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# *Faith, Philosophy and the Elemental*

Richard J. Colledge

In recent popular debate concerning the relationship between religion and contemporary philosophy and the natural sciences, two pervasive tendencies can be identified, these being what might be called 'incompatibilist' and 'assimilationist' approaches.<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I will maintain that neither of these is adequate to the task of seriously thinking through the relationship between rational-empirical and religious interpretations of the world.<sup>2</sup> But further, drawing heavily on the work of Adriaan Peperzak, I will maintain that the crucial shortcoming of both approaches is that they fail to recognise the essentially *derivative* nature of both kinds of discourse, and their rootedness in something much more primal and basic; if also, by definition, something vastly more difficult to elaborate.

## **Beyond Polarisation and Synthesis: Rethinking the Contemporary Debate**

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to map the terrain of much of the contemporary debate. The first ('incompatibilist') approach assumes a bipolar view of the relationship according to which a *choice* essentially needs to be made to affirm either reason or faith as fundamental. Accordingly, one must affirm either the primordially of contemporary rationality and scientific empiricism over and above religious truth claims; or alternatively, to adopt a position of fundamental faithfulness to a religious orthodoxy whilst regarding philosophical and scientific methodologies and conclusions with caution or even suspicion.

There are, of course, various shades of insistence with each position. In the case of rationalist incompatibilism, one might distinguish between more and less exclusivist tendencies. On one hand, there are those (e.g., de Botton 2012, Solomon 2006) who allow religious modes of discourse some level of legitimacy as aesthetic or ethical ways of speaking that can inspire us to act in positive ways or give us a sense of life meaning, but whose truth claims (in any realist sense) are to be largely (if usually politely) rejected. On the other hand, there are the advocates of a strongly 'eliminativist' bent (e.g., Grayling 2013, Onfray 2005) and an array of other anti-religion campaigners with scientific or social-scientific credentials. For such thinkers, religious, superstitious and supernaturalist approaches are inimical to rational and even civilized thought, so much so that even

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the classificatory terms introduced in this first section are used descriptively with reference to the content matter of this essay. As such, they are not to be understood with reference to their usage in other familiar philosophical debates (e.g., incompatibilism with reference to the metaphysics of human freedom, or eliminativism with reference to physicalist accounts of mind).

<sup>2</sup> Space constraints preclude a more expansive typology of worldviews that have been lumped together here under the headings of "rational-empirical" approaches (by which I include both scientific and rational philosophical outlooks in their myriad varieties) and "religious" interpretations (in their equally diverse manifestations). However, given the contentions of the essay that seeks to challenge at least one important aspect by which these two approaches are so commonly opposed, little is lost in initially granting such a broad-brush (if, in itself inadequate) characterisation.

apparently 'reasonable' versions of religious thought need to unmasked and similarly discarded as the artefacts of pre-scientific barbarism that they nonetheless remain.

Meanwhile, religiously-orientated incompatibilism remains alive and well. Admittedly, strong eliminativism is comparatively rare within contemporary intellectual debate, if by that is meant the rejection of rationality out of hand when it comes to matters of faith, including all exercises in theology and apologetics that look to make a systematic case for religious belief. Absolutist disjunctions between Athens and Jerusalem that would regard reasoned accounts of faith as impious, illegitimate and (since they commit the category error of attempting to understand eternal things with finite concepts) impossible, are now quite rare. On the other hand, there are a large range of approaches that fit into what C. Stephen Evans (2008) has called "responsible fideism", as opposed to "irrational fideism" of which Evans gives the example of Shestov (1966). In insisting on the primacy of faith over reason, such approaches paradoxically provide serious reasoned justifications for this very primacy by which faith transcends reason. In doing so, they look *not* to rationally justify faith-based truth claims (which can only ever be recognised in faith itself), but rather to demonstrate *why* reason is unable to satisfactorily deal with religious problems and truths, and why faith alone can do so. The Reformed Epistemology school provides an interesting variation of this approach in arguing for a conception of faith as "properly basic" and not in need of being inferred from anything more fundamental (e.g., Plantinga and Wolterstorff 1991).

