while it possessed a particular sense in St. Augustine's time as more than just an intellectual disciple, this was no longer the case by the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, who was able to make the proper distinction between philosophy and theology.¹⁸ To speak of Christian philosophy now would be improper, and all that it could refer to, according to Deely, is a sociological distinction.¹⁹ Finally, to be a "Christian philosopher" can only signify being a Christian who thinks about philosophy.²⁰ Now, as we will explain further, Maritain would have agreed with this idea, namely, that Christian philosophy cannot refer to a prior acceptance of faith-based principles in philosophy, and that it refers instead to the philosopher himself as a Christian, highlighting the differences between Christians and non-Christians in the virtues each have at their disposal, given the influx of grace. Deely, however, did not seem to think this was significant, as he stated that the philosopher's Christian faith could only influence his thinking accidentally, but not necessarily for better or for worse. Finally, Deely claimed that Maritain himself abandoned the term at the end of his life in recognition that Gilson and his followers mistook St. Thomas' theology for his philosophy.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid 178: "Philosophy in the time of Augustine had been regarded more as a way of life than as an intellectual discipline; and, as we saw, Neoplatonism even developed some pretensions to being a 'way of salvation'. In this climate, as thinkers who developed their ideas within the framework of ancient pagan beliefs were pagan philosophers, so those who thought within the framework of the new Christian beliefs were Christian philosophers."

¹⁹ Ibid xxxv: "But only improperly and in a sociological sense can we speak of 'Christian philosophy', 'Islamic philosophy', etc.; for the sectarian orientation essential for theology is not essential for philosophy and can only accidentally exert its proper influence upon philosophical thinking."

²⁰ Ibid 178: "To be a *Christian* philosopher meant simply (it is quite a lot, actually) to be a Christian *who thinks about philosophical questions and problems*, just as to be a *pagan* philosopher meant simply to be one who thinks about these same issues but without the added dimension of a specifically Christian framework of beliefs and concerns (or even, as in the case of Proclus and many others of late Neoplatonism, with the added dimension of a specifically anti-Christian framework of beliefs and concerns)."

²¹ Ibid 220: "The 'Christian philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas' of which Gilson and his many followers like to speak was in fact his theology, *sacra doctrina*, not the *doctrina* simply of philosophy, cenoscopic science. Reasoning guided by the light of the revelation

Given that Deely was also a scholar of Maritain's thought, it is necessary for us to examine this challenge carefully. Deely acknowledged that while Maritain had defended the term "Christian philosophy" throughout his career, he seemed to have an awakening of sorts toward the end of his career, recognizing the inevitable consequences of St. Thomas' distinction between philosophy and theology.²² In support of this, Deely cites one passage from Maritain's last work, *Untrammelled Approaches*:²³

(A little parenthesis here: I just used the expression "natural mysticism," and I have used it often because, where we are under the pressure of research, we use the words we have at hand. But however worthy of attention the thing might be, the words in question are not worth a tinker's damn. I have racked my brains to find a better expression; what I would like to propose is "the mysticism of gazing at oneself" or, more briefly, "mirror mysticism," in opposition to "the mysticism of loving union with God" or "mysticism with fire." The same problem arises with the expression "Christian philosophy" which I have often used as well, and which is just about as worthless; What I propose in its place is "philosophy considered fully as such" or "philosophy forging ahead" as distinguished from "philosophy considered simply as such" or "stumbling philosophy.")

Moreover, Deely also cited Heinz R. Schmitz in the preface to this work, Maritain's "closest intellectual associate of his final years," remarking that he

of a specific believing community is precisely what Aquinas considered theology to be. That is why Maritain, at the end of his life, after many and eloquent attempts over years to defend the notion, ended as we saw by abandoning the expression 'Christian philosophy', and rightly so, as, after all, an inapt designation."

²² Ibid 180n30: "Among the 20th century writers who have tried to defend the idea of 'Christian philosophy', only Maritain seems to have awakened in the end fully to the consequences of what St. Thomas wrote as the opening Question with ten articles for his *Summa theologiae*."

²³ Maritain 1973: *Untrammelled Approaches*, 421. Quoted in the original French in Deely 2010 : *Medieval Philosophy Redefined*, 180-181n30: "Ici une petite parenthèse: je viens d'employer le mot 'mystique naturelle', et j'en ai usé bien souvent, parce que, lorsqu'on est pressé par la recherche, on se sert des mots qu'on a sous la main. Mais si digne d'attention que soit la chose, le mot en question ne vaut rien. Je me suis creusé la tête pour en trouver un meilleur; ce que je voudrais proposer, c'est 'la mystique du regard du soi' ou, plus brièvement, 'la mystique du miroir', par opposition à 'la mystique de l'union d'amour à Dieu' ou 'la mystique du feu'. Le même problème se pose avec le mot 'philosophie chrétienne', que j'ai aussi employé bien souvent, et qui ne vaut rien non plus; ce que je propose à la place, c'est 'la philosophie comme plénièrement telle' ou 'la philosophie allant de l'avant', par opposition à 'la philosophie comme simplement telle' ou 'la philosophie trébuchante'."

considered Maritain's point above important enough to explain at greater length:²⁴

In speaking of philosophy considered in its existential state which is that of reason in a Christian order, Jacques Maritain often used the term "Christian philosophy." If today he proposes to designate it by another word, it is first of all because the name Christian philosophy is too suggestive of a philosophy that is not free but bound by some restriction or other of a confessional nature. There is however a more profound reason for changing the vocabulary on this point. The truth is that the term "Christian philosophy" runs the risk of hiding from our mind's eye that we are no longer concerned here with philosophy considered simply as such, but with philosophy that has come to its full maturity, with philosophy considered fully as such. What is fundamentally at stake here is much more than a change of vocabulary.

