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Bruce Ellis Benson

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# THE TWO-FOLD TASK OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Bruce Ellis Benson

Using Pierre Hadot's idea of "philosophy as a way of life," I argue that Christian philosophy of religion is ultimately about the practical task of living our lives. But I contend that this task is two-fold: it includes both theory and practice. While analytic philosophy of philosophy of religion (APR) tends to emphasize theory and continental philosophy of religion (CPR) tends to emphasize practice (admittedly, these generalizations are only true to a certain extent), APR and CPR are both part of a two-fold task. Throughout the paper, I put into question any hard distinction between theory and practice.

## *Introduction*

In an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* with the somewhat menacing title "Making Philosophy Matter—Or Else," Lee McIntyre argues that we philosophers have not always made it clear why what we do matters, and that recent threatened closures and actual closures of philosophy departments should encourage us to think more about how to demonstrate that we do something of great importance.<sup>1</sup> Now I am utterly convinced that our philosophical work *does* matter; I think what we do has deep implications for how we live life. But it is less clear to me exactly how best to articulate what it means for philosophy *to matter*. More important, my concern is particularly how *Christian* philosophy matters, and *to whom* it matters.

In what follows, I want to argue that Christian philosophy has a two-fold task. On the one hand, philosophy is rightly thought of as first and foremost *practical*: this is true of all philosophy and it should be particularly true of *Christian* philosophy. It is not just that our philosophy should have an effect on our lives; it is also the case that philosophy grows out of our lives in the first place. By "practical," I simply mean: "concerned with action." On the other hand, this emphasis on practical philosophy is in no way incompatible with what we might call "theoretical philosophy." By "theoretical," I mean: "concerned with thinking." I will be working with these rather rough and ready definitions throughout my paper, but it will become apparent by the end that they are not quite as clear as they

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<sup>1</sup>Lee MacIntyre, "Making Philosophy Matter—Or Else," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 11, 2011.



might seem to be. In any case, while it is true that theoretical philosophy can become (and sometimes *does* become) “academic” in the worst sense of that term—remote, obscure, and hermetic—it *too* can be seen as having the goal of living well. This is what I mean by the two-fold task of philosophy as a practical pursuit and as a theoretical pursuit; it is *one task* that takes two forms. However, even these forms are such that they are not exclusive. Since it is well beyond the scope of this paper to consider philosophy broadly construed, I will work this out in regard to philosophy of religion. More specifically, in sections two and three, I want to consider three criticisms of analytic philosophy of religion (APR) made by John D. Caputo, Richard Messer, and Nick Trakakis. These criticisms are: (1) that APR makes God into a definable object; (2) that APR is concerned with cognitive certainty; and (3) that APR is overly theoretical. The questions that I will ask are: First, are these claims correct and, if so, to what extent? Second, if there is some truth to these claims (particularly the last one), are APR and CPR (continental philosophy of religion) simply engaged in different tasks? Ultimately, my claim will be that practitioners of APR and CPR are actually engaged in *one* task that is *two-fold*.

### *Philosophy as a Way of Life*

Before we can talk specifically about Christian philosophy, we need to consider how philosophy emerges. Socrates claims that philosophy begins in *thaumazein*—awe or wonder: “This sense of wonder [*thaumazein*] is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin.”<sup>2</sup> It is a pity that the English term “awe” has, through colloquial overuse, lost so much of its force. For, right before this passage, Theaetetus has just said: “By the gods, Socrates, I am lost in wonder [*thaumazô*] when I think of all these things, and sometimes when I regard them it really makes my head swim.”<sup>3</sup> Aristotle says the following: “For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant.”<sup>4</sup> In the second section of this paper, I will turn to the question of the extent to which philosophy remains in *thaumazein*, as opposed to simply finding answers so that wonder ceases.

For the moment, let us consider what wonder causes us to do. I think it’s safe to say: ask questions. What sorts of questions are these? They are first and foremost questions about living life. Pierre Hadot (in such texts

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<sup>2</sup>Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d, in *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

<sup>3</sup>Plato, *Theaetetus* 155c, quoted in Rosemary Desjardins, *The Rational Enterprise: Logos in Plato’s Theaetetus* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1990), 189.

<sup>4</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 982b 12–17.

as *Philosophy as a Way of Life* and *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*) has argued that ancient philosophers saw what they were doing as a complete way of life. More recently, John M. Cooper (in *Pursuits of Wisdom*) has taken up the same thesis and considerably broadened it. Both build what I take to be a convincing case that it was not just ethics and politics that were seen as “practical” for the ancients but that metaphysics, epistemology, logic, and physics were designed to be practical too.

Consider what Plutarch says about philosophy as something one *does*:

Most people imagine that philosophy consists in delivering discourses from the heights of a chair, and in giving classes based on texts. But what these people utterly miss is the uninterrupted philosophy which we see being practiced every day in a way which is perfectly equal to itself. . . . Socrates did not set up a grandstand for his audience and did not sit upon a professorial chair; he had no fixed timetable for talking and walking with his friends. Rather, he did philosophy sometimes by joking with them, or by drinking or going to war or to the market with them, and finally by going to prison and drinking poison. He was the first to show that at all times and in every place, in everything that happens to us, daily life gives us the opportunity to do philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

The love of “*sophia*,” then, is not some kind of theoretical love, but a practical one. Philosophy is an *activity* in which we are constantly engaged. It does not end when we leave our offices at the end of the day.

How might we define this activity? Plato defines philosophy as training for death and Montaigne famously writes “that to philosophize is to learn to die.”<sup>6</sup> One aspect of this training is that one is preparing for one’s own death. We might put this as follows: on your deathbed, what do you want your life to have looked like? Will you be able to say: “I have no regrets”? While the Christian view of the afterlife significantly re-contextualizes this insight, it in no way negates it: as one Christian monk noted, “since the beginning of our conversation, we have come closer to death. Let us be vigilant while we still have the time.”<sup>7</sup> Yet this “death” can be taken in another way. *Thaumazein* opens our minds in such a way that we realize our own ignorance. When we are thus humbled — when we have “died” to intellectual pride — we are able to learn. We are no longer complacent. Of course, one might well ask at this point: if I am working on a technical argument or doing a careful investigation of, say, Book I of Plato’s *Republic*, in what sense am I training for death? My response: in both ways. First,

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<sup>5</sup>Plutarch, *Whether a Man Should Engage in Politics When He is Old*, quoted in Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 38.