The second diverse group of approaches to negotiating the faith-reason divide – the assimilationist tendency – are those that look to argue not for the primacy of one over the other, but rather to affirm the equiprimordiality and/or complementarity (if not the complete unity) of both. Many versions to this assimilationist strategy can be identified. Putting to one side myriad efforts to unite pagan gnostic spiritualities with science of dubious quality, the focus here is on approaches that look to meld naturalism and religious thought, bringing faith and reason together in a higher synthesis by which the contingencies of both – understood as that which creates the *illusion* of polarisation – fall away, thus revealing a single vision of reality. The Process Theology of scholars such as David Ray Griffin (2004) and John Cobb (2007) is an example of this approach. (Such syntheses are to be distinguished from Hegel's *Aufhebung*, Spinoza's "true knowledge", and other such approaches in which religion emerges as the poorer cousin, one step below absolute the knowing of philosophical science.) A second approach, developed most famously by Stephen J. Gould (1999), is the strategy of affirming both science and religion as independent "non-overlapping domains" or authoritative sources dealing with separate but equally important areas of human knowledge: on one hand the facts, and on the other hand meaning, value and purpose. Third, there are those who make use of philosophically sophisticated forms of argumentation, and/or the findings of recent scientific research, to build a case for the common trajectory of philosophy, science and religious traditions. Among this group, one might count the work of philosophical apologists such as William Lane Craig (2008) and Richard Swinburne (1993), and scientist/theologians such as John Polkinghorne (1993). Somewhat like the method of

Aquinas, this approach claims that there is a fundamental complementarity between reason and revelation, even if one cannot always simply be derived from the other.

These are, of course, very broad brushstrokes, but I make them in order to demonstrate a striking point about much of the current debate. It is this. What lies so often unremarked upon is the *assumption* that rationality (however configured) and/or religious belief (however configured) are – either singularly or together – “properly basic” (to borrow Plantinga and Wolterstorff’s term). This is an assumption that cuts right across a vast range of theories, from evangelical theism to evangelical atheism. But this is not an assumption that need go unchallenged. Might it not be that the community between rationality and religious faith has roots that go deeper than either of them alone?

In drawing on the work of Adriaan Peperzak and a series of other thinkers in the field, this paper argues not so much for the unity (of whatever kind) between faith and reason, but rather for their rootedness in a common pre-conceptual soil from which both spring. Rather than focusing on teleological attempts to do justice to both via synthesising them, I suggest that much more might be gained by allowing them to retain their distinctiveness even while developing an *archaeological* account of their common source in *pre-rational* and *pre-religious* soil. Of course, given this common source, elements of convergence among the fruits of each plant should come as no surprise, for the offspring carries a shared ancestry. But the change of focus from teleology to archaeology is nonetheless hugely significant, since affirmation of the desire for the unity of human knowing is no longer reliant on the demonstration of (often artificial) claims of culminative sameness.<sup>3</sup> As such, there is no need to, nor justification for, forcing faith and reason together in some kind of dubious epistemological hybrid in which one is almost inevitably made into a caricature of the other. Much better to allow each to maintain its distinctiveness even while being affirmed as an authentic expression of our common dwelling within the world.

### **Peperzak’s Existential Archaeology of Thought**

Over the course of the last decade and a half, Adriaan Peperzak has published a series of volumes in which a quite distinctive account emerges of what I will refer to here as an existential archaeology of thought; a meta-narrative concerning the origins of both rationality and religious thought.<sup>4</sup>

According to Peperzak, determinate religious belief (whether or not it follows a traditional creed) and rational reflection (regardless of its own structures and truth-claims) *both* need to be understood thoroughly in the context of their rootedness in the

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<sup>3</sup> Such claims are akin to pre-emptive notions about the ultimate sameness of all religions; claims that – as any careful analysis will show – are at best inconclusive, most likely misleading, and often just plain false.

<sup>4</sup> Peperzak generally takes philosophy as he representative discipline of modern rationality. However, it seems to me perfectly consistent to extend this (as I do in this essay) to include all forms of rational thought, including the contemporary empirical sciences.

human condition. Specifically, both are ways of thinking and reflecting that are responses to the experience of finding ourselves in a more or less meaningful universe. To be existentially rooted in this sense means that both presuppose a certain *confidence* in the essential *reliability* of things that justifies our strivings and our taking a stand on matters of significance (whatever that stand might be in each case). This underlying confidence is a *lived affirmation* that marks all intellectual stances on the world – from conservative religiosity to vociferous atheism; from detailed empirical observations of the world to sweeping theories of reality – each of which involve interpretations of the situation within which individuals and communities find themselves (2005, 74-75; 1999, 122). Peperzak goes as far as to see this elemental lived confidence as indicating a basic sense of “faith”, a fundamental “hope” and “trust” in the meaningful coherence of the universe (2003, 4, 10, 155; 2005, 75; 2013, 116). Accordingly, all human intellection is rooted within this basic existential dimension of human life within which questions of “decisive or ultimate meaning” are mediated “at least tentatively and in an embryonic, albeit half-unconscious form” (2005, 74). This is the “universal dimension, level or structure that can be found at the core of all forms or ways of life” (2005, 76), and thus all forms of reflection on the cosmos and the human place within it. It is out of this fundamental milieu that concrete theories of all kinds arise to give voice to this basic experience of the world.