While we acknowledge Maritain's evident frustration with the term (going so far as to call it "worthless" in this aside), this passage alone does not indicate on our reading any kind of awakening on Maritain's part against Gilson or in light of a new reading of St. Thomas. This is neither explicitly stated in the text, nor can it be stated implicitly, as the replacement term "philosophy fully considered" is perfectly consistent with what Maritain stated prior regarding Christian Philosophy (as we shall see below). Schmitz' explanation in the preface also suggests a continuity in Maritain's thought on the matter, as opposed to a sudden break. Even more so, while Deely argued that Christian philosophy died with St. Thomas, Schmitz suggested strongly on the contrary (as Maritain had for many years) that the growth of awareness of Christian philosophy as Maritain had understood it (i.e., referring to "the state in which philosophy finds itself in a Christian order") "marks a historical turning point of capital importance for philosophical reason itself."²⁵

²⁴ Heinz R. Schmitz (as Ernst R. Korn) 1973: "Preface to Jacques Maritain", *Untrammelled Approaches*, xv. Quoted in the original French in Deely 2010: *Medieval Philosophy Redefined*, 181n30: "Si aujourd'hui il propose de la désigner par un autre mot, c'est d'abord parce que le nom de philosophie chrétienne évoque trop l'idée d'une philosophie non pas libre, mais liée par on ne sait quelles convenances d'ordre confessionnel. Il y a cependant une raison plus profonde pour changer le vocabulaire sur ce point. C'est que le terme de 'philosophie chrétienne' risque de masquer aux yeux de notre esprit que nous avons affaire ici, non plus à la philosophie parvenue à sa pleine maturité, à la philosophie comme plénièrement telle. Dans le fond, ce qui est un jeu ici est bien plus qu'un changement de vocabulaire."

²⁵ Continuing immediately past the quote above in our own n23, Schmitz 1973: "Preface", xv: "It is a question of indicating that the state in which philosophy finds itself in a

In light of Maritain's passage above alongside Schmitz' commentary, we would argue that Maritain, rather than abandoning the term, wanted a stronger one instead; one that did not reduce Christian philosophy to the Christian alone, but which extended to all of wisdom, being, and philosophy itself (hence, "fully considered"). On that point, we could anticipate the contemporary view that Christian Philosophy is simply another kind among many equals. More than this, Maritain argued that Christian philosophy, adequately understood, is privileged with the fullest sense of the truth, for the simple reason that the Christian himself has access to the full truth. In this way, "Christian Philosophy" is not one among many, but one which stands above the rest. This is parallel to Maritain's earlier explanation of Christian philosophy in his work *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*.²⁶

3. Understanding the Relationship between Faith and Reason

Moving back to the task at hand, let us begin first with a clarification on how to understand faith in itself and in relation to natural reason. Faith is an infused virtue given by God to man through grace.²⁷ It is primarily a matter of grace, but

Christian order is not only a better state for reason, but a state in which philosophy as such attains its proper plenitude and attains it only there. The growth in awareness of this fact marks a historical turning point of capital importance for philosophical reason itself to the degree that it implies the growth in awareness by philosophy of the breadth of its own domain."

²⁶ Leo R. Ward 1955: "Review of *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*", *Review of Politics* 17.4, 548: "Maritain agrees with those who say that all philosophy is philosophy, the work of human reason, and in many of his works he notes that for a long time philosophy lacked the autonomy that rightly belongs to it. If we are to say that a Christian philosophy does or can exist, we must say that it is the work of reason and is rightly autonomous, as is any philosophy. Put negatively, Maritain says that Christian philosophy is not a species or a being with its own nature to distinguish it from everything else that is philosophy: and here his work stands against the view of some of his compatriots and friends who had been saying that Christian philosophy is a species of philosophy-almost as if we should say that an Arab or a Jew is a species of man. It is philosophy in a particular state or condition. Now, state or condition can make a vast difference: take man free and man enslaved. As Maritain has said elsewhere, philosophy comes properly out of experience, and not out of theology."

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas 1270-72: *ST* IIa-IIae, q.6, a.1, c.: "Two things are requisite for faith. First, that the things which are of faith should be proposed to man: this is necessary in order that man believe anything explicitly. The second thing requisite for faith is the

faith also requires assent from the recipient (which God also assists with the grace necessary to make this assent). In addition, faith is an act of the intellect, wherein the object of faith is truth by divine revelation, most of which exceeds the natural boundaries of human reason.²⁸ The typical definition of faith is that it is a knowledge of things unseen. Maritain, following St. Thomas Aquinas, defined it in this way:²⁹

Faith is an obscure communion with the infinitely luminous knowledge which the divine Abyss has of itself. Faith instructs us in the depths of God. Faith stands above any human system, no matter how valid; it is concerned with the revealed data, with that very glory which cannot be named by any human name, yet has desired to make itself known to us in words which all may understand.