<sup>6</sup>*Phaedo* 62a: “Ordinary people seem not to realize that those who really apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are directly and of their own accord preparing for dying and death.” Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), chap. 20.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 68.

doing something more “technical” in nature is *also* part of living well, even if it simply expands one’s mind and gives one a better understanding of the nature of reality. Second, working on an argument usually *is* humbling, for it tends to involve frustration with initial attempts and it may require the “death” of giving up cherished beliefs. Nicholas Wolterstorff puts this as follows:

The scholar never fully knows in advance where his line of thought will lead him. For the Christian to undertake scholarship is to undertake a course of action that may lead him into the painful process of revising his actual Christian commitment, sorting through his beliefs, and discarding some from a position where they can any longer function as control [beliefs].<sup>8</sup>

While Wolterstorff is specifically talking about research that may disturb Christian beliefs, there are many other beliefs that our work as philosophers may disturb.

Now, if we combine this idea of training for death with dying with Christ—so not just a literal death but also death to our sinful selves—the idea becomes even more profound. In Mark 8:35, Jesus tells us that “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and the sake of the gospel, will save it.” Paul talks about being dead to sin (Rm. 6:2) and being dead to one’s sinful self (Gal. 2:20). The Christian notion of “conversion” (*metanoia*) is that of a fundamental, 180-degree reorientation of the self. It is nothing short of a movement in which we become different persons and thus die to self.

Something like this idea of conversion is actually to be found in ancient philosophy. Hadot reminds us of the prominent place that *askêsis* plays in ancient philosophy. While the term *askêsis* is often rendered as “asceticism,” it is much better rendered as “spiritual exercises” that concern both body and soul. They are designed so that we (to quote Hadot) “let ourselves be changed, in our point of view, attitudes, and convictions. This means that we must dialogue with ourselves, hence do battle with ourselves.”<sup>9</sup> According to Hadot, the goal of *askêsis* is to bring about “a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it.”<sup>10</sup> So *metanoia* and *askêsis* end up being remarkably similar, with one important caveat: *metanoia* is not something that we can accomplish by ourselves. Of course, exactly how one works this out is going to depend on one’s theology of the Holy Spirit. And this project of dying to a certain self is one that can be found, for instance, in Nietzsche, who takes philosophy to be fundamentally about self-overcoming. Specifically, he speaks of “life that cuts into life.”<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche’s

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<sup>8</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion Alone*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 96.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>11</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), II.8.

philosophy, then, should be read as part of the ascetic tradition.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, Nietzsche is engaged in dying to self, in ways that are both Socratic and Pauline, even though I think it is ultimately a failed project.

While Christians tend to think that spiritual exercises or disciplines are something unique to Christianity, the reality is that such disciplines long predate its advent. Thus, early Christians imported such disciplines from pagan philosophy and Judaism, adapting them for distinctively Christian ends. Further, as Christianity was trying to find its own identity, second-century Apologists such as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria explicitly positioned Christianity as a competing philosophy—not just any philosophy but the *true* philosophy that had been prefigured by earlier philosophers. And that emphasis continued with such thinkers as Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa. It is also to be found in John Chrysostom, who works out *askêsis* in the following way: he encourages those wishing to follow the way of Christian faith to consider their souls to be like paintings or pieces of sculpture. We are the works of art that God has created, though God gives us the great honor of further fashioning ourselves. Of course, we do not do so all by *ourselves*; indeed, Saint Chrysostom exhorts parents to be part of the process with their children. By extension, all of us in Christian community are part of helping fashion one another to become beautiful works of art.

Practically, though, what does the *askêsis* that develops us as living works of art involve? Consider the following list of activities that Hadot provides: research, investigation, reading, listening, attention, and self-mastery.<sup>13</sup> The most important of these categories is that of “attention” or self-awareness. What the Stoics called “*prosoche*” (attention) “supposes that, at each instant, we renew our choice of life . . . and that we keep constantly present in our minds the rules of life which express that choice.”<sup>14</sup> The goal here is to be aware of what one is doing—one’s actions, one’s thoughts, one’s motivations—and thus constantly aware of whom one is becoming. Given that Paul exhorts us not to be “conformed to this world” but instead to “be transformed” (Rm. 12:2), such attention is surely appropriate. Under the category of listening, we could place both prayer and meditation. When we engage in meditation, we allow God to speak to us, as well as to ruminate upon Christian teachings about how we ought to live. For the Stoics, meditation involves remembering and even memorizing key maxims, dwelling upon them, and seeing how they can be put into practice. The point of meditation is to transform both thinking and practice. Indeed, Saint Paul calls us to think on those things that will lift up our gaze and our lives: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is

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<sup>12</sup>Bruce Ellis Benson makes this point in *Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), chap. 9.

<sup>13</sup>Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 84.

<sup>14</sup>Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 193.

pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Ph. 4:8). Then he goes on to connect these meditations to practice: "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you" (Ph. 4:9). Research, investigation, and reading all involve immersing ourselves in the truths of the Christian faith and considering how those truths should practically be expressed. Reading Scripture is clearly central to a distinctively Christian *askêsis*, but so is reading theology or classic Christian texts. But this is also what *philosophers* do: we read philosophical texts, we advance arguments, and we give papers at conferences. This is all part of our philosophical *askêsis*. Hadot reminds us that these spiritual exercises are not merely *personal*. The Socratic dialogues are about putting the interlocutors through a rigorous examination. In other words, the topic is not merely some point of belief (though it is certainly that *too*); it is also the very interlocutors themselves. Consider Socrates's rebuke to the Athenian senate:

My very good friend, you are an Athenian and belong to a city which is the greatest and most famous in the world for its wisdom and strength. Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth [*aletheia*] and understanding [*phronesis*] and the perfection of your soul?<sup>15</sup>

One could easily imagine such a claim from a Christian theologian or someone writing on living the Christian life. Socrates makes a claim about what is really important in life that is remarkably similar to what Christians would say.

