

Theia Mania: Josef Pieper's Philosophical Anthropology

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While many thinkers consider the twentieth century to be an age dominated by the philosophy of language, we should not forget that the last century gave rise to serious discussions in the field of philosophical anthropology as well. Psychologists, philosophers and anthropologists have contributed to our understanding of what it is to be a human being. As a thinker knowledgeable in the disciplines of philosophy, law, and sociology, Josef Pieper's contribution to this discussion can be characterized as an attempt at trying to retrieve the spirit of medieval Christian anthropology in a way that could shed light on the conditions of contemporary man. Indeed, this is an important project because modernity has changed the way we view the world and man's place in it. The rise of scientific rationalism and the consequent demythization of the human subject brought with it the vision of a technocratic world where social progress and technological rationalism reigned. Under its aegis, the human subject itself was instrumentalized, turned into both the agent and object of rational technique. Ironically, Immanuel Kant's Copernican revolution placed the human subject at the center of the intelligible universe. Trapped inside himself, the Kantian subject was forced to bear the burden of providing for herself the meaning of the world and her existence.

In contrast, Pieper's retrieval of St. Thomas's position makes room for the philosophy of person in what post-modernism would call a "decentered subject," one whose perfection and end lie outside of her, and whose very openness to this perfection is strangely part of her very nature.¹ For Pieper,

¹ For an example of how contemporary philosophers are dealing with Plato's doctrine of

the human subject must be a responsible but not an autarkic² self: she must bear the responsibility for her actions, but her personhood is not given to her as formless material to be shaped at will by an ego consciousness, instead discovered in her capacity for relation. While human nature can be defined and revealed through patient reflection on our actions, its ultimate source and end remain a mystery. Pieper sees the *via negativa* of Scholastic philosophy as playing an essential role in understanding human existence. The *negativa* here means relinquishing us from the Kantian notion of man as wholly autonomous being so we can be open to the mystery with which our life presents us. Key to Pieper's understanding of the human person, as a creature, is our capacity to be affected.

The role of affectivity has not been sufficiently explored in the thought of Josef Pieper. Yet, traces of this theme can be found throughout many of Pieper's most famous works, from *Leisure as the Basis of Society* to *On Love* and from *Enthusiasm and Divine Madness* to *The Cardinal Virtues*. The notion of affect is an essential element in Pieper's philosophical anthropology, one that binds together his ideas on creatureliness, virtue, philosophizing, and truth with the sacred Tradition and ancient and medieval philosophy. In general, affectivity becomes an important theme today because (1) it allows for further dialogue between Thomism and contemporary philosophy, and (2) it clarifies the Thomistic position about the human person against the ever-present backdrop of modern rationalism, which would tend to conceive of the person too narrowly as an ego subject.

The challenge, in one respect, is to fully integrate the Platonic themes in Pieper's corpus, especially his reading of the *Phaedrus*, into his virtue ethics while keeping its consistent Thomistic character.³ In other respects, the

divine madness, erotic transcendence, and the nature of the human subject, see Francis P. Coolidge, "On Divine Madness, Its Relations to the Good, and the Erotic Aspect of the Agapeic Good," *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* 65, no. 1 (2003): 93–119.

² The author contends that Pieper's use of "autarchic/autarchy" ("autarkic/autarky") refers to the character of Antisthenes and the Stoic idea of *αὐτάρκεια* rather than any modern meaning of the term. Although the Winston translation cited in note 4 uses the spelling with "ch," as is evident in the block quote there, it should be kept clear that the Greek term for the Stoic concept uses the *kappa* and not the *chi*, a substantial distinction, as it comes from the root *ark-* for "[to be] sufficient/content" (the adjective yields "sufficient," while the middle-voice verb denotes being content), rather than from the root *arch-* for "to rule" or "to begin" (all instances in this article outside of that quote have used the "k" spelling).

³ Juan F. Franck does an excellent job of showing the influence of Plato on Pieper's conception of philosophy in "The Platonic Inspiration of Pieper's Philosophy," in *The Cosmopolitan Hermit: Modernity and Tradition in the Philosophy of Josef Pieper*, ed.

challenge is to provide a comprehensive view of affectivity in Pieper's work which is consistent with all of the phases of his work but does not mitigate the historical dimension of his writing.

Theia Mania

For Pieper, philosophizing takes place in leisure, which has festivity at its heart. Within this context, all contemplation is joyful, because within it is the affirmation of being as a gift. Yet, the question soon arises of how it is possible for human beings to receive a gift. To answer this, Pieper returns to the tradition and the Platonic ideas of enthusiasm and divine madness. Plato writes that the highest good comes to us in the manner of the mania, inasmuch as this is bestowed upon us as a divine gift (*Phaedrus* 244a6). Contemplation should not be understood as an act or rational technique which we perform on an object; rather, it is, in the first instance, a response, a summoning to a gift. However, the reception of this gift, the contact with the absolute otherness of the divine, is dangerous for human beings. We risk a form of healing madness that marks the end of our egocentric illusions about ourselves. Pieper writes:

If we consider all the aspects of mania that Plato mentions, we shall have to say that he uses the word to mean, primarily being-beside-oneself, a loss of command over oneself, surrender of the autarchic independence [autarken Selbstmächtigkeit] and self-control; a state in which we are not active, but passive. We do not act but suffer something; something happens to us.⁴

Pieper also wants us to realize that the experience of divine madness is not reserved for the mystic or the saint, but it is open to all of us in esthetic experience, catharsis, and love. These experiences may seem more "down to earth" for some of us than a mystical experience of the transcendent.

Bernard N. Schumacher (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 251–78. Although Franck's paper mentions *theia mania* and anticipates some of the topics explored here, his work is not concerned with the question of affectivity per se. The *Phaedrus* will hereafter be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴ Josef Pieper, *Enthusiasm and Divine Madness*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine, 2000), 49 [originally *Begeisterung und göttlicher Wahsinn: Über den platonischen Dialog Phaidros*, in *Darstellung und Interpretationen: Platon*, vol. 1. ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2002), 288]; hereafter cited as *EDM*, with German and English pagination, respectively, parenthetically in body text.

Nevertheless, according to Pieper, they are in no way mundane or ordinary experiences of everyday living, for they are punctuated by the divine.

Pieper adheres to Plato's idea of wisdom, which begins with self-knowledge (i.e., to know that I do not know is the beginning of wisdom), but because we transcend ourselves to the whole world of things, there must be an aspect to the wisdom that corresponds to this:

"The highest goods come to us in the manner of mