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## WHICH PHILOSOPHY FOR WHICH THEOLOGY?\*

**Abstract.** The ancestral relationship between philosophy and theology will be worked here not abstractly but based on some of its historic achievements. From the diversity of theological areas and theological discourse trends—especially in the last century—the article proposes to establish a relationship between this diversity and the diversity of some contemporary philosophical proposals. Among the huge variety, we chose to refer to hermeneutical philosophy, philosophy of language, phenomenology and some “unique” cases. The article ends with a reflection on the relationship between theology and metaphysics.

**Keywords:** philosophy; theology; hermeneutics; phenomenology; metaphysics.

“Today, in order to free itself from the aphorism, therefore because of its scientificity, philosophy demands that “theologians” philosophize ... Because ... the theologian that philosophy requires in virtue of its own scientificity is, in turn, a theologian who demands philosophy, by virtue of his own seriousness.”<sup>1</sup> This quote, taken from *Stern der Erlösung* by Franz Rosenzweig, can serve as a starting point for the reflections I propose. It’s a simply generic starting point, as it only intends to evoke the general fact that it will be very

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Freiburg im Br.: Universitätsbibliothek, 2002 [First Edition: 1921]), 118: “Die Philosophie verlangt heute, um vom Aphorismus frei zu werden, also geradezu um ihrer Wissenschaftlichkeit willen, daß ‘Theologen’ philosophieren... Denn... ist der Theologe, nach dem die Philosophie um ihrer Wissenschaftlichkeit willen verlangt, selber ein Theologe, der nach der Philosophie verlangt—um seiner Ehrlichkeit willen.”

difficult to think theology, in any area, without some kind of relationship with philosophy (which is not always evident, at least in some of its forms); and it will also be difficult to think philosophy without any relation to theology (which seems to be even less evident in most of its forms). But is this principle valid for all philosophy? And for all theology? And if we assume the validity of this thesis, taking it to all its consequences, is there not an eternal risk, also referred by Rosenzweig, that philosophy will make theology superfluous? Or, conversely, that philosophy is enslaved by theology, according to a long and problematic tradition?

Pedro de Amorim Viana, a Portuguese rationalist from the end of the 19th century, said: “The philosopher and the doctor of the Church differed little in their opinions; the reason for this is that both had developed together in schools; there had been a long time that they shared the same ideas, but it was the very smallness of the distance that separated them that made them irreconcilable enemies.”<sup>2</sup> It can be seen, first of all, that the issue is not peaceful; and, secondly, that it does not stand in the same way at all times in history. The eventual conflict is not intended to be resolved here—nor would I be able to. I will limit myself to a contextualization of the issue within some more recent philosophical and theological practices, leaving aside many other issues and possibilities. Thus, the challenge is launched: to think about the relationship between philosophy and theology in a situated way, whether in the history of some of their respective achievements, or in the variety of some of their forms and pretensions. As for the first aspect, I will, of course, focus on more recent history; as to the second aspect, I will take as a guide the formal organization of theology and its different areas, as well as some of its tendencies. In both respects, the variety is such that it makes it impossible to draw up a single scheme. And it makes it impossible, of course, any kind of exhaustiveness. I will only draw sketches, for an eventual debate. The sketches outlined will be limited to the presentation of some philosophical trends that seem to me to be more significant for what is intended here.

The danger of this option lies, without a doubt, in the fact that we only stick to generic observations, without going into the details of the respective

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<sup>2</sup> Pedro de Amorim Viana, *Defesa do racionalismo ou análise da fé* (Lisboa: INCM, 1982 [First Edition: Porto, 1866]), 47: “O filósofo e o doutor da Igreja diferiam pouco de opiniões; a razão de ambos se havia desenvolvido juntamente nas escolas; tempo houvera que comungavam nas mesmas ideias, mas era a própria pequenez da distância que os separava que os tornava irreconciliáveis inimigos.”

philosophical elaborations—and of the theologies that refer to them. But it doesn't seem to me that, in the context of a study of this kind, anything different is possible. At the same time, assuming that many of the philosophical trends presented below are already sufficiently known, as well as certain theological receptions of them, it is nevertheless important to reflect back on their importance for theology. Thus, what I propose here is a kind of relaxed meditation on some paths taken in the last century, in the relationship between philosophy and theology. It is also a meditation that is still on its way. Therefore, I will be above all grateful for the debate that it may provoke, as it may allow us to go into more detail and, eventually, to go a little further along that path.

## 1. HERMENEUTICS

The first foray will inevitably have to start with a version of philosophy that the Luxembourg philosopher Jean Greisch even considered a new era of reason, precisely his “hermeneutical era.”<sup>3</sup> Hermeneutical philosophy, to formulate it in a synthetic and fundamental way, proposes a reading of being and meaning based on the category of mediation. In other words, the long path of historical articulation is the only path to any possible relationship with truth, in whatever sense. Generically, the concept of mediation can be replaced by the concept of language in a broad sense, as it constitutes the articulation of everything that can be understood, because it has meaning. But the challenge of understanding lies in something that is not reducible to language as rational *logos*, in the sense of conceptual logic. Reality is something to think about—and that is why it paves the way for the concept—but it is even more than the concept and, for this very reason, its diverse mediations—the various forms of language, in a general sense—demand the permanent and endless work of interpretation. Between the mediations most worked by certain hermeneutical philosophies, the best known are: tradition (mainly worked by Hans-Georg Gadamer),<sup>4</sup> the symbol and the text (worked above all by Paul Ricœur).<sup>5</sup> The event of truth (as meaning) and, above all, its possible articulation in a conceptual *logos* are permanently related to these

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jean Greisch, *L'âge herméneutique de la raison* (Paris: Cerf, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986 [First Edition: 1964]).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Paul Ricœur, *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d'herméneutique I* (Paris: Seuil, 1969); Paul Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action. Essais d'herméneutique II* (Paris: Seuil, 1986).

fundamental mediations. They precede and enable thought itself, especially when articulated as a critical reflection, even constituting the basis for the construction of the criteria for its critique. Therefore, an inevitable hermeneutical circle is established, in which we are always already immersed, as finite humans that we are. The possibility that, in this finite and historical process, there is or there is no real access to the truth, according to an indirect or speculative ontology of its own, is what distinguishes relativist or historicist hermeneutics from ontological hermeneutics, as is the case of Gadamer and of Ricœur.

The importance of hermeneutical philosophy for theology is indisputable. First of all, because it frees the concept of hermeneutics from a certain traditional limitation to its sectoral and pragmatic application, namely in the concrete exercise of the interpretation or exegesis of documents. Obviously, such an hermeneutics had always been practiced throughout the history of theology, whether in relation to the texts of Scripture or in relation to other texts. The methods were very varied, but that is not mainly what is being debated here. Because the contribution of hermeneutical philosophy does not exactly go towards discussing the validity of interpretive methods. The question is now posed at its fundamental level: what is the meaning of the interpretation of sense for our understanding of the world—also for the understanding of faith and the corresponding reading of reality? Or, more fundamentally still: if the interpretive activity is ontologically fundamental, this means that the way in which being and meaning are given to us is an indirect way, in the mediations that demand a permanent hermeneutical work. The historicity of truth is thus clearly assumed, placing the respective mediations in their ontological context.

Now, this is fundamental for theology, which inevitably refers to its “object” in an indirect way, precisely through the work on the respective historical mediations. In this sense, all theological areas are marked, at their roots, by hermeneutical philosophy: fundamental theology, above all, because that is where the hermeneutical question is placed on its epistemological basis, very close to its philosophical position. Dogmatics, in turn, lives from the hermeneutical process, which is the fundamental matrix of its method. Practical theology gains a new epistemological status, from the moment in that the cognitive status of historical reality is recognized, experienced as a sign of the times.<sup>6</sup> Even the most traditionally interpretive

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Carlos Schickendanz, “Un cambio en la *ratio fidei*. Asociación (aparentemente ilícita) entre principios teológicos y datos empíricos,” *Teología y Vida* (2016): 157–184.

areas, such as historical theology and biblical theology, receive from hermeneutical philosophy a more consistent foundation for their exercise, even if not exactly the debate on the adequacy of the concrete paths of documentary interpretation, especially textual.

## 2. LANGUAGE

Since hermeneutical philosophy, taking its inspiration in particular from Heidegger, already placed language at its center, as the mediation of mediations—and therefore as a true “house of being” and of meaning—it was above all the analytical tradition, initially driven by Wittgenstein, that more clearly worked the meaning of language for the understanding of the world.<sup>7</sup> From a fundamental point of view, there is no significant difference between one tradition and another. But the concrete development of both was very different. The analytic tradition, based on the principle that all philosophical problems are problems of language, focuses the work of thought precisely on analyzing the use of ordinary language. It develops, to the extreme—which seems to be a reminiscence of the old scholastic tradition—the analysis of details and the precision of argumentation, in a style that seems to bring philosophy closer to the field of exact and mathematical sciences, at least to logics. It is not the place to discuss the limits of this philosophical current, which seems to identify the notion of truth with the logical coherence of sentences. However, its contribution to the refinement of the argumentative and analytical process is indisputable, which makes it fertile also in theology. In the field of fundamental theology, the contributions of the analytical philosophy of religion are above all significant,<sup>8</sup> which allow us to revisit, in a new way, certain arguments that the long tradition of philosophical theology had elaborated, above all in relation to the question of the existence of God. But the treatment of language and its use—especially in the Christian tradition—is also a fundamental element of dogmatic theology, which here gains more awareness of the different ways in which it articulates itself and the languages of its history. Being the basis

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998; First Edition: 1921); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Alvin Platinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Alvin Platinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1974); Alvin Platinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Alvin Platinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980).

of theology constituted by the languages of faith, in its daily use in the context of the believing community and in its relationship with the world is, without a doubt, one of the main objects of study in theology, namely in practical theology. Theology can thus be understood, in a certain sense, also as analytics of believing languages, in their various articulations throughout history and in the present. On the other hand, Wittgenstein himself left interesting indications about the relationship between the saying of language, what is said in it, and the unspeakable or the mystical.<sup>9</sup> Theology, in the diversity of its areas and tendencies, can never forget this paradoxical relationship between the inevitable plurality of languages that articulate it and the impossibility of its “object” ever becoming a pure said of human language. On the other hand, for there to be theology, the possibility of language has to be safeguarded, otherwise what is usually called “negative theology” becomes a mere negation of theology.

### 3. DECONSTRUCTION

By putting the question in these terms—precisely with regard to a possible denial of theology—we touch on one of the most controversial and even enigmatic trends in philosophy of the last century: the so-called “deconstruction.” Although inspired by Heidegger, this proposal became known mainly through Jacques Derrida.<sup>10</sup> The radical nature of the deconstructive gesture places us in the vicinity of the tradition of negative or apophatic theology, albeit in a perhaps even more radically negativistic way. It is a path that is not without its problems—especially the aforementioned problem of the denial of theology itself—but that does not fail to constitute an important critical element, in relation to theological models that are too positivist, systemic and dominant. Recent paths in liberation theology show how there can be a link between the tradition of apophatic theology—which fertilizes and is fertilized by deconstruction thinking—and a political stance that resists to a globally dominant system that threatens to bring humanity to ruin, whether from an ecological or even from a social point of view.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jean Greisch, “La religion dans les limites du langage,” in *Penser la religion*, ed. Jean Greisch (Paris: Beauchesne, 1991), 321–380.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967); Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967); Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: PUF, 1967).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, *Deus Absconditus. Désir, mémoire et imagination eschato-*

On the other hand, even in the context of traditional theological practice, the process of deconstruction has the power to alert us to the complex construction of western thought, the process of which we often forget, and to lead us back to certain fundamental human roots. These roots explore central categories, which we would reach through a process somewhat similar to Husserl's "eidetic reduction," albeit with another method, other results, and other applications. And many of these fundamental concepts allow an interesting rediscovery of elements proper to the Hebrew tradition, foundation of the Christian tradition and the respective theology—as the best-known cases of certain categories such as forgiveness and hospitality, as well as the meaning of writing for the event of Revelation. It is precisely in this more affirmative dimension that Derrida's philosophy can approach another great philosophical tradition of the last century, which finds many outstanding examples in France: phenomenology.

#### 4. PHENOMENOLOGY

Regardless of the question of method or the debate about the final configuration of some phenomenological paths—starting with that of Husserl himself, eventually still too attached to modern subjectivism—French phenomenology has, above all, elaborated an intense work about some of the most fundamental human realities. Let's think, for example, about the issue of corporeality. The works of Edmund Husserl and above all those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty on this domain met with a very unique reception in the philosophy of incarnation of Michel Henry,<sup>12</sup> for example. But there are ramifications of the same subject by other philosophers in the same context. Now, it is not possible to consistently elaborate any Christian theological anthropology without an in-depth interpretation of the experience of the body, as the primary constituent of personal identity.<sup>13</sup>

In another sense, the concept of givenness (*Gegebenheit*), so central to Husserl's phenomenology, was developed in such a way by Jean-Luc Marion<sup>14</sup>

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*logique. Essai de théologie fondamentale postmoderne* (Paris: Cerf, 2011); Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, *Deus ineffabilis. Uma teologia pós-moderna da revelação do fim dos tempos* (S. Paulo: É Realizações, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Michel Henry, *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Emmanuel Falque, *Triduum philosophique* (Paris: Cerf, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: PUF, 1987); Jean-Luc Marion, *Réduction et donation* (Paris: PUF, 1989).

that, articulated with the notion of gift proposed by Derrida<sup>15</sup>, it can be approximated to the biblical notion of gift or *agapē*. Even if one doesn't share a certain path of its phenomenology, namely a somewhat strange approach to the reality of revelation, it is necessary to recognize the fertility of its proposal for the understanding of certain traditionally theological perspectives, such as the theological phenomenology of a category as central as that of "love" or "charity." Along the same lines, but now with regard to the study of certain human relationships that were assumed, in theology, as unavoidable analogies, can be enriching, for example, interesting contributions from phenomenology. I think about Ricœur's<sup>16</sup> and Levinas's<sup>17</sup> considerations on the phenomenon of paternity—and the corresponding category of filiation. Christian dogmatics, namely Trinitarian theology, can gain much from the study of this phenomenology of human relations, as the basis of an experience, without which the experience of God is not only impossible but even unthinkable.

Without wanting, in this context of synthesis, to emphasize specific figures, it seems to me, however, that the case of Emmanuel Levinas constitutes a special proposal in this environment of the phenomenological tradition. Not only because it departs directly from the Hebrew tradition—which is, without a doubt, a primary source of all Christian theology as well—but because it works with some categories that are also theologically fundamental. Namely the category of alterity and the place of the third in the fundamental understanding of the experience of the other; or the way in which it interprets the constitution of subjectivity as a responsibility<sup>18</sup> it is not only significant in the field of fundamental ethics (eventually non-theological) but also in the theological reading of human reality and, analogously, of divine reality itself. Concretely within the scope of Trinitarian theology—and in a Trinitarian understanding of being and human—it seems to me more fertile to understand the relationship of love as a responsibility, than as communion, especially if it is understood as a way to the annulment of relational and demanding difference. But that would entail another debate.

Now, it is above all in this specific philosophical context that a question can be raised which will inevitably provoke debate: is this configuration of philosophy not even intended to replace theology, coming to be considered

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Donner le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ricœur, *Le conflit*, 458–486.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être et au-delà de l'essence* (Paris: Grasset, 1974).



even as a rationally more demanding and therefore more competent way to think about the main categories related to the Christian faith—including the Eucharist, as the recent case of Emmanuel Falque seems to reveal?<sup>19</sup> But is it not, then, simply another form of theology, sometimes even with the pretense of being the true theology, much more profound and adequate to the present time than a theology closed in a certain sterile ecclesiastical language? Where can we place the difference between philosophy and theology there?<sup>20</sup>

The legitimate recourse to theology's reference to a concrete history, as the starting point of its discourse, putting there the fundamental topic of its distinction in relation to the alleged ahistorical logic of philosophy does, in fact, apply in some cases—but not to all types of philosophy, so in many concrete situations it does not seem sufficient to sustain its distinction. On the other hand, the reference to the Christian community, as an inevitable starting point for theology—and never for philosophy, supposedly free in relation to any community of belonging and origin—seems to be a very functional criterion, but the concrete reality of the thinking activity, whether philosophical or theological, is often more complex than what this distinction presupposes—for neither is philosophy uprooted from human communities, which can also be ecclesial communities, nor does the ecclesial belonging of theology invalidate its freedom of thought. And the notion of absolute freedom is a difficult notion to understand, as there is no freedom without historical belonging or without at least a fundamental relationship to ethical duty<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Emmanuel Falque, *Les noces de l'Agneau. Essai philosophique sur le corps et l'eucharistie* (Paris: Cerf, 2011); Emmanuel Falque, *Passer le Rubicon. Philosophie et théologie: Essai sur les frontières* (Bruxelles: Lessius, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> It is no coincidence that this version of philosophy has been classified as a “theological turn in French phenomenology,” cf. Dominique Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat, 1992), an accusation similar to that which, symptomatically, critical rationalism had already directed at the hermeneutic philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer, accusing it of being the “continuation of theology with other means.” Hans Albert, *Traktat über kritische Vernunft* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991 [First Edition: 1968]), 170.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Max Seckler, “Theologie als Glaubenswissenschaft,” in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, vol. 4, ed. Walter Kern, Hermann Pottmeyer, and Max Seckler (Freiburg im Br.: Herder, 1988); Lorenzo Bruno-Puntel, *Sein und Gott. Ein systematischer Ansatz in Auseinandersetzung mit M. Heidegger, E. Levinas und J.-L. Marion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 2010), 179–241. The case of Bruno-Puntel deserves special attention, as it is the proposal for a distinction and articulation between philosophy and theology that is more systematised and thought out at its fundamental level. Without entering into an exhaustive debate, as the scope of the proposal would deserve, I only leave three questions for debate. First, if the starting point of philosophy coincides with the point of arrival of theology and *vice versa*, do we not enter a circle

## 5. SOME “UNIQUE” CASES

At this point in the journey, I propose a kind of interruption. If until now we have spoken of significant philosophical trends, even with a certain articulation between them, and without a doubt with an undeniable connection to the theological tradition, we cannot forget that the theology of the 20th century has been challenged by some very personified philosophical proposals. This was the case, at first, of Marxism, either directly or through its sociological transformation, or even and above all through its critical transformation, namely as elaborated by the so-called Frankfurt School (above all by Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and Jürgen Habermas). It is evident that the entire new political theology, including the theology of hope, political eschatology and liberation theology, would be unthinkable without the initial challenge of this philosophical source, which by the way finds great inspiration also in the Hebrew tradition. It is clear that the background of this debate continues to be constituted by a philosophy in the Hegelian tradition, above all with regard to the philosophy of history, from which theology will eventually find it difficult to completely free itself.

More recently, the interpretation of the violent mechanisms of society, proposed by René Girard<sup>22</sup>, has inspired some models of theology, in different spectrums of its tendencies, namely in the way of understanding the theological status of the innocent victims<sup>23</sup>. It is true that we could even discuss the philosophical status of these readings. But the truth is that it is a global and fundamental interpretation of reality and its meaning, corresponding in this way to what we can very generically consider philosophy. And it is at this level that it becomes especially challenging for theology.

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in which philosophy presupposes theology and the latter, philosophy? And isn't that destructive for both of them? In fact, if the respective starting points can subsist without the other, then they are superfluous to each other; but if they cannot subsist, then they are servants to each other—which eliminates their autonomy, eliminating them as such. Secondly, if the “methodological caesura” means the orientation towards history, which belongs to theology, but also to hermeneutics and phenomenology, then the latter will only be forms of theology. Finally, a system as coherent as the one proposed by Bruno-Puntel seems to find its main problem in that same coherence—as happened with Hegel. How to think about the phenomenon of evil in this interpretive context? Or how to think about the ambiguity of reality, namely in human relationships?

<sup>22</sup> Cf. René Girard, *La violence et le Sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972); René Girard, *Le bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982); René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. James Alison, *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* (Glenview: Doers Publishing, 2013); Mendoza-Álvarez, *Deus Absconditus*.

Without a doubt, we could discuss the theological pertinence of these currents, when we intend to place the debate above all at the level of epistemology, as there is a risk of transforming theology into something that is no longer itself. But the potential fertility of the respective readings is indisputable, when properly framed in the epistemological context of theology. The most evident scope of its application is, without a doubt, that of practical theology—in which the relation to sociologically-oriented readings is more immediate—but often also in the field of biblical theology and fundamental theology, an area especially suited to the debate of fundamental epistemological questions.

#### CONCLUSION: STILL METAPHYSICS?

If we talk about a properly theological—or at least theological-philosophical—epistemology, then we have reached the point where it seems inevitable to touch on the issue of metaphysics.<sup>24</sup> After all the debate around the end of metaphysics—centered above all on the problem of onto-theology—I think we will be in a good position to reach a more mature perspective, also less prejudiced, on this issue. At the very least, we are more vividly aware that the history of metaphysics is very complex. This includes the awareness that the criticism made of it is, in many cases, at least one-sided, referring at most to only some of its configurations, such as the objectivist and the subjectivist ones. In addition, it becomes increasingly evident that there is no reason to put a contradiction between a properly metaphysical perspective and hermeneutical or phenomenological approaches—not even the analytical or deconstructive ones, which often end up leading to statements with metaphysical pretensions.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the fact that philosophy is aware that it cannot abandon its reference to historical experience, as a starting point, does not invalidate the fact that, in this way and so to speak *a posteriori*, it is possible to reach statements with metaphysical pretension. These would be statements about the globality of reality, as to its being and its meaning, whenever in the experience of what is given one

<sup>24</sup> Cf. João Manuel Duque, *A transparência do conceito. Estudos para uma metafísica teológica* (Lisboa: Didaskalia, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jean Greisch, *Hermeneutik und Metaphysik* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1993); Jean-Luc Marion, “La science recherchée et toujours manquante,” in *La métaphysique. Son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux*, ed. Jean-Marc Narbone and Luc Langlois (Paris: J. Vrin / Québec: PU Laval, 1999), 13–36.

experiences its universal foundation and, in that sense, the dimension of unconditionality.

In this context, we could eventually explore the notion of transcendental experience, a somewhat paradoxical concept. The German philosopher Jörg Splett, in continuity with Karl Rahner, defines metaphysical discourse precisely as the orientation of thought and language to the very foundation, as that reality—or dimension of reality—which is always indirectly experienced in the experience of whatever.<sup>26</sup> Just like light, which is not directly experienced but only in what it illuminates, insofar as it is illuminated, so the foundation can be thematized as such, although it never dispenses the mediations in which its experience takes place. This explicit thematization of something that is implicit constitutes metaphysics proper. Ultimately, either the discourse about God is of this kind, or it transforms “god” into a directly manipulable object—or else it ends up in the very impossibility of such discourse. It is clear that, perceiving metaphysics in this context of an indirect transcendental experience, it always presupposes the historical and phenomenological mediations of its donation, so it is not a metaphysics that could be elaborated in itself, eventually from a logical and abstract thought *a priori*, but from a metaphysics articulated with the hermeneutics and phenomenology of the historical donation of the foundation, in the mediation of precisely what is founded. The transcendental meaning understood on this way will never be accessible through a discourse elaborated *a priori*, but will always occur in a discourse that, starting from its historical and particular constitution, poses the question of its universal validity *a posteriori* and is, for that very reason, transcendental.<sup>27</sup>

Now, since theology is a form of *logos* that, in whatever way, refers to God, it cannot evade the question of its metaphysical dimension, otherwise it becomes a pure socio-anthropological description of historical reality, in its pure positivity. In this sense, I would say that the explicit thematization of the metaphysical dimension of his discourse is inevitable. It does not seem

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<sup>26</sup> Jörg Splett, *Denken vor Gott. Philosophie als Wahrheits-Liebe* (Frankfurt a.M: Knecht, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, “Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendentaler Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte,” in *Mysterium Salutis*, vol. II, ed. Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1967), 317–401, 388: “There is an intermediate term between an *a priori* deduction and the mere *a posteriori* collection of arbitrary facts: it is the knowledge that what is experienced *a posteriori* is something transcendently necessary and not mere facticity. If this need is conceived in a formal way, the attempt to try to understand this need from what is known *a posteriori*, to the extent possible, becomes legitimate. This kind of knowledge of the ‘necessary’ is often found, for example, in Thomas Aquinas.”

possible to me that theology can be without it, even though in many of his areas this dimension may be more implicit than explicit. We can ask, of course, if this mode of metaphysical discourse, implied by the reference to the very concept of God—a reference that is constituted historically, namely by the believing process—is not only a theologically possible mode, in an exclusively theological metaphysics, therefore. What would mean the affirmation of the impossibility of a strictly philosophical metaphysics, since by reaching that level philosophy would already be transformed itself into theology. Or, contrary to this restriction of philosophy, one would assert not only the possibility, but even the need for philosophy to arrive at a properly so-called metaphysical discourse, in which the concept of God would have to be thematized. Both paths have been taken in philosophy—although lately the former predominates. It is clear that, at this level of thought and discourse, the distinction between theology and philosophy is once again difficult, as it was in the contexts analyzed above—and here perhaps even more so. We can try to establish precise criteria for a distinction, but the reality is always more complex. The possibility and even necessity of a non-theological metaphysical philosophy could become, once again, important in a work of foundation of faith, similar to the traditional work of the *prae-ambula fidei*. This could happen again, insofar as, in the current conditions of the philosophical discourse—even if already in the aftermath of modernity and in an environment of late or post-modernity—it was possible to demonstrate the possibility or even the need to think the dimension of unconditionality, whether in a logical and ontological, or even in an ethical context. But I prefer to leave the deepening of the question of the relationship between a strictly theological metaphysics and a strictly philosophical metaphysics open.

I come to the end in an eventually disconcerting way, but in fact corresponding to the way I am currently able to read the relationship between philosophy and theology. Depending on the ways in which they are carried out, as well as on the respective areas and tendencies, there can be theologies that are completely free from philosophy and vice versa. Of course, in this extreme case, it can be argued whether it is still really about theology or philosophy. But what is certain is that there are configurations of both in which there is no mutual reference, either explicit or even implicit. At the other extreme, there are theological forms elaborated in a properly philosophical way and philosophical forms elaborated in a properly theological way. In these cases, distinction is difficult—and one might even ask whether

it would not be useless to pose the problem of mutual distinction itself, as it is simply a matter of exercising thought with theological content. It is clear that, paradoxically, also at this extreme, each part can reach the immeasurable pretension of dismissing the other. Between one extreme and the other, there may be forms that imply a clear distinction, but with mutual reference. Such cases are more frequent in theology, which traditionally, especially in the context of systematic theology, usually uses philosophically developed concepts to simply think about faith. In the complexity of situations, drawing defining lines that are too rigid seems to me inadvisable, even harmful. While it is true that some situations can originate harmful confusions—with corresponding inordinate pretensions on both sides—it is no less certain that some fluidity of frontiers—or even a life permanently on the frontier—has contributed, throughout history, to the great fertility of thought, whether theological or philosophical. It is not up to us—nor could we—to eliminate this fluidity, eventually in the name of a clarity that could easily become sterile.

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## JAKA FILOZOFIA DLA JAKIEJ TEOLOGII?

## S t r e s z c z e n i e

Relacje niejako rodowe między filozofią a teologią są tu omawiane nie abstrakcyjnie, ale na kanwie niektórych historycznych dokonań. Wobec różnorodności dziedzin teologicznych i nurtów teologicznych dyskursów — zwłaszcza w ostatnim stuleciu — proponuje się ustalenie związku między ową teologiczną różnorodnością a różnorodnością niektórych współczesnych propozycji filozoficznych. Spośród wielu różnorodnych obszarów autor postanowił odwołać się do filozofii hermeneutycznej, filozofii języka, fenomenologii i niektórych „unikatowych” przypadków. Artykuł kończy refleksja na temat relacji między teologią a metafizyką.

*Przekład angielskiego abstraktu  
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**Słowa kluczowe:** filozofia; teologia; hermeneutyka; fenomenologia; metafizyka.