Of course, I could also imagine someone at this point wondering if the way I've been describing ancient philosophy is almost the kind of thing you'd find in the "Self-Help" section of your local bookstore (if you're lucky enough to still have one). Where, one might ask, is the *philosophy*—or the "beef," if you're old enough to remember that ad campaign? I think there are two responses. One goes as follows: precisely because we have generally lost sight of this vision of what philosophy looks like, we may be inclined to think something along the lines of "but this isn't *real* philosophy." That is, we are largely conditioned to think that philosophy is a kind of *scientific* endeavor. In contrast, what we've been looking at seems more like an *artistic* endeavor. But, again, that kind of response is very much conditioned by a certain viewpoint that has developed in contemporary philosophy. At the beginning of Hadot's *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, he quotes Kant, who writes: "The ancient Greek philosophers, such as Epicurus, Zeno, and Socrates, remained more faithful to the Idea of the philosopher than their modern counterparts have done. 'When will you finally begin to *live* virtuously,' said Plato to an old man who told him

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<sup>15</sup>Apology 29d–e

he was attending classes on virtue. The point is not always to speculate, but also ultimately to think about applying our knowledge."<sup>16</sup> Here Kant recognizes that, already in his time, this idea of the philosopher (that is, the one who applies her knowledge) had been lost—or nearly so.

But another way of responding to the objection that this is not *real* philosophy is by pointing to centrality of argument and reason within this tradition, albeit with a twist. In *The Therapy of Desire*, Martha Nussbaum writes that

Epicureans, Skeptics, and Stoics—all conceived of philosophy as a way of addressing the most painful problems of human life. They saw the philosopher as a compassionate physician whose arts could heal many pervasive types of human suffering. They practiced philosophy not as a detached intellectual technique dedicated to the display of cleverness but as an immersed and worldly art of grappling with human misery.

She goes on to say:

These philosophers were still very much philosophers—dedicated to the careful argumentation, the explicitness, the comprehensiveness, and the rigor that have usually been sought by philosophy, in the tradition of ethical reflection that takes its start (in the west) with Socrates. . . . On the other hand, their intense focus on the state of desire and thought in the pupil made them seek a newly complex understanding of human psychology, and led them to adopt complex strategies—interactive, rhetorical, literary—designed to enable them to grapple more effectively with what they had understood. In the process they forge new conceptions of what philosophical rigor and precision require. In these ways Hellenistic ethics is unlike the more detached and academic philosophy that has sometimes been practiced in the Western tradition.<sup>17</sup>

But here we see that things get complicated. On the one hand, the Epicureans, Skeptics, and Stoics are still engaging in philosophy and operating according to standards of rigor and precision. They are *philosophers*, after all. On the other hand, their very practical concerns mean that philosophy for them is not narrowly conceived. It also uses techniques that seem (at least to many of us) more artistic than scientific.

Nussbaum fleshes out these differences by examining what she terms “the medical model of philosophizing.” Since the Hellenistic philosophers are concerned with health of the soul, they realize that the entire enterprise is person-related. Whereas physics might perhaps proceed in a purely detached manner (and this is surely a contestable claim), ethics cannot. We are not interested in (as she puts it), “standing on the rim of heaven” to find out about the truths of one’s life.

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<sup>16</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Encyclopedia*. *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 29, Abt. 4.1.1, *Vorlesungen. Kleine Vorlesungen und Ergänzungen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 9 and 12.

<sup>17</sup>Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–4.



At this point, we can make what I take to be an important connection between these Hellenistic philosophers and Aristotle. Consider what Epicurus says: "Philosophy is an activity that secures the flourishing [*eudaimōn*] life by arguments and reasonings."<sup>18</sup> Clearly, the kinds of arguments and reasonings that Epicurus has in mind are more concerned with practical wisdom, the usual translation of *phronesis* in Aristotle. And here it is helpful to consider Aristotle's distinction between, on the one hand, *phronesis* or *praxis* and, on the other hand, *sophia* or *theoria*. *Phronesis* is three-fold for Aristotle. It is the ability (1) to know what is important, (2) to know how to bring that important thing about, and (3) actually to do so. Anything short of right action is not true *phronesis*. Given this emphasis on action, *phronesis* is concerned with specific and concrete truths. For instance, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle talks about "what is fitting . . . in relation to the agent, and to the circumstances and the object."<sup>19</sup> How should I live *my* life? While there is a universal and unchanging component in the answer to this question (for Aristotle is going to say that the virtues of temperance and courage do not change), they still need to be concretized not only in a specific person's life but also in a specific person's action. By way of *phronesis*, we are able to acquire moral virtue, which Aristotle ultimately thinks is closely connected to political knowledge.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, *sophia*—theoretical reason—is not necessarily connected with action. What *sophia* gets us, instead, is knowledge of that which does not change, universal truths. It arrives at something we normally call "science."

But here is where things start to get interesting. For Aristotle complicates the *sophia/phronesis* distinction in (at least) two ways. First, while it is clear that the intellectual virtues are ultimately higher than the practical virtues, the practical ones are needed as part of the whole package. A way of putting this is that the intellectual virtues and the moral virtues complement one another, so that they are both needed for one to be truly virtuous. A more powerful way of putting it, though, is by saying that wisdom and happiness of the highest sort requires both, since *phronesis* is more basic and so is indispensable to *sophia*. This is an insight that turns out to be key for Martin Heidegger, and it is connected to his study of Aristotle. On the way to *Being and Time*, Heidegger lectured repeatedly on Aristotle while at the University of Marburg. In a course on Plato's *Sophist*, Heidegger devotes a large portion of his lectures to book six of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, paying special attention to *phronesis*.<sup>21</sup> By the time of *Being and Time*, he writes that "knowing the world" (which Heidegger

<sup>18</sup>Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 11.169.