This is a bold thesis, and one which very deliberately looks to undermine rival accounts of the primacy or rightness of determinate religious, philosophical or scientific thought. In taking on both sides of the polarisation between systematic expressions of religious and rational thought (in claiming to have seen beyond the pretensions of both, to a more basic originality), Peperzak has opened up two fierce fronts. In this, he is aware of potential objections from both sides.

First: the notion of primal ‘faith’ is a deliberate and devastating attack on the pretensions of philosophy to be an absolute and foundational discipline, and one on the basis of which other discourses are to be judged. For Peperzak, far from being a rival to faith, reason is in fact only possible on the basis of a prior “hidden faith” of its own (2005, 77). Reason is thus not basic: it is contingent upon, and derived from, deeper “pre-predicative and pre-propositional experience”; sources that are not themselves rational but are rather pre-rational, and even “affective” (2005, 75). To illustrate, Peperzak points to modern philosophy’s “indefatigable questioning and self-critical questioning”, something that he sees as betraying “a genuine desire of something greater than itself”, perhaps even to an intimation of “absolute transcendence”. After all, “from where does its passion for the truth come and what justifies its hope?” (2005, 81-82). In rejecting modern philosophical “autarchic” pretensions concerning its own primordality (philosophy as *kath auto; sui generis; causa sui*), Peperzak at times mocks modern philosophy’s illegitimate declaration of independence referring to it at one point as the “religion of [the] Enlightenment” (2005, 80).

Peperzak is keenly aware of the potential for rebuke from rationalistic forms of philosophy (and the natural sciences) that he has illegitimately read faith-based claims

back into logic and the natural world. One might, for example, affirm the obvious point that philosophers philosophise (and scientists conduct research) out of particular life contexts, but that it is part of the professional rigour of such disciplines that personal subjective contexts need to recede into the background as the thinker puts forward arguments that need to pass the test of logical validity ( and/or evidential plausibility). Peperzak need not deny that on one level this is obviously the case. Nonetheless, it seems equally obvious that if the last century of hermeneutical epistemology (and philosophy of science) have shown anything, it is that claims to complete objectivity, in which the philosopher (or scientist) effectively disappear from the thinking process, are unsustainable. Science proceeds on the basis of *hypotheses* which are very human constructions built largely within existing paradigms, and which can only be rigorously tested *after* they have been formulated. Philosophy similarly proceeds on the basis of traditions of thought and individual *intuitions* that are the basis of rationally constructed arguments, a process that largely becomes obvious only in cases of stubborn and fundamental disagreement.<sup>5</sup> Peperzak's case is drawn from the familiar conclusions of twentieth century hermeneutics (and, one might add, work in the philosophy of science by thinkers like Kuhn and Polanyi). He illustrates the alternative via a parody:

In order to separate their philosophy from their lives as they live them, philosophers must find a free-standing perspective outside their own worldly and historical existence. Only then can they form an objective and universally valid judgement about the universe, including their own functioning within it ... Thinking thus becomes the activity of an extra-existential, suprahistorical, superterrestrial thinker (2005, 77)

The reality, he reminds us, is obviously very different. It is true that significant philosophical progress is made when philosophers appropriate our shared inheritance in new ways, thereby opening new possibilities for others. But it is terribly naïve to accept the notion that new philosophical systems really are simply creations "founded upon indubitable evidence and crystalline logic". All philosophical contributions, even the great ones, "are rooted in some hidden faith, even when their authors are not aware of it" (2005, 77). Peperzak's nod in the direction of the mysterious and indeterminate life context (indeed, the social and individual psychology) of philosophical (and scientific) practitioners can be understood as naming something of this vast inchoate reservoir from which rational thinking of all kinds arises.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This is a matter on which I have written at length elsewhere. See Colledge 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Having said that, Peperzak does not help his cause, it seems to me, by his references to this fecund "existential" dimension of human life as "the *religious* dimension" (2005, 74; emphasis added). His justification for this "very broad definition of religion" is, to my reading, never sufficiently explained, for it is not clear why faith in this more elemental and existential sense needs to be associated with the religious *per se*, with the elemental religious dimension then having to be distinguished from "concrete (or 'positive') religions" (2005, 74). Terminological confusions aside, there is also a significant risk here of a telling asymmetry forming according to which an ambiguous priority is afforded *after all* to the religious over the rational, where no such slanting is necessary. In what follows, I abstain from using this terminology which seems to me both unnecessary and incurring significant risks of misunderstanding.

Second: While writing as an unmistakably Christian philosopher, Peperzak's view, it seems to me, should be understood as equally an assault upon determinate religious traditions insofar as they harbour their own foundationalist (literally *fundamentalist*) assumptions. This includes positions that insist on the originary primacy of concrete Christian theological truth claims (or those of any other tradition) as the starting point for all subsequent reflection. Far from being "properly basic", particular concrete religious traditions are themselves responses to, and only possible on the basis of, a more immediate indeterminate experiential faith which is thereby given determinate and systematic doctrinal formulation.

Peperzak recognises the grounds for protest from religious communities that he is at risk of reducing creedal faith to "existential categories that fit all human beings so well that religions in any normal sense of the word and the differences between religions no longer matter" (2005, 76). After all, to claim that concrete faith-claims arise out of a deeper experiential dimension, is to open the whole problem of the *contingency* of both one's affective experience of the cosmos *and* of the tradition's dogmatic interpretation of this basic human experience. Who is to say (and what possible criteria could one use to establish) *which* experience of the cosmos (and interpretation thereof) is the most adequate, worthy and faithful to the universe as it actually is? This is clearly a complex matter that goes to the heart of Peperzak's broadly hermeneutic conception of theology proper, a topic that lies well beyond the scope of this paper.

Nonetheless, Peperzak's approach would indeed appear to be at odds with Christian doctrinal foundationalism. In the Augustinian/ Anselmic tradition, *the* faith is both the starting point and the content from which, and in the service of which, rationality seeks to provide understanding: *fides quaerens intellectum*. Thus any method which inverts this order of priority – which would assess faith on the basis of rational reflection – is a critical distortion.<sup>7</sup> This conviction is widely attested across a range of Christian traditions, and is at the heart of the Reformed Epistemology movement (with its Calvinist roots) that has brought this view to the heart of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Unlike Peperzak, this variously articulated tradition of Christian fideism makes no differentiation between primal existentially-based "faith" and properly Christian doctrinal truth-claims. Only when the meaning of "faith" is stretched (or perhaps more accurately, changed) to take on an elemental existential rather than a dogmatic sense can faith seeking understanding be understood in the way Peperzak suggests.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Such staunchly incompatibilist thinking is echoed in a very different context by Leo Strauss in his famous address on Jerusalem and Athens: "According to the Bible, the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord; according to the Greek philosophers it is wonder. We are thus compelled from the very beginning to make a choice, to take a stand. Where then do we stand? Confronted by the incompatible claims of Jerusalem and Athens, we are open to both and willing to listen to each ... Yet since we say that we wish to hear first and then to act or to decide, we have already decided in favor of Athens against Jerusalem (Strauss, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> In saying as much, I admit that across his various works Peperzak is not especially consistent with his use of the terminology of "faith". A notable case in point is his 1999 text, *Reason in Faith* (the sub-title of which

In any case, against both angles of attack – from the rationalists and the religious traditionalists – Peperzak insists that his project is not interested in efforts to *reduce* either faith or reason to one another; nor to subjectivise them in any relativistic sense. His aims are much more modest. It is simply to insist on a common source for all concrete systematic thought as grounded in ordinary human experience. They are thus not relativised or undermined, so much as *contextually* affirmed.

### **Engaging Peperzak's Archeology of the Primal**

Peperzak's writings are deeply informed by, and interlaced with, references to the history of western philosophy and twentieth century phenomenology. His sources and interlocutors are many. Before moving on, I wish to touch very briefly on aspects of the work of four figures who provide helpful contexts for further exploring this idea of a primal faith from which emerges both rationality and religion.

A key source is Blaise Pascal, particularly those rich and oft quoted passages from the *Pensées* where he provides an account of the relationship between faith and reason. Of particular relevance here is Pascal's notion of the role of "faith" (knowledge of the heart) in providing the "first principles" by which reason can then operate:

The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things ... We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart, and it is in this last way that we know first principles; and reason, which has no part in it, tries in vain to impugn them ... For the knowledge of first principles, as space, time, motion, number, is as sure as any of those which we get from reasoning. And reason must trust these intuitions of the heart, and must base them on every argument ... And it is as useless and absurd for reason to demand from the heart proofs of her first principles, before admitting them, as it would be for the heart to demand from reason an intuition of all demonstrated propositions before accepting them. (Pascal, 1968, n. 277, 282)

While Pascal's reference to "intuitions of the heart" is clearly intended to denote conviction of the presence and love of God ("This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason" (n. 278)), this elemental awareness is not to be confused with a systematically elaborated theological conviction which must, by definition, involve the application of reason. The "first principles" that are revealed by the heart are sensed by an immediate intuition which transcends both the senses and rationality. Further, Pascal is clear that it is these intuitions that are "properly basic" (so to speak), and which indeed are the foundations of all reasoning. They are not deductively derived, but are grasped all at once, inspiring immediate conviction.

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is "On the Relevance of Christian Spirituality for Philosophy"), where faith is often used in a specific sense to mean adherence to the Christian tradition.



However, while Pascalian intuitions of the heart are clearly not to be understood as determinate Christian theological claims, one is nonetheless left with a sense that what he has in mind has a certain proper form (if not 'content') that bears the marks of the creator. If this is so, then there is a nascent suggestion here of some kind of universal pre-rational experiential core that is the basis for all concrete knowledge. If this is so, then a range of familiar problems from the debates of early modern epistemology are raised. Is this knowledge of the heart innate (needing perhaps only to be recognised) or does it need to be acquired? If the former, why is it not generally recognised? If the latter, how does it come to be known? More recent lines of questioning might proceed as follows. Are (radically) different life experiences likely to induce (radically) different kinds of knowledge? Does one need to be formed in a particular way of thinking and being (e.g., within a particular religious tradition; or indeed through study of mathematics, science or philosophy) in order for the eyes of the heart to be opened to those things?

These are real and difficult questions for interpretations that would posit a universal content for the primal ground of discursive thought. It is not clear, however, that Peperzak's primal faith is of this kind. As instructive as the Pascalian background is for understanding what Peperzak has in mind, it seems to me that the most helpful points of reference are more recent.

One such more recent interlocutor is Emmanuel Levinas, on whom Peperzak is, of course, a leading commentator. While Peperzak does not explicitly cite Levinas in this context, it is no accident, I would suggest, that it is Levinas himself who has provided one of the richest phenomenological descriptions of what Peperzak refers to as the "pre-predicative and pre-propositional" dimension of human life. According to Levinas, "the non-intentional consciousness" lies prior to, or perhaps beneath, the reflexivity of consciousness that establishes the self-aware and free ego with its possibility of contrivance and projection of status.<sup>9</sup> As such it stands before the other in utter vulnerability and openness:

[T]he non-intentional ... has no intentions or aims, and cannot avail itself of the protective mask of a character contemplating in the mirror of the world a reassured and self-positing portrait. It has no name, no situation, no status ... It has not yet been invested with any attributes or justified in any way (Levinas 1989, 81).

Importantly, far from framing this elemental state as an early developmental stage which rapidly recedes with the onset of self-consciousness, Levinas emphasises that the non-intentional "remains" (79) beneath the intentional overlay:

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting that Peperzak prefers the term "pre-intentional" (which is more suggestive of Merleau-Ponty and indeed Husserl) than it is of Levinas. To speak of the *pre-intentional* is to suggest a temporal orientation in relation to the intentional. The "non-intentional", on the other hand, is entirely *other* to intentionality, and it is perhaps for this reason that it is generally preferred by Levinas. Nonetheless, the absoluteness suggested by utter "non-intentionality" is in some senses inconvenient for Peperzak, given his interest in the *transition* from indeterminate to determinate forms of faith.

Prior to any particular expression, and prior to all particular expressions which cover over and protect with an immediately adopted face or countenance, there is the nakedness and destitution of the expression as such ... This is the hidden human face behind perseverance in being...the affirmation of being (Levinas 1989, 83, 85).

The non-intentional is “prior” to all structures of intentionality which allow the positing of propositions that are the essence of determinate faith structures on one hand, and philosophical and scientific claims (the realms of fact and theory) on the other. As such, the sphere of the non-intentional might be characterised as the ultimate *a priori*; that elemental layer from which thought arises, and to which it – in some sense – returns. The *priority* of this elemental encounter with the world is thus a function of its humility: it is pure receptivity that is unadorned with justification or contention.

On this basis, one might even suggest that the authenticity of conscious rational thought of any kind (be it religious or secular in nature) comes down to the faithfulness of the transition/ translation from elemental experience to determinate discourse and practice. One might perhaps suggest that this is the primary hermeneutic task: the movement from authentic subjectivity (defined here as a patient attentiveness to one’s elemental experience of being in the world) to the possibility of objectivity which, as Bernard Lonergan famously put it, is its fruit (Lonergan 1990, 292; also 265). Rationality comes too late to be the author of the basic intelligibility and meaningfulness of the world, or of its saturation with value. If these characteristics are not already present for us to be brought to the table of discursive thought, no amount of rational theorising can force them into existence.

Other than the obvious Husserlian background, Levinas’ non-intentional is also substantially indebted to Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology of Dasein’s modes of being in the world, and Heidegger is clearly another major source for Peperzak. Of particular note here is Heidegger’s analysis of basic attunement (*Befindlichkeit*).<sup>10</sup> Peperzak is keen to emphasise the “primarily affective character” of his notion of the elemental human domain, using explicitly Heideggerian language in speaking of “a fundamental attunement, a basic ‘mood’” (2005, 75; see Heidegger 1962, §29). With Heidegger, Peperzak would maintain that rationality is not *sui generis*, springing into the world as the beginning of all thought. Logic always has a context; its “metaphysical foundations” (to borrow from the title of one of Heidegger’s early lecture courses: Heidegger 1984) need to be understood in the context of Dasein’s being-in-the-world.

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<sup>10</sup> While I do not deal with this topic here, Peperzak’s phenomenological roots are also evident in his suspicion of the impoverished metaphysics of rationalistic and empirical scientific accounts of the world. Even while being highly critical of the Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian critique of onto-theology, he clearly accepts aspects of this critique insofar as western thinking about God has reduced the Divine to a definable term in a syllogistic game of chess (see Peperzak 2005, 98ff).

With Heidegger, Peperzak also emphasises the importance of distinguishing particular emotional states from the whole domain of affective attunement to the world:

[O]ur affective response, rather than being a constellation of particular emotions, consists in a general and diffuse attunement that is so deep and permeating that often we are not even aware of it: a mood. We are in touch with the world by feeling ourselves involved in it, more or less at home or exiled, more or less at peace or struggling ... [A] basic mood is the way in which we let the universe attune us (2005, 160).

For Heidegger, as for Peperzak, this attunement – this affective basis for thought – has *structure* (of which his early thought looks to provide a phenomenology) but no universally instantiated *content*. In bringing our past with us, we experience the world differently. The whole structure of attunement is characterised by its factual nature; Dasein finds itself “assail[ed]” by moods (Heidegger 1962, 176), though which it is always *already* attuned to the world in inevitably idiosyncratic ways. Elemental human experience has a common structure to be found at the core of all forms or ways of life, but the *character* of this basic attunement will differ (sometimes dramatically) from individual to individual. The point is not that we basically experience the world in the same or similar ways (that would be ridiculous); rather that all thinking happens on the basis of a fundamental affective experience of living in the world. Indeed, *given* the differences in basic experience, one would expect that reasoned arguments in philosophy and theology, ethics and aesthetics, the natural and human sciences (and so on) would show great diversity in progression and conclusion. And so they do. Indeed, Peperzak’s suggestion that all such determinate rational and faith-based systems of thought are derivative of a more basic affective and experiential dwelling in the world provides a compelling *reason* for the vast and ubiquitous differences of judgement we see among religious and philosophical communities. It also goes quite some way to explaining what is at stake in incommensurable scholarly arguments that seem impervious to resolution through rational means (see Colledge 2014).

Peperzak’s focus on the way in which our pre-intentional emotional attunement to the world speaks of an elemental faith or trust in the world is strongly echoed by William Desmond. In a passage that strikingly evokes Desmond on this theme, Peperzak put it as follows:

The universe can inspire awe, admiration, gratitude, anxiety; we can feel threatened, safe, secure, content, frustrated, nostalgic, and so on ... So long as we continue to live, however, there is always some sort of basic consent and trust, even if these are overwhelmed by anguish and temptations of despair. Somehow we remain attached to our existence and confident that it is better to be than not to be ... Trust, confidence, or ‘faith’ ... implies the affirmation that existence has an overall meaning ... This affirmation is lived rather than pronounced or thought. It

is the element of consent in our moods ... 'Faith is thus linked with hope (2005, 75).

Desmond's work on the dynamics and affectivity of primal faith and its relation to determinate thought provides a perfect context for developing Peperzak's own contributions to this field. Of primary importance here is Desmond's notion of the "primary ethos" within which human beings fundamentally dwell, and which we then reconfigure in drawing up determinate and familiar ways of being. Desmond speaks of this ("properly basic") context of our lives in various ways, such as the following:

By ethos, I mean the ontological context or overdetermined matrix of value in which our human ethos and ethics come to be articulated. This is prior to, and in excess of, every ethical [and epistemological] determination that we define ... The ethos is not first revealed by thinking or by reflection; it is a happening *before* we make any firm difference between inner and outer, subject and object ... [T]his pre-determinate ethos of value is not just 'back there' in an indefinite beginning, but is with us always (Desmond 2001, 17, 21, 22).

For Desmond, recognition of this elemental context of being is essential, for without it we illegitimately see ourselves as creators of meaning, value and insight, which are in fact always derivative. This is an insight that he explores in a series of directions in his work, for it has metaphysical, ethical, aesthetic, psychological and theological implications.