As divine revelation, faith stands above all human authority and science since its source is God.³⁰ Moreover, the matter of faith itself is nobler than those of human sciences. In fact, sacred doctrine, as St. Thomas Aquinas explained, is the essence of wisdom itself as the matter of divine revelation is God, who is the highest cause of being, as well as subsistent being itself.³¹ Yet, given the limitation of our temporal condition, along with our various vices and imperfections, there is an obscurity implied in faith as it regards what is unseen, wherein there can be a degree of uncertainty in our experience of faith in this life. Again, this is not a defect belonging to grace or of the faith itself, rather, the

assent of the believer to the things which are proposed to him. Accordingly, as regards the first of these, faith must needs be from God. Because those things which are of faith surpass human reason, hence they do not come to man's knowledge, unless God reveal them." Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

²⁸ Aquinas 1270-72: *ST* IIa-IIae, q.4, a.2, c.

²⁹ Maritain 1953: *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 211.

³⁰ Aquinas 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.1, a.5, c: "Now one speculative science is said to be nobler than another, either by reason of its greater certitude, or by reason of the higher worth of its subject-matter. In both these respects this science surpasses other speculative sciences; in point of greater certitude, because other sciences derive their certitude from the natural light of human reason, which can err; whereas this derives its certitude from the light of divine knowledge, which cannot be misled ..."

³¹ Aquinas 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.1, a.6, c.: "... sacred doctrine essentially treats of God viewed as the highest cause—not only so far as He can be known through creatures just as philosophers knew Him—"That which is known of God is manifest in them" (Romans 1:19)—but also as far as He is known to Himself alone and revealed to others. Hence sacred doctrine is especially called wisdom."

defect is our own, as this knowledge is received according to the nature of the knower.³²

This way of thinking about faith stands in stark contrast to the modern conception of religious faith in culture today. The common way of defining religious faith since the modernist separation of faith and reason has been more a matter of will, rather than received knowledge. To reduce faith to an act of the human will alone, however, would be to fall into the Pelagian error, which is that the cause of faith is solely a matter of free will choosing to believe in the things of God.³³ Thus, faith today is seen more as a choice on one's part to voluntarily assent to religious beliefs without evidence. The underlying idea to this is that faith is an irrational matter, therefore, those who assent to the faith are essentially believing in propositions as a force of will given that reason is no longer part of the equation. Against this, the Catholic understanding of faith emphasizes a harmonious relationship between faith and reason in the mind, stressing that the two must be taken together for the human person to truly understand even themselves in the fullness of the truth. Consider St. John Paul II's well-known formulation in *Fides et ratio*:³⁴

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.

³² Aquinas 1266-68: *ST Ia*, q.1, a.5, ad.1: "It may well happen that what is in itself the more certain may seem to us the less certain on account of the weakness of our intelligence, 'which is dazzled by the clearest objects of nature; as the owl is dazzled by the light of the sun' (*Metaph.* ii, lect. i). Hence the fact that some happen to doubt about articles of faith is not due to the uncertain nature of the truths, but to the weakness of human intelligence; yet the slenderest knowledge that may be obtained of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge obtained of lesser things, as is said in *de Animalibus xi.*"

³³ Aquinas 1270-72: *ST IIa-IIae*, q.6, a.1, c.: "The Pelagians held that this cause was nothing else than man's free-will: and consequently they said that the beginning of faith is from ourselves, inasmuch as, to wit, it is in our power to be ready to assent to things which are of faith, but that the consummation of faith is from God, Who proposes to us the things we have to believe. But this is false, for, since man, by assenting to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly; and this is God. Therefore faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace."

³⁴ Pope St. John Paul II 1998: *Fides et ratio*, proemium.

This view of the relationship between faith and reason, however, stems from medieval thinking, clarified in particular by the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, cited by both Maritain and St. John Paul II as the foundation of their meditations on the subject.

Now, with regard to philosophy itself, it is interesting to note that there is a degree of overlap between divine revelation and truths able to be naturally acquired through true philosophy. St. Thomas explained that the ultimate aim of faith is to provide knowledge necessary for eternal beatitude, which includes truths able to be discovered by the philosopher. The practical reason for this overlap was that if the matter were left to philosophers alone (that is, the truths of the faith), such knowledge would only be reserved for the few, and would only come about after much time with many errors along the way.³⁵ Specifically, St. Thomas referred to these truths that are both given by faith and discoverable by philosophy as the “preambles of the faith” (i.e., *praeambula fidei*).³⁶ As he discussed this, St. Thomas also provided a quick formulation of the relationship between faith and reason in the following manner: “for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected.”³⁷ This, of course, harkens back to what we mentioned prior, highlighting not only the natural relationship between faith and the intellect, but also the perfective nature of faith, wherein the grace of faith perfects reason. Finally, St. Thomas also explained in this manner exactly how theology can make use of philosophy, which also demonstrates further how faith and reason intersect, as theology uses philosophy insofar as truth acquired by natural reason is better known to us than those given by revelation, not because of a defect in the faith, but because of a defect in our own condition in this world.³⁸

³⁵ Aquinas 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.1, a.1, c.

³⁶ Aquinas 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.2, a.2, ad.1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Aquinas 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.1, a.5, ad.2: “This science can in a sense depend upon the philosophical sciences, not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teaching clearer. For it accepts its principles not from other sciences, but immediately from God, by revelation. Therefore it does not depend upon other sciences as upon the higher, but makes use of them as of the lesser, and as handmaidens: even so the master sciences make use of the sciences that supply their materials, as political of military science. That it thus uses them is not due to its own defect or insufficiency, but to the defect of our intelligence, which is more easily led by what is known through natural

Beyond this, St. John Paul II explained the overlap between faith and reason more broadly by pointing out that the recognition of truth, from a Christian standpoint, comes from the Holy Spirit (a principle also taken from St. Thomas).³⁹ What this entails is that the link between faith and reason is something which flows inextricably from Christian doctrine itself. The Christian understanding of God in relation with truth and being itself necessitates this. Yet, with all this being said, St. John Paul II still defended the relative autonomy of philosophy with regard to its intermediate end (i.e., seeking the truth according to the light of natural human reason). Thus, while there is a harmony between faith and reason, particularly within the philosopher as a person, the science of philosophy itself must still be practiced as philosophy rather than theology, for it too serves a purpose in this regard, but it must do so with a continued openness to the transcendent.⁴⁰ To do this actually benefits the pursuit of truth overall, as philosophy may still be sought between people of various faiths in a way that allows for the exchange of ideas without the necessity to begin from the same religious principles. For these reasons, St. John Paul II reminded us that the Church has no “official philosophy,” even as Pope Leo XIII urged Catholic philosophers to study St. Thomas in *Aeterni patris*, and to use his thought to shed light against contemporary confusions.⁴¹

With all things being said, what must be taken into consideration most of all in light of Maritain’s proposal is how the harmony between faith and reason exists within the person, more so than the formal link between sacred doctrine and the science of philosophy in the abstract. St. John Paul II emphasized this as well in reference to Christian philosophy: “Christian philosophy therefore has two aspects. The first is subjective, in the sense that faith purifies reason.”⁴² By “subjective,” St. John Paul II referred to the human person *qua* person. In other words, he was speaking of the irreducible lived experience with reference to the individual person. This is also what we will speak of with respect to Maritain’s existential consideration of virtue within the Christian philosopher. We must keep in mind, then, that when we are considering human science and knowledge, the “human” element also carries extensive weight with regard to the outcome,

reason (from which proceed the other sciences) to that which is above reason, such as are the teachings of this science.”

³⁹ Pope St. John Paul II 1998: *Fides et ratio*, n.44 [citing St. Thomas Aquinas, 1269-70: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.109, a.1, ad.1].

⁴⁰ *Ibid* n.75.

⁴¹ *Ibid* n.49.

⁴² *Ibid* n.76.

in conjunction with the various principles and rules of logic of the sciences themselves.⁴³ It is also worth pointing out that, in contrast with the modern imagination regarding science, not all truth is grasped through argumentation. First principles, for example, can only be grasped immediately. If this were not the case, no demonstration could be possible in the first place, for all demonstrations rely on granting premises with certainty. Consider, then, Maritain's sense of realism in philosophy (that is, the idea that the human mind grasps reality directly), wherein he stated that "realism is lived by the intellect before being recognized by it."⁴⁴

There is a parallel here between the manner in which philosophical realism is intuited by the mind before it is recognized metacognitively, and the way in which faith, as an *infused* virtue is fused with our knowledge overall, such that it is difficult to determine what exactly we know thanks to the virtue of faith versus our own acquired intellectual virtue of science itself. This gets clouded especially when considering that, first, there is an overlap between revealed truths of the faith and things knowable by philosophy (as explained above). Second, in light of this overlap, there may be a truth discovered first thanks to the virtue of faith, but then bolstered by the natural light of reason, or vice versa. In other words, we can come to know by the virtue of faith certain truths which could have been discovered by philosophy alone, or we could come to know other truths which in turn help us in other ways in our natural scientific pursuits. The main point is this: while we can distinguish abstractly between revealed truth and naturally acquired science, the two are constantly intermingled in our own experience as persons, as each strengthens the other, and both fly together (as St. John Paul II expressed in *Fides et ratio*). Lastly, there is also divine assistance with acquired virtues as a result of prayer, which complicates matters further.

⁴³ Maritain 1953: *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 94: "Reason does not only consist of its conscious logical tools and manifestations, nor does the will consist only of its deliberate conscious determinations. Far beneath the sunlit surface thronged with the explicit concepts and judgments, words and expressed resolutions or movements of the will, are the sources of knowledge of creativity, of love and supra-sensuous desires, hidden in the primordial translucid night of the intimate vitality of the soul. Thus it is that we must recognize the existence of an unconscious or preconscious which pertains to the spiritual powers of the human soul and to the inner abyss of personal freedom, and of the personal thirst and striving for knowing and seeing, grasping and expressing: a spiritual or musical unconscious which is specifically different from the automatic or deaf unconscious."

⁴⁴ Maritain 1959: *Degrees of Knowledge*, 83.

4. Maritain's Proposal for Christian Philosophy

To be clear, by Christian philosophy, we cannot mean the assumption of precepts given by revelation wherein they would form parts of the logical arguments offered by the philosopher. If we begin with revealed truths from a logical standpoint, there would be no true distinction between philosophy and theology. Yet, the Christian philosopher does, in fact, use revealed truth to aid in his understanding of truth as a whole. How is this to be reconciled? In *Science and Wisdom*, Maritain wrote the following on the matter:⁴⁵

We need to distinguish the nature of philosophy from its *state*. In other words, we need to distinguish the order of specification from the order of exercise. Considered in its pure *nature* or essence, philosophy, which is specified by an object naturally knowable to reason, depends only on the evidence and criteria of natural reason. But here we are only considering its abstract nature. Taken concretely, in the sense of being a *habitus* or a group of *habitus* existing in the human soul, philosophy is in a certain *state*, is either pre-Christian or Christian or a-Christian, which has a decisive influence on the way in which it exists and develops.

Thus, when we speak of “Christian philosophy,” we are making an existential claim about the practitioner of the science, not an abstract claim in which we define a new science of philosophy.⁴⁶ This is also in keeping with St. John Paul II's thoughts on the matter in *Fides et ratio*:⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Maritain 1940: *Science and Wisdom*, 81. See also Schmitz 1973, “Preface”, xvii: “For the metaphysical habitus touches the theological habitus directly, according to the law that the lower touches at its summit the lower limit of what is immediately above it. But how is the communion between the two habitus established? If the light of theology strengthens metaphysical reason, it is by proposing theological objects to reason, for it is the object which governs here. The theological habitus itself is born in the mind only when the latter has taken possession of truths which constitute the object of theology. From the point of view of receiving its perfection from the habitus, the mind is dependent on the object which is revealed to it. All the light is communicated through the object. In setting his sights on being, the philosopher, from the very outset of his work, encounters matters which at one and the same time and in one way or another are both philosophical and theological.”

⁴⁶ Dennehy 1973: *The Subject as the Metaphysical Ground for Maritain's Personalism*, 14: “He [Maritain] does not take this expression [viz. ‘Christian Philosophy’] to refer to a single, internally unified discipline but rather to a complex, a framework within which the philosopher who is a Christian seeks the truth.”

⁴⁷ St. John Paul II 1998: *Fides et ratio*, n76.

In itself, the term [Christian philosophy] is valid, but it should not be misunderstood: it in no way intends to suggest that there is an official philosophy of the Church, since the faith as such is not a philosophy. The term seeks rather to indicate a Christian way of philosophizing, a philosophical speculation conceived in dynamic union with faith.

When the term “Christian philosophy” is challenged today, it is typically done by those who think of it as an abstract category, rather than in this existential sense that Maritain is describing. The key is to focus on the philosopher, not philosophy as such.

We can see a simple illustration of Maritain’s point if we consider even the differences among our fellow philosophers in our own lives. Some of our colleagues choose to focus on ethical questions while others are more inclined toward metaphysical ones. The impetus for such inclinations is in many ways pre-philosophical. When philosophers are asked why they chose to focus on one thing rather than another, they typically point to something within their lived experience outside of philosophy (properly speaking) which accounts for this. Consider then how much more these differences are magnified when comparing a Christian to an atheist philosopher. More importantly, from the Christian standpoint, there are certain truths which the atheist philosopher will miss precisely on account of these existential considerations. For instance, Maritain argued that only the Christian will be able to produce a moral philosophy adequately considered, that is, one which gives the complete answer to what moral philosophy seeks (i.e., the true path to complete happiness or beatitude). The force of Maritain’s answer, then, is not merely in accounting for the differences among philosophers of different faiths, but in his argument that only the Christian philosopher will reach a certain level of wisdom.

To be clear, Maritain’s claim applies to sciences which have an overlap with religion based upon the matter being discussed. This is why there is a *prima facie* absurdity with a hypothetical “Christian mathematics” or “Christian biology.” The scope of such sciences (quantified matter and living matter) does not have a shared concern with religion, whereas philosophy on the other hand does. As Maritain explained in *Ransoming the Time*:⁴⁸

Philosophy, however, though distinct from Christianity, is in interrelation with it, and must deal with matters pertaining to religion, if it is to understand and analyze concretely the problems of human life and human conduct. Not after the fashion of any necessary requirement, but after the fashion of a concrete

⁴⁸ Maritain 1941: *Ransoming the Time*, 197.

and existential suitability, the natural manifestation of the eternal Word [*Logos*], in which philosophy is rooted, in a certain sense invokes the supernatural manifestation of the Incarnate Word [Christ as *Logos* incarnate], in which faith is rooted.

We have added the Greek term *Logos* for clarification purposes, since this was the original term used that calls to mind eternal truth, rationality, order, etc. Of course, in the Christian setting, this is linked with Christ himself in the gospel of St. John. What this suggests is the connection between God (and especially Christ) with Truth. *Logos* is more than just truth in being, but also truth through reasoning, the essence of wisdom. This is ultimately what philosophy is after, and what makes philosophy possible in the first place. Through *Logos*, then, there is a natural connection between Christianity and philosophy to the point where the truth of Christianity is the highest wisdom sought by philosophy itself.⁴⁹

Put another way, the philosopher alone (aside from the theologian), as metaphysician, seeks being *qua* being as the formal object of his study. While the theologian recognizes this as God from the start, the philosopher may end his study at that point, and here we see the natural intersection between both disciplines. If we consider this from a human standpoint, however, it is likewise natural for the philosopher studying being itself to wish to know it in full, even beyond that which is naturally accessible to human reason.⁵⁰ The Christian

⁴⁹ Pieper 1960: *Scholasticism*, 162: “‘Christian philosophy’ is not a more or less abstruse brand of philosophical activity corresponding to the special (‘religious’) interests of individuals. It is *the* only possible form of philosophy—if it is true that the *Logos* of God became man in Christ, and *if* by ‘philosophy’ we understand what the great forefathers of European philosophizing (Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle) meant by it. The thinkers of the Middle Ages perceived that a ‘Christian philosophy’ depended upon the conjunction of *fides* and *ratio*.”

⁵⁰ Schmitz 1973, “Preface”, xv: “This domain is above all that of the formal object of the philosopher: *being* as it is accessible to natural reason. But being has an infinite amplitude; and it includes higher degrees, which are offered to our mind by faith and the supernatural order and which, without being the formal object of philosophy, are objects which concern it eminently and which it receives from a higher wisdom. As soon as it makes contact with being, the intelligence thirsts for being its totality. Far from compartmentalizing the mind and enclosing it within the limits of its formal objects—as is the case for the specialized sciences... —philosophy, which is already a form of wisdom, refuses to compartmentalize the intellect and to imprison it in its formal object (according to an only too prevalent narrow-minded conception, which misconstrues both being and the mind). It is the formal object itself of the philosopher who is fully a philosopher which asks him to consider objects of a higher order, which are objects of a science superior to his own, that is, the science of theology. It asks this of him certainly not in order to acquire

philosopher in particular would be in a unique position to recognize this and would also have a unique path to knowing more about being itself than others.

Now, it should go without saying at this point that this entire discussion assumes the truth of the Gospel for Christian philosophy to be valid. It should be clear at this point nonetheless that even if the truth of Christianity were not granted, Christian philosophy is the logical outcome of internalizing Gospel truths. Thus, there are two possibilities for the Christian philosopher. If Christianity were false, then obviously Christian philosophy itself would be a dead-end of sorts. It would represent an intellectual straitjacket for the philosopher. However, if Christianity is true, the opposite is the case. That is, Christianity would raise the philosopher above his natural limitations, completing in a way the search for wisdom sought by pre-Christian philosophers. As Maritain explained:⁵¹

In one sense, the advent of Christianity did dethrone philosophic wisdom and raise theological wisdom and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit above it. Once philosophy acknowledges this new arrangement, its condition in the human mind is thoroughly changed. I think that every great philosophy harbors a mystical yearning, which in fact is quite capable of throwing it out of joint. In a Christian regime, philosophy understands that even if it can and ought to sharpen this desire, it is not up to philosophy itself to consummate it. Philosophy, then, is wholly orientated toward a higher wisdom, and thus it is made able to achieve some degree of self-detachment and be relieved by some of its ponderousness.

Hence, given the specific claims of Christianity, the practice of philosophy in the West was changed from that point onward.

Traditionally, it has been understood that the philosopher not only seeks truth, but also searches for truth that transforms his way of life. Moreover, the philosopher as a lover of wisdom will wish to make use of all available data in this search for ultimate truth. Professor Raymond Dennehy explained Maritain's position as such:⁵²

Owing to the limitations of the human condition, the imperfection of our understanding, the fact that we are confined to sensible things for our evidence, etc., unaided reason cannot in itself give us the ultimate and complete truth.

full knowledge (savoir) of them (A knowledge which depends on a higher order than his and is the affair of the theologian), but in order to complete as much as possible, in his own perspective, his quest for being to which his intelligence is assigned."

⁵¹ Maritain 1955: *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 27-28.

⁵² Dennehy 1973: *The Subject as the Metaphysical Ground for Maritain's Personalism*, 15.

Now Maritain does not regard philosophy as a merely conceptual experience. It is for him a search for truth which, to the extent that it is discovered, transforms one's entire life...

From this perspective, it would not make sense for the philosopher to ignore religious input, not for the sake of his arguments necessarily, but for the sake of his own never-ending search for the truth. Professor Dennehy continued:⁵³

If he [i.e., the philosopher] finds a source of higher truth, or truth which he believes cannot be grasped by unaided reason, then, just because he is dedicated to the truth, he incorporates it into his life. But, if this higher truth cannot be grasped by reason alone, then it cannot, according to Maritain, be fused with philosophy, which relies on unaided reason, to form a single, unified discipline.

This is in keeping with what we have explained prior, namely, that the Christian philosopher incorporates revealed truth into his life, and this has a natural impact on his thinking, but as a philosopher, it is not fused with philosophical arguments themselves unless these truths can be shown from the vantage point of unaided, natural human reason as well. Essentially, this is the harmonious relation between faith and reason understood by the Catholic, with the end being that faith and reason must fly together as much as possible. Indeed, there are certain mysteries of the faith that require revelation (such as Christ's dual nature of God and man), and to some extent, these will elude most rational explanations. With that being said, the Christian (in particular the philosopher and theologian) will attempt to find the logic in these revealed truths to the best of their abilities, however, the philosopher has the specific task of attempting this task within the confines of natural human reason. In other words, while the Christian philosopher comes to accept revealed truth through faith as a Christian, he would, as a philosopher, try to find a way to express the same truth without the aid of revelation.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ St. John Paul II 1998: *Fides et ratio*, n76: "In speculating on these questions, philosophers have not become theologians, since they have not sought to understand and expound the truths of faith on the basis of Revelation. They have continued working on their own terrain and with their own purely rational method, yet extending their research to new aspects of truth."