<sup>19</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1122a 25–26. I am using the translation (by W. D. Ross, revised by J. O. Urmson) found in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>20</sup>John Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 72.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), chap. 1.

equates with the “knowing” of the natural sciences) is a “founded mode” of our relation to the world.<sup>22</sup> In other words, we first encounter the world in the practical way of “living in it” and *then* we theorize about the world. *Phronesis* provides us with the “for which” and “the how.” While Heidegger never uses the term *phronesis*, one can find this idea in his uses of *Umsicht* (circumspection), *Verstehen* (understanding), *Entschlossenheit* (resoluteness), and *Gewissen* (conscience).<sup>23</sup> So *phronesis* is central to the most basic form of human existence, which means that *theoria* is dependent upon it. We find a similar idea in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*: namely, that our everyday, practical embodiment in the world is the basis for any scientific or philosophical claims.

There is a second complication. Cooper speaks of “philosophy as two ways of life” in regard to Aristotle. On the one hand, it is clear that the happiest life for Aristotle is the contemplative one. Of course, Cooper makes the point that I made earlier, namely that even contemplatives are engaging in the practical virtues in their daily lives. But then he goes on to say that “this life [the contemplative life] also includes the best and most end-like virtues, the virtues of theoretical wisdom and understanding, together with the active employment of these virtues on the highest and best objects of knowledge, the divine entities that are the first principles of all reality.”<sup>24</sup> So that is one way of life that suits the philosopher: the life of contemplation. In contrast, the second kind of philosopher is actively engaged in human affairs. For Aristotle, this person may be involved in politics or may be simply an ordinary person. What distinguishes these folks is that (again, to cite Cooper) “their philosophy consists in practical understanding and knowing, and the proper exercise of that philosophical knowledge is in the discriminating evaluative thinking that goes into and informs each and every virtuous action making up their fully virtuous lives.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, one can do philosophy by engaging in daily affairs in a philosophically thoughtful way, even though there may well be some contemplation in this philosophical way of life too.<sup>26</sup> As we will see moving forward, it may well be the case that only by integrating both of these dimensions to philosophy can Christian philosophy be fully *Christian*.

#### *APR and CPR on Thaumazein*

So far, we have talked about *thaumazein* and the differences between practical and theoretical philosophy. In this section, I want to consider how

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<sup>22</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), ¶13.

<sup>23</sup>For more on this point, see Robert Bernasconi’s discussion in “Heidegger’s Destruction of *Phronesis*,” in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 29 (1989), 127–147.

<sup>24</sup>Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*, 138.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>26</sup>Aristotle makes it clear that the statesman also engages in *theoria*. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

APR and CPR relate to *thaumazein*; in the next section, I will consider how they relate to practical and theoretical philosophy.

Earlier, we noted that philosophy begins in awe or wonder. As such, it generates—at least for Socrates—*aporia*. At one point, Meno accuses Socrates of being like a stingray by perplexing his interlocutors. Socrates responds by saying: “It isn’t that, knowing the answers myself, I perplex other people. The truth is rather that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself. So it is with virtue now. I don’t know what it is.”<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, Socrates describes himself precisely in terms of perplexity: he says, “I am utterly disturbing [*atopos*] and I create only perplexity [*aporia*].”<sup>28</sup> To be *atopos* is literally to be “out of place.” And this is what Socrates is in Athens: he is “strange, extravagant, absurd, unclassifiable, and disconcerting” (to cite Hadot).<sup>29</sup> Yet achieving this state of being *atopos* and having a sense of *aporia* is part of the very *point* of the dialogues. It is not the *only* point—for one wants to actually reach knowledge—but it is not simply accidental either.

What I am suggesting here is that philosophy is a way of life that works by way of an *askêsis* that leads us *both* to knowledge and to *aporia*. *Aporia* is central to the idea of Socratic ignorance. If we assume that we already know something, it is impossible to learn it: for we already know. In contrast, to ask is to admit that one does not know. As Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it, “discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question. . . . To ask a question means to bring into the open.”<sup>30</sup> So no new knowledge is possible if we insist that we already know. And *learning* to see our blind spots is actually quite difficult: it is part of the *askêsis* of knowing and questioning ourselves, and it involves a kind of dying to self.

Of course, it is not as if philosophy—or any other kind of thinking, for that matter—simply leads us onward and upward to ever more knowledge. Here we need to be quite clear about what this *aporia* really is. The Greek word *poros* means “a way,” either literally or figuratively. With the addition of the alpha privative, it means simply “without a way.” In other words, to reach a point of *aporia* is to be at a point where it seems like one can go no further. This can be worked out in two different ways. One is simply that we *cannot go any further*. Christian philosophers may not always agree as to exactly where this point lies, but the nature of God and the fact that we are created, finite beings mean that there are such limits in talking about God. Or to put this problem in a more general way: we

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<sup>27</sup>Plato, *Meno* 80c.

<sup>28</sup>*Theaetetus* 149a. This is Hadot’s translation. For comparison, John McDowell translates this as: “What they do say is that I’m very odd, and that I make people feel difficulties.” Cornford translates it as: “the ignorant world describes me in other terms as an eccentric person who reduces people to hopeless perplexity.”

<sup>29</sup>Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 158.

<sup>30</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev ed., trans Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), 363.

always recognize—or at least we do if we are paying attention—that our attempts to answer questions are imperfect and incomplete. The more we understand the issue, the more we come to see our limitations.

What is at issue here is the possibility of “getting things right.” Richard Rorty infamously said that we should abandon the project of “getting things right,” but I think most analytic and continental philosophers agree that we cannot and ought not to give up on this project. Even Nietzsche does not give up on this project. Although he is often cited as some sort of “relativistic perspectivist,” this is a significant misunderstanding. While Nietzsche realizes that we all have hermeneutical lenses, he thinks that some perspectives are actually *truer* than others (precisely in terms of “getting things right”). Nietzsche can correctly be said to have given up seeking for the view from nowhere, but I take it that most philosophers have given that project up by now. As Merold Westphal points out, “we are all postmoderns now.”<sup>31</sup> I could work this out in various ways, but let me limit myself to the notion of “violence.” Emmanuel Levinas, for instance, worries that our efforts to do justice to the Other—whether human or divine—are inadequate. To put this as simply as possible: Levinas believes that, despite our best efforts to understand the Other aright, we do violence to the Other by reducing her to categories of our own making. For Levinas, this is a general concern, but let me give a specific example of what Levinas is worried about—namely, what I am doing right now in this paper. I am trying to speak meaningfully of APR and CPR, but my efforts (even with appropriate qualifications) are inevitably going to fall short. For neither is a monolithic whole, and so even talking about them as “tendencies” or “general ways of operating” is still problematic. But I don’t know how else to present this paper about general tendencies in APR and CPR without doing a certain kind of violence to each.

This concern for doing violence to the Other is central to much of contemporary CPR, and for good reason. For CPR, as it currently stands, has been deeply shaped by the critique of onto-theology. What is onto-theology? Succinctly put, it is a form of metaphysics that allows God to be possible only according to the conceptual claims of philosophical discourse. The god of onto-theology is a philosophical creation akin to the *causa sui*, the *ens realissimum*, or “the god of the philosophers.” Heidegger puts this as follows: “metaphysics is theology, a statement about God, because the deity enters into philosophy.”<sup>32</sup> But one might ask: what’s wrong with that? The problem is that (again to cite Heidegger) “the deity [as *causa sui*] can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how

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<sup>31</sup>Merold Westphal, “Must Phenomenology and Theology Make Two? A Response to Trakakis and Simmons,” *Heythrop Journal* 55 (2014), 711. This is Westphal’s reworking of Robert Brandom’s claim that “we are all Gadamerians now.”

<sup>32</sup>Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics,” in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 55.

the deity enters into it."<sup>33</sup> The result is that the "god" of onto-theology is no more than an idol, a creation of human thought used for our own purposes. Heidegger points out that "before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god."<sup>34</sup>

Assuming one believes that onto-theology really is a problem—which is a typical belief among practitioners of CPR—one can proceed in different ways. Jean-Luc Marion clearly thinks it is and employs at least three strategies to escape. First, he affirms Nietzsche's death of god, arguing that the god who dies for Nietzsche is actually "the god of the philosophers" and *not* "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Second, drawing on Christian apophatic traditions (which emphasize what we *cannot* say about God), he suggests that we think of God as "beyond being."<sup>35</sup> Third, he describes Christ as the "saturated phenomenon," whose appearance to us is like that in Luke 9:29 in which Peter, James, and John see Christ in his glory and are overwhelmed. A somewhat different strategy can be found in Merold Westphal, who claims that the difference is not so much about whether we can say anything about God but one of *how* one says it. He claims that onto-theology "does not discredit theistic discourse as such. . . . It only discredits certain forms that discourse can/has take(n)."<sup>36</sup> I believe that Westphal is right on this matter.

But this raises a question: are practitioners of CPR really more attuned to violence done, say, to the idea of God than are practitioners of APR? Here's *one* answer to this question. In his book *Does God's Existence Need Proof?* Richard Messer claims that Richard Swinburne's conception of God "is the dominant conception of God in traditional philosophy of religion." Indeed, he goes on to say that this conception "is one which could be found with few variations in almost any introductory text in the philosophy of religion written in the recent Anglo-American academic environment."<sup>37</sup> Messer claims that this conception includes such aspects that (1) God is definable; (2) God is an object; and (3) God is comprehensible. For this first point, he cites Swinburne as saying that God is "something like a 'person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who is eternal, free, able to do anything, knows everything, is perfectly good, is the proper object of human worship and obedience, the creator and sustainer of the universe.'"<sup>38</sup> For the second point, he cites Swinburne as saying that "God is something of which properties are true, which causally interacts with other recognizable observable objects . . . and therefore on any natural meaning of 'object,'

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>36</sup>Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 22.

<sup>37</sup>Richard Messer, *Does God's Existence Need Proof?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 18.

<sup>38</sup>Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1.

God is an object."<sup>39</sup> As to the third point, Messer does not cite Swinburne specifically to say that God is comprehensible, but thinks that this point in Swinburne is clear enough. It is important to note that Messer is not a practitioner of CPR but is instead a follower of D. Z. Phillips, a follower of Wittgenstein. In opposition to this conception of God, Messer argues that God is inexpressible, is not a being, and is not an object. Although Messer does not use this language, the charge is essentially that Swinburne puts forth a conception of God that sounds very onto-theological. It is also a conception that Messer thinks is closely connected to proofs for God's existence. Nick Trakakis explicitly picks up on this critique and, following Messer, argues that (1) God is wholly other; (2) God is not a being; and (3) God is "a concrete, not abstract, reality."<sup>40</sup> In describing God in this fashion, Trakakis is explicitly following John D. Caputo, who likewise (as we will see shortly) thinks there is no place for proofs for God's existence.<sup>41</sup>

Assuming that Messer gets Swinburne right,<sup>42</sup> to what extent is Messer's claim that Swinburne's view of God is the predominant view in APR *true*? Here things get complicated. For we can probably say that there are practitioners of APR who have a view like or similar to that of Swinburne. However, APR is simply too varied to conclude that Swinburne's view is true of all of APR or even paradigmatic for APR. Moreover, even these designations used by Trakakis are not completely clear on their own. I assume that practitioners of APR and CPR can agree that God is not a being in the sense that humans are beings. In other words, even if we can say that God is some sort of *being*, it is surely clear that God's "beingness" is quite significantly different from the "beingness" of other beings. Yet, if God is really *wholly* other, then one wonders what can be said of God at all.

Let me leave this question at this point and move to what I think is at stake here. Wherever one stands on what can be said of God, it has much to do with the extent to which philosophy *remains* connected to *thaumazein*, as opposed to wonder simply disappearing. Aristotle claims that, while *theoria* begins with awe, it "must end in something which is the opposite of our original inquiries."<sup>43</sup> So the goal is to do away with *thaumazein* and replace it with *theoria*. We no longer wonder once we are able to explain phenomena in terms of first principles and highest causes, since to comprehend something's *archē* and to possess its *aitia* is to be able to explain it. To what extent philosophers can know *anything* in this way

<sup>39</sup>Messer, *Does God's Existence Need Proof?*, 21n54.

<sup>40</sup>Nick Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2008), 63–65.

<sup>41</sup>I am not interested in taking a stand one way or the other on this matter. In other words, Messer could be right about Swinburne and yet, if Westphal is right about onto-theology, the apologetic enterprise might be misguided, but not necessarily because it affirms false claims about God.

<sup>42</sup>I am assuming here that Messer's read of Swinburne is correct and that many practitioners of APR would likewise agree. Whether his read may be too narrow or in some other way problematic is a question I set to the side.

<sup>43</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983a.

is certainly up for debate. But, clearly, Christian philosophers cannot and should not claim to possess such absolute knowledge *about God*. In Rom. 11:33–36, Paul writes:

O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.

Of course, merely quoting this piece of Scripture hardly solves anything. For we can agree that God cannot be fully known and still disagree (quite strongly) as to how just *how* far our knowledge of God actually goes. After all, the Christian tradition has hardly been unified over the past two millennia on this point.

In *The New Phenomenology*, J. Aaron Simmons and Bruce Ellis Benson speak of two tendencies, *kataphatic* excess and *apophatic* excess. On the one hand, practitioners of CPR are sometimes (maybe often—I leave this question open) too deflationary about what can be said of God. The worry here is that we become so obsessed with the limits of human reason, the fact that we are historically and culturally situated, and the overwhelming nature of God that we reduce discourse about God to the barest minimum. With this worry in mind, we proclaim that God cannot be properly known by human beings and thus we must say very little about God. This is the tendency of the apophatic tradition in theology and philosophy. On the other hand, practitioners of APR sometimes (maybe often—again, I leave this open) claim more about God than can rightly be maintained given human finitude and divine infinitude and, more important, the utter difference between creator and creation. Swinburne, again, is probably an example of this trend. We can become very confident in the powers of human reason, which leads to a strong kataphatic tradition that is *overly* confident about the ability of God-talk to map onto who God truly is. This latter tendency is often correlated with modernity, which generally exalts the powers of human reason (despite Kant’s project of *Kritik*); the former tendency is often correlated with postmodernity, which tends to see the modern project (assuming one can even speak in such a way) as both hubristic and a failure. Either way, though, there is room for arrogance both in claiming too much about God and also in claiming that “those other people” are claiming too much. We might call these tendencies, respectively, “inflationary arrogance” and “deflationary arrogance.” As it turns out, arrogance is an equal opportunity employer.

We could lament this situation, or we could see it for the blessing that it really is. If I am correct that APR and CPR represent tendencies toward inflation and deflation, respectively, then they can actually be seen as

complementary and part of the two-fold task of philosophy. It is certainly important for philosophers to make claims about God, but it is equally important for philosophers to challenge those claims. For lack of better terminology, we might say that we need both “constructive” and “critical” philosophy. Both have their value; both are dangerous if left unchecked by the other. The first can end up creating cults; the second can bring about a dangerous skepticism. Perhaps it goes without saying that, if you tend toward being a constructor, you will think that critical philosophers are particularly dangerous. But those who tend toward critical philosophy will think that those engaging exclusively in constructive philosophy are likewise dangerous.

#### *APR and CPR on the Two-fold Task*

For reasons of simplicity and clarity, I have put my comments on how one’s take on *thaumazein* affects one’s philosophy in the previous section. (Just to be clear, one does not have to know that “one has a take on *thaumazein*” in order to have one.) Here I want to address the two-fold task of philosophy in regard to Aristotle’s two ways of philosophical life—the contemplative and the active. Let me begin with the second of these ways of life: the life of the active philosopher.

In 1973, over a decade before Plantinga published his “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” Westphal published an essay aimed at giving advice specifically to Christian philosophers of religion. Obviously, Westphal could not have read Plantinga’s essay; I don’t know if Plantinga had read Westphal’s essay when he published his own. In any case, Westphal’s essay has not received nearly the attention that it deserves. It is titled (and this is quite a mouthful) “Prolegomena to any Future Philosophy of Religion which will be able to Come Forth as Prophecy.” There he speculates (it was 1973, of course) that philosophy of religion should become “prophetic” in nature, by which he means it should be “*personal, untimely, political, and eschatological*.”<sup>44</sup> By eschatological, he means that it should point to the future. By political, he means that it should not be afraid to confront political structures. By untimely, he means the following: “Prophetic speech is conspicuously out of step with the spirit of the times. It is always minority speech.” By personal, he means that it is *not* like scientific discourse, for “it comes in the mode of direct address.”<sup>45</sup> I think we can say that CPR is often written in these ways. Certainly Westphal’s own work takes this form.

This commitment to praxis would mean that subjectivity is essential to philosophical discourse. That would be the *personal* quality that Westphal mentions. For reasons of space, I will consider this personal aspect and how it connects to the untimely aspect, leaving the other two for another

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<sup>44</sup>Merold Westphal, “Prolegomena to any Future Philosophy of Religion which will be able to Come Forth as Prophecy,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4 (1973), 141.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 144, 141.



occasion. So to what extent does CPR exhibit these personal and untimely qualities? There are different places where one could begin to mount such a case. One could start with Kierkegaard. Whatever else Kierkegaard's writings are, they are clearly personal in the sense of being *edifying*. Kierkegaard actually has a text titled *Edifying (or Upbuilding) Discourses*, but his entire corpus is really about edification. He writes on love, religious belief, sin, character development, and other phenomena that get right to the heart of daily human existence. Kierkegaard is very clear that he wants the reader to be changed by his texts. He does not simply want a change of mind, but a change of heart and a change in one's *action*. It is not insignificant that he believes the classic proofs for God's existence do not lead to belief in God and instead inspire doubt. His work is also *untimely*. One can point to the fact that he was not all that well received in his lifetime and, even today, he still is somewhat of an "outsider" in philosophy in the sense that many philosophers do not know quite what to make of him.<sup>46</sup> His "existential" argument for belief in God is highly convincing to some, but perplexing to others.

We could make the same kind of case with Nietzsche. Although Nietzsche is usually read as an atheist, I have argued elsewhere that he is a kind of Dionysian theist. In any case, Nietzsche is also an edifying philosopher. Perhaps his works are not as "upbuilding" as those of Kierkegaard, but they are certainly life-changing. As to his work being untimely, I think this is so obvious as to need no further clarification. While Nietzsche may have won a spot in the standard ethical theory course, his arguments still come across to many as, one might say, unusual. And I think one could—*mutatis mutandis*—make a similar case for the likes of Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, Marion, and Jean-Louis Chrétien. Their writing is, in my estimation, moving and personal, even when it is sometimes written in a very difficult fashion. Further, having taught texts by these authors for over twenty years, I have watched as students have been transformed not just in their minds but in their behavior by reading them. Even if one ultimately comes to disagree with, say, Levinas, it is hard to have gone through the experience of reading his texts without becoming more concerned for the Other. And, without going into detail here, I think it would not be difficult to make the case that each has been "untimely" in significant ways. The appearance of *Being and Time* came as a shock to the way philosophy was then being done in Germany. Philosophers in France did not know what to make of Levinas. Derrida never received the honor of teaching at the Sorbonne (though he did teach at the still quite prestigious École Normale Supérieure) and his reception in the English-speaking world has been primarily in departments other than philosophy. Marion is probably the leading philosopher in France today, but his Christian commitment is in stark contrast to the general atheistic cultural atmosphere in France. And

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<sup>46</sup>I borrow this notion of "outsider" from Diogenes Allen's book *Three Outsiders: Pascal, Kierkegaard, Simone Weil* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1983).

Chrétien, who became a Christian *after* taking up his post at the Sorbonne, writes in a way that is hard to classify as offering a “philosophical argument.”

This idea that philosophy of religion should be prophetic is taken up by Caputo, who tells us that “the poetics of the Kingdom is prophetic—a diction of contradiction and interdiction—that ‘calls for’ (*prophetein*) the rule of God, calls for things to happen in God’s way, not the world’s.”<sup>47</sup> I have no idea if Caputo had read Merold’s essay and said “by golly, that’s it” (or, more likely, “*oui, oui, amen*”). I think it is safe to say that Caputo understands philosophy as a way of life. But I think it is instructive to see what this means for him and his vision of CPR.

The talk about God and religion in contemporary continental philosophy bears almost no resemblance to what passes for traditional “philosophy of religion.” The latter has typically concerned itself with offering proofs for the immortality of the soul and for the existence of God, and with identifying and analyzing the divine attributes. This tradition, which goes back to the scholastic debates of the high middle ages, is largely perpetuated today in the works of contemporary Anglo-American philosophers, who offer the old wine of metaphysical theology in the new bottles of analytic philosophy. Richard Swinburne alone can fill a blackboard with the symbolic logic of his proofs. All over Anglo-America, logicians and epistemologists, from the Dutch Reformed to the Roman Catholic confessions, hasten to stretch a net of argumentation under faith in the divine being, lest the leap of faith end up falling to the floor in a great crash.<sup>48</sup>

The reference to Swinburne is clear enough. The mention of the Dutch Reformed could refer to a number of people, though Alvin Plantinga is a probable candidate. As to “the Roman Catholic confessions,” it’s really hard to know exactly who is being included. However, I think we can safely say that APR has put considerably more emphasis on arguments for God’s existence than has CPR. One reason for this is that continental philosophy in general has been less concerned about certainty and proof than has analytic philosophy. A good example of what I mean is Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*. Instead of asking *whether* we can know (or how can we know that we know?), Gadamer simply assumes that we can know and then asks: *how does this take place?* Both are epistemological concerns, but the emphasis is different. Further, it’s true that APR has been concerned with considering the attributes of God, but I think one can argue that Marion is doing something like this in *God without Being* (albeit in a rather modest way) and that Jean-Louis Chrétien considers the nature of God, for instance by way of the call and response.

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<sup>47</sup>John D. Caputo, “The Poetics of the Impossible and the Kingdom of God,” in *Rethinking Philosophy of Religion: Approaches from Continental Philosophy*, ed. Philip Goodchild (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 45.

<sup>48</sup>John D. Caputo, “Introduction: Who Comes After the God of Metaphysics?,” in *The Religious*, ed. John D. Caputo (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 2–3.

Before responding any further to Caputo, let us consider what he thinks differentiates CPR from APR.

We on the continental side of this divide have sworn off that sort of thing and taken our stand with the equally traditional objection to the ontotheological tradition, voiced in a prophetic counter-tradition that stretches from Paul to Pascal and Luther, and from Kierkegaard to the present. . . . The objectifying tendencies, the preoccupation with cognitive certainty, the confusion of the religious life with assenting to certain propositions, prove to be almost completely irrelevant to anyone with the least experience of religious matters, which beg to be treated differently and on their own terms. . . . The God of the traditional philosophy of religion is a philosopher's God explicating a philosopher's faith, to be found, if anywhere, only on the pages of philosophy journals, not in the hearts of believers or the practice of faith.<sup>49</sup>

I think these passages can be explicated by focusing on three aspects:

The first is one that I dealt with in the previous section on *thaumazein*: namely, "objectifying tendencies" and "cognitive certainty." I take it that most philosophers have sworn off of the foundationalist project (or whatever one would like to call it), so apodictic certainty is off the table for both APR and CPR. Where exactly one lands after giving up absolute certainty is going to be a matter of disagreement. I do not intend to adjudicate this debate here, but I will note that there is nothing like a consensus among practitioners of APR or CPR on this matter. The same goes with objectifying tendencies: how cut and dried we think phenomena are—how well they can be reduced to logical propositions in the early Wittgensteinian sense—is again going to be a matter of some disagreement among practitioners of *both* APR and CPR. It is not clear to me that simply because one uses numbered propositions or symbolic logic that one has thereby objectified God.

The second point—that the God found "in the hearts of believers" is not the God found in the pages of philosophy journals—is less easy to dispatch. Caputo is clearly trading on the distinction between the "god of the philosophers" and "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"—or the God of *faith*. But what really is the charge here? Certainly it can't simply be that practitioners of APR write journal articles and practitioners of CPR do not. Instead, I think it has to be that the God of CPR is concrete and found "in the hearts of believers," whereas the God of APR is not. But is this really true? Here the real issue is whether practitioners of APR are speaking to believers or writing for academic professionals. As for CPR, it is not very difficult to make the case that practitioners of CPR tend to write in ways—and on topics—that are seen by readers as having a purchase on their personal lives. Earlier, we saw that Nussbaum points out that the therapeutic strategies of the Hellenistic philosophers are indeed philosophical arguments which have a certain sort of rigor. If we take Kierkegaard's existential argument for the existence of God and the truth

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

of Christianity, many people think that it has a certain kind of force. Depending on what one thinks of the value of the traditional proofs for God, one might find Kierkegaard's argument much more convincing. But one does so in an existential way that is certainly *rational* (I don't want to say it is something other than "reason" at work here), but rational not in the sense of *theoria* but of *phronesis*. It appeals to us in the sense of practical wisdom as in "you'd be a fool not to believe in God." Actually, this is not too far from the argument that Pascal makes, but I'll leave that point aside. In such a case, no small part of that convincing nature would be that it is a person-related argument in that it has a personal rather than merely theoretical force.<sup>50</sup>

Yet here we come to a significant problem. I cannot speak for practitioners of APR, but presumably they find the kinds of arguments that Caputo says that CPR has "sworn off" significant. As it turns out, in many cases practitioners of APR are writing for fellow academics who are also believers. Of course, the extent to which their own belief is based on those kinds of arguments is somewhat more difficult to discern. Once, when a student was visiting my class, I made a joke about Billy Graham not having used the ontological argument in his crusades. She immediately replied that a friend of hers had become a Christian precisely because of the ontological argument. I responded: "well, then you have a really weird friend, for most people do not become Christians by reading the ontological argument." I may simply be wrong here, of course. Perhaps there are far more people whose faith is based on the classic arguments than I imagine. But, if that is the case, then Caputo is not quite correct, which opens us the possibility that perhaps the classic arguments, the objections to evil, and the analysis of the divine attributes can be *therapeutic* after all. Whether they serve to *bring* people to the faith is something I will leave as an open question. But perhaps they have very significant therapeutic effects for those who are already believers and find that their faith is strengthened. Or perhaps we might better say that, for many in APR, their belief would be *weakened* if they found the classic arguments of no value, for instance.<sup>51</sup> Of course, these therapeutic effects may be limited to some degree. Plantinga notes that "neither a Free Will Defense nor a Free Will Theodicy is designed to be of much help or comfort to one suffering from such a storm in the soul" but then concludes that "neither is intended for that purpose."<sup>52</sup>

Yet one can come at this from another angle. While there are philosophers who have been particularly successful at speaking personally and to a broad audience (Cornel West comes to mind), it is not as if "serious" analytic philosophers cannot speak in a personal and therapeutic ways.

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<sup>50</sup>For a more extended discussion of this subject, see J. Aaron Simmons and Bruce Ellis Benson, *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), chap. 7.

<sup>51</sup>I am indebted to Tom Flint for this point.

<sup>52</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 26.

Let me provide a couple of examples. Looking through one of the “standard anthologies” on philosophy of religion (the ones that Messer takes to be thoroughly Swinburnean), one finds a chapter on “Faith, Hope, and Doubt” by Jay Wood and another on “Prayer” by Charles Taliaferro. I could cite more chapters like these, but I think these are enough evidence that APR is not necessarily about some “abstract God.”<sup>53</sup> Or, for another example, consider what Plantinga says in *Warranted Christian Belief*: he speaks of the “testimonial model,” in which faith is the result of the Holy Spirit at work in believers’ hearts. He specifically contrasts the “belief” of the demons (James 2:19) with that of Christian believers. Plantinga points out that the difference between a demon and a believer is one’s *affections*. It is not insignificant that he also cites Luther as being on his side.<sup>54</sup> I could go on, but I think the point is clear enough.

And that leads me to my conclusion. Given the trajectory of my remarks about the two ways of being a philosopher in Aristotle, perhaps these two ways themselves need to be examined more closely. We have seen that Aristotle distinguishes between two ways of being a philosopher. One way is more contemplative. The contemplative philosopher is particularly concerned with the intellectual virtues and with *theoria*. Such a philosopher is inclined, on Aristotle’s view, to work on questions of physics, logic, and what we today call epistemology and metaphysics. Not surprisingly, such work tends to be *theoretical*. This is true for Aristotle’s work in these areas and has been, at least on the whole, true for the tradition of western philosophy. The other way of doing philosophy tends much more toward matters of practice. But we have already seen that the interpenetration of *theoria* with *phronesis* makes any simple distinction here untenable. Perhaps, then, these two ways of being a philosopher could actually be borne out *in the same person*. That is not to say that some philosophers are going to be more like the classic contemplatives and others are going to be active—perhaps even “activists”—but there need be no clear division between them. If that is the case, the worst that we can say about the distinction between APR and CPR is that it represents a different division of labor. The one is not more important than the other (even if each “side” tends to think this way regarding itself). But that is the worst-case scenario. A better vision would be that we are engaged in a common project to which we are all contributors in different ways. And, if I’m right about APR and CPR, this engagement is not only important to the philosophical way of life but to Christian identity and calling.

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<sup>53</sup>Chad Meister and Paul Copan, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>54</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), chap. 9.