Desmond speaks of this basic idiosyncratic context of all personal being and thinking as "elemental idiocy" (in the Greek sense of *idios*, the private). This "elemental I" is "presupposed by all subsequently 'constructed' selves". However, "this 'root' is not the Cartesian 'I think', or any version of it. It is not a prereflective *cogito*. It is a prereflective idiocy, prior to all *cogitos*, and all determinate thinking" (Desmond 1995, 63). Paralleling Peperzak's notion of the movement from the pre-intentional *archē* to determinate forms of rational and religious thought, Desmond is interested in the way that we move from this primary *ethos* to reconfigured forms out of which arise particular modes of determinate thought. Much is at stake in this reconfiguration of the primal ethos, by which we "stay true, betray or disfigure its promise" (Desmond 2001, 17). A paradigm case of the disfigurement of the *ethos* is what he sees as the devaluation of being in modernity: an epoch (which is in some ways still very much with us) in which the dominance of rational discourse and scientific method has often left philosophers with few tools with which to speak of the intrinsic goodness of being as such; of a cosmos already infused with value. In this way, the "primal ethos" in which we "live and move and have our being" is entirely overlooked and its derivative products (including all determinate forms of thought) are instead as regarded original.

Much more might be said of the rich ways in which Desmond unfolds his analysis of the primal *ethos* and of his call for a return to a new attentiveness to its intimations in the context of life and thought. There is, for example, a closely related and strikingly

recurrent motif in his work of the stages of thinking relative to one's relationship to this primal *ethos*: from the immediate joy of living (wonder, first innocence); the fading of wonder as the *ethos* is reconfigured; stages of despair through unfulfilled *conatus*; and finally the gift of renewed wonder (variously: "idiotic rebirth", "agapeic rebirth", "aesthetic recharging"), as something of the primal love of being in its basic goodness (the *passio essendi*) returns in a chastened and deepened sense (see Desmond, 1995, 256; 2001, 380; 2008, 31-43, 118-121, 337). Despite everything, there can be a dawning of a new *ontological faith* (2001, 381, 508-09; 2008, 82, 121, 338-40;). This state of renewed openness to the gift and goodness of being – even in the midst of evil and suffering – seems to be what Desmond is gesturing to, wishing for, for the whole of western culture; and he sees philosophy as a discipline that needs to undergo its own transformation in order to play its part. A very similar trajectory is discernible in Peperzak's own recent work.

### **Religion and Philosophy as Modes of Determinate Discourse**

Given this discussion of the primal domain of experience and the derivative domains of thought that emerges from it, it remains to clarify the nature of the difference between concrete expressions of religious faith (particularly in creedal form) and philosophical (and/or scientific) reason. In what follows, Peperzak's approach is brought into conversation with Greg Moses' development of Jan Van der Veken's distinction between faith and reason along the lines of the particular and the general.

In dealing with the case of a Christian philosopher, Peperzak considers the switch of mode that occurs when conversing with those who do not share the same religious conviction. In such as case ...

he will look for common ground and shared assumptions in order to make discussion possible despite any fundamental differences. If we reserve the name 'philosophy' for the level of universally shared assumptions, we abstract from all the real and possible differences in faith. Such a universally valid philosophy does not represent the concrete (and therefore existential) thought of its author, because it is only an abstract element of it (2005, 79-80).

In this way, philosophy, for Peperzak, is "nothing other than the theoretical part of [the philosopher's] existential endeavor" (2005, 79). This "theoretical part" is to be understood as that which is (in principle) *intelligible to all people* and not simply a concrete expression of the individual's own intimate experience of meaningful dwelling in the cosmos. But against the claims of rationalistic philosophy, this theoretical mode of expression cannot be simply affirmed as independent and absolute, for to do so would be to uproot it from its elemental context. Reason itself is a doxastic practice every bit as much as determinate religious faith. But reason is a very particular *kind* of expression of faith: one that tries to speak in a language that is *accessible to all*.

Now it seems to me that Peperzak's point feeds directly into the distinction that Jan Van der Veken makes (as related by Moses) between "what can be said about God on the basis of generally available experience, versus what can be said on the basis of particular experiences of particular people" (Moses 2004, 37). This is likened to "the knowledge that a perfect stranger might have of my good friend and the knowledge available to me *as his or her good friend*" (2004, 38). In both cases, what is at stake is an immediate familiarity or intimacy out of which one might speak (the particular), versus an abstract, theoretical and formal mode of knowing and speaking that seeks to find a place (so to speak) within the *common domain* (the general). Moses goes on to conclude that:

the ... distinction between faith and reason is not that of subjective versus objective, or non-rational versus rational, or supernatural versus natural, but more like, particular versus general, or even, as it will turn out, more particular versus less particular (2004, 39).

In rejecting the standard objective/subjective, rational/non-rational, natural/ supernatural ways of understanding the faith-reason distinction, the pretensions of concrete philosophical, scientific *or* religious traditions to claim the role of the master discourse is undermined, for all are rooted in something far more elemental and primal which is the truly "properly basic" starting point of all determinate discourses. Theoretical discourses transform immediate and intimate elemental experience into concrete theoretical and reflective accounts typical of both theology and philosophy (as well as scientific discourses in their own way). This distinction maps perfectly onto Peperzak's own distinction between derivative faith (i.e., concrete or "positive" religions) and derivative reason (such as philosophical enterprises).

It is important to note that this approach entails a distinction between religious experience as such, and developed theological reflection which can be both individual and communal in nature (and which may then be distilled into highly formalised creedal form). As literally a *logos* concerning the Divine, a living theology is rooted in elemental experience and is a reflectively (and communally) distilled response to that experience. True, the distillation that occurs within religious traditions begins as a communal enterprise, and only with growing maturity does it look to address the human condition in a more general way. To that extent, even concrete religious discourses retain a degree of particularity that is often in tension with an impetus to broaden its base to address humanity in more general terms (a tension accentuated by canonical and doctrinal conservatism).

Nonetheless, vital philosophical reflection is also a product of reflective distillation, in dialogue with others, of the experience of dwelling within an overdetermined (meaning-saturated, if deeply perplexing) universe. It is for this reason that Moses' qualification in the quotation above – less "particular versus general", than "more particular versus less particular" – is so important. It is crucial that reason – qua the general – is not understood to be free of any particularity, while faith is associated only with the particular, or even

the idiosyncratic. This would be to entirely undermine Peperzak's (and Van der Veken's) whole distinction. Further, the category of the "general" must not be taken to mean generally applicable or absolute, but rather simply as the *commonly accessible*. Rationality seeks to provide a common language and collection of methodologies – albeit is in ways that are perhaps largely constrained within the horizons of the western intellectual paradigm – by which people may communicate, but this is far from claiming it to be the master discourse as such. General means *less* particular, but particular nonetheless.

In sum, *both* forms of discourse (the theological and the philosophical), if they are to retain their vitality, must remain rooted in elemental experiential soil, and both become empty abstractions as soon as that rootedness is lost. But, of course, the very process of transition (or distillation) from elemental experience to rational discourse involves both a loss as well as a gain. The very drive toward generality means that rationality is constrained in the range of insight and elaboration thereby open to it according to what can be thought and spoken within this mode. Thus, ironically, in abstracting experience from its native context, theoretical discourses can perhaps be equated as much with a *loss* of the absolute as its achievement. On the other hand, the great and important benefit of rational discourse is precisely the *distance* it is able to take on elemental experience in all its overwhelming immediacy, and thus the wider perspective and common clarity it is able to bring to reflection. Thus, while it lacks intimate affective-cognitive enmeshment in the primal experience, it instead contributes (literally) to the *common sense*. While the immediacy and intimacy are lost, determinate discourses look to retain the formal structure of experience.

Moses applies this point to rational and religious reflection on the experience of God: "The God of the philosophers may well be the same as the God who properly deserves the name, the God of the Religions, but only abstractly considered" (2004, 53-54). It is thus the role of reason – in this case philosophical theology – to provide a breadth and depth of perspective to the questions at issue. However, as one necessary step removed from the intimacy of a distinctively human confrontation with what is at stake in the question of God, reason alone is "incompetent to decide in any final fashion" or to "make religious choices for us" (2004, 56).

What all this highlights, of course, is the complementarity of elemental faith and discursive reason in the realm of religious experience and thought. However, such a conclusion is now beyond any merely 'tactful' affirmation of mutual legitimacy, and is instead underpinned by a demonstration of the intrinsic belonging-together of faith and reason in their joint rootedness in the primal human experience of dwelling meaningfully in the cosmos.

### **Conclusion: Faith, Reason and the Elemental**

I return to where this paper began: with the current state of the debate concerning the relative primacy of faith and rationality. What is clear, I would suggest, is the inadequacy of both incompatibilism and assimilationism in all their varieties.

Incompatibilist approaches (of whatever hue) are wrong to polarise the ways of reason and faith. On one hand, while distinct, philosophical and theological discourses are not mutually exclusive contraries, for the rational and the non-rational may be identified in each. Philosophy is not to be simplistically correlated with the rational; for as unable to ground itself, philosophy needs to face its own contingency and its rootedness in non-rational and pre-philosophical sources. If the history of western philosophy proves anything, it is that attempts to refound philosophy on indubitable rational principles that banish all contingency, is lost cause. Similarly, determinate religious intellectual traditions cannot be simply associated with the non-rational, for they too seek to give concrete form to their contentions through the use of reason.

But there is also much that should give us pause about assimilationist approaches to conceiving the faith-reason relationship. To be sure, there is much to affirm in the view that the unity of reality can be approached differently through a diverse range of thinking practices. Nonetheless, there remain important matters of assumption, methodology and perspective that separate the philosophical and religious domains. Philosophy (*logos*, albeit with its non-logical roots) and religion (*mythos*, albeit with its rational modes of articulation) need to be carefully – if not absolutely – differentiated. But just as importantly, they need to be understood in the context of their common roots in elemental human experience.

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