5. Moral Philosophy Adequately Considered: A Case for Christian Philosophy

Whether we are speaking of speculative or practical philosophy does make a bit of difference in this consideration as well. We can agree that a hypothetical “Christian mathematics” does not seem to make sense, while “Christian Ethics” does. What about “Christian Metaphysics”? This seems more complex. Again, in this case there seems to be a shared concern between the metaphysician and the Christian (especially the theologian), but how much does revelation truly impact metaphysical conclusions?

Maritain considered that speculative philosophy possesses a degree of autonomy from theology that practical philosophy does not. Dennehy explained that Maritain held this position “because the search for wisdom has a dynamism: the lower wisdom seeks the higher wisdom.”⁵⁵ In other words, since the subject matter of metaphysics is being insofar as it is being, it is rightfully called “first philosophy” since there is nothing more universal than being *qua* being. Moral philosophy, however, is less universal as it is concerned specifically with the human good, so from a hierarchical standpoint, Maritain argued that moral philosophy is subalternated to theology on account of its shared end.⁵⁶

There is a disagreement among scholars of Maritain on this point, however, as some (such as Jung or Pugh) hold that either Maritain is knowingly theologizing practical philosophy or doing so unwillingly. Jung’s thesis on Maritain’s political philosophy is that it is indeed a theological endeavor, whereas Pugh acknowledges that Maritain does not view it in this manner, but argues that Maritain fails to make the case. Dennehy, in contrast with Jung, held that while practical philosophy requires revelation for Maritain, it still remains separate

⁵⁵ Dennehy 1973: *The Subject as the Metaphysical Ground for Maritain's Personalism*, 16-17: “Maritain insists, therefore, that speculative philosophy constitutes an autonomous discipline. He can say this—and at the same time maintain that philosophy leads up to theology—not because he thinks that speculative philosophy is inadequate with regard to its proper object, *ens secundum quod ens*, being insofar as it is being, but because the search for wisdom has a dynamism: the lower wisdom seeks the higher wisdom. However, he sees a different situation with regard to practical philosophy, i.e., ethics and political philosophy.”

⁵⁶ Maritain (1955: *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 31) stated that: “a science can be subalternated to another on account of its end, its principles (only), or its subject (and its principles).” In the case of moral philosophy, it is subalternated to theology in the first way (“on account of its end”).

from theology. Dennehy's concern seemed to be that Jung overstated the need for Christian doctrine in Maritain's political philosophy such that it was only a political theology of sorts.⁵⁷ The truth, however, seems to be in the middle. The completion of practical philosophy for Maritain, as for St. Thomas Aquinas, requires the import of revelation for the "final answer," so to speak, but this is not to say that there is no philosophical content to speak of. For example, there is still virtue, natural law, happiness in this life (i.e., imperfect happiness), and with respect to Maritain's political philosophy, there is still an understanding of human rights which stems from his metaphysics of the human person (as Dennehy argued). With that being said, it is also important to note that as a Christian philosopher, there are significant aspects of Christian doctrine which carry this further (for instance, how Maritain's Christian view of history affects his view of political action, or how democracy is argued for positively insofar as it reflects Gospel truths). We can summarize then that practical philosophy, from Maritain's perspective, can only go so far from the vantage point of natural reason alone (and indeed, it can go far), but its absolute completion requires supernatural truth to reveal what lies ahead. This complete form of practical philosophy would be what Maritain thought of as moral philosophy "adequately considered."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Dennehy 1973: *The Subject as the Metaphysical Ground for Maritain's Personalism*, 10. Dennehy here is referring to Hwa Yol Jung 1960: *The Foundation of Jacques Maritain's Political Philosophy*, 23. There, Jung wrote: "Christian theology is not only the keystone of speculative philosophy but also the bedrock of practical philosophy from which the very notion of democracy is derived. Thus for Maritain political issues and problems are inseparable from Christian theology. In this respect, Jacques Maritain is primarily a Christian theologian who utilizes political philosophy for theological purposes and, without contradiction, theology for political purposes."

⁵⁸ Ralph Nelson 1963: "Moral Philosophy Adequately Considered", 141: "What precisely does Maritain mean by an adequate moral philosophy? Maritain employs this term with the meaning it possesses in the Thomistic definition of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. A moral philosophy adequately considered 'is moral philosophy taken as constituting purely and simply (*simpliciter*) a true moral *science*, in a state which makes the mind of itself adequate to or in conformity with its object, that is to say, *human action*.' A moral science inadequately considered would be one which is not adequate to this object and hence not a science in the Aristotelian sense of the term. It will be inadequate, says Maritain, if it is in ignorance of the concrete conditions within which human nature as it actually exists is placed in its journey toward its end. Historically we have been presented with two important examples of moral philosophies which are inadequate in this way: the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle and *Ecclesiastes*."

Pugh, on the other hand, thought that although Maritain did not believe his presentation collapses moral philosophy into moral theology, Maritain's arguments do not prove this point.⁵⁹ We would suggest that what Maritain is speaking of here is not moral philosophy *simpliciter*, but specifically a perfected moral philosophy. You can do moral philosophy in a purely autonomous fashion (that is, without import from revelation). Clearly, Aristotle's *Ethics* would be a good example of this. However, Aristotle's *Ethics* also shows us the limits of a purely natural moral philosophy without revelation. Indeed, you can talk about virtue and vice, as well as the best way to live in this natural life. But as St. Thomas spoke of it, this really only comprises imperfect happiness. This is what Maritain seems to be expressing: if you want a *complete* moral philosophy that actually reaches the perfect end (that is, perfect happiness), you can only get this with the aid of revelation.⁶⁰ But if you just want a baseline, natural, moral philosophy, you cannot only go as far as imperfect happiness (like Aristotle described).

Raïssa Maritain also touched on this topic in her piece "Abraham and the Ascent of Conscience," noting that: "...moral laws do not depend only on the nature of the soul and on what the soul can know of its own nature: they are also a function of its eternal destiny. They are the living bonds which, in varying degrees, tie created nature to its uncreated end."⁶¹ It is this dependence on the eternal end which connects a complete moral philosophy to revealed truths. Like Jacques, Raïssa pointed to the subalternation of moral science to religion, tying this with her understanding of history as a development of moral conscience, wherein man does not possess a perfect moral understanding at every age, even as the history of moral conscience is progressive as God guides us forward.⁶²

⁵⁹ Matthew S. Pugh 2009: "Maritain and the Problem of Christian Philosophy," 105.

⁶⁰ Nelson 1963: "Moral Philosophy Adequately Considered", 145: "The subalternation of moral philosophy to theology occurs in such a way that the former is completed and perfected by theology. It is not a question of moral philosophy needing theology in a radical or originative way. In other words moral philosophy has its own methods and can attain many truths by following its own experiential way of knowing, but it reaches a point where it realizes its own ignorance and the limitations of unaided reason."

⁶¹ Raïssa Maritain 1955: "Abraham and the Ascent of Conscience," 30.

⁶² Ibid: "For our knowledge of the moral laws we rely both on the lights reason has at its command and on divine revelation. Of course, all knowledge could have been given us from the beginning, given and preserved in each of us to the end. But that, it seems, is not the world God created; that is not the way He governs souls. Even toward man in the state of original justice, with all the privileges of innocence, God acts, we like to think, like a gardener who puts into the ground a seed, not a mature tree heavy with fruit. And the seed dies and lives, waxes strong in the soil, climbs toward the sun, knows the changes

6. Conclusion

Grasping the magnitude of the Gospel's claims in relation to what has been sought by the philosopher lies at the core of properly understanding Christian philosophy itself. Everything hinges upon the veracity of its claims, as Josef Pieper explained:⁶³

To examine the framework of 'Christian philosophy,' we must first accept a basic premise. This is the premise that in Christ man received an intelligence which relates to the whole of the universe and of existence, and therefore by definition concerns anyone who engages in philosophizing—and which, moreover, is valid by virtue of a superhuman claim to truth. Should anyone reject this premise, he must in consistency regard 'Christian philosophy,' however one defines it, as meaningless.

For the Christian, then, it becomes impossible to practice philosophy in an earnest fashion without attempting to harmonize the truths of faith with philosophical wisdom. Pieper continued:⁶⁴

On the other hand, suppose that the premise is granted. Then the task of 'conjunction' comes to the fore—the question, at least, in what way the *believed* intelligence concerning the world and existence can be made to accord with the *known* intelligence concerning the same world and that same human existence as it is revealed to men's eyes. If man is desirous of existing out of the fullness and out of the unchecked energies of the spiritual impulse—which means existing in the face of absolutely everything that comes within his scope—then he is bound at least to attempt the conjunction of *fides* and *ratio*.

Christian philosophy emerged historically as precisely the result of the Christian philosopher attempting to resolve the implications of his faith with respect to the science of philosophy itself. Again, whether or not this enriches or constricts philosophy, however, all depends on the ontological truth of Christianity itself. Given the claims of the Gospel, neutrality or indifference to this question is impossible.

Finally, it is necessary for us to understand (as Maritain explained) how the human person engages in philosophy from an existential standpoint, that is, with regard to the individual person's lived experience. It is a mistake begun by rationalism to suppose that the human being is capable of engaging in science

of season, flowers, and bears fruit. God acts like a father, like an educator. All human history shows this, and the inspired Scriptures tell it on every page."

⁶³ Pieper 1960: *Scholasticism*, 156-157.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 157.

abstractly, as though it were possible for there to be such a thing as “pure reason.”⁶⁵ In the *Dream of Descartes*, Maritain famously called this “angelism,” wherein Descartes’ desire for human science mirrors angelic thinking. Essentially, the angelic mind is contradistinguished with the human mind by the angel’s ability to grasp universals immediately given that they are pure spirits. The knowledge of human beings, on the other hand, begins with sense perception as the medium by which human beings grasp universals through particulars. Moreover, as embodied spirits, human beings are affected by their physical condition and the limitation of matter. This is all to say that the philosopher, regardless of faith, does not engage in philosophy independently from their nature. Considered this way, the meaning of Christian philosophy is evident considering the state of the philosopher as a Christian.

⁶⁵ Maritain 1936: *Integral Humanism*, 165: “The Averroism of the Middle Ages and the Cartesian rationalism of the seventeenth century claimed in this manner to furnish the world with a *perfect natural wisdom* of which man existentially considered would be capable in actual fact, while keeping himself in isolation and separation from the things of faith and of revelation, in a climate apart, removed from that of Christian wisdom.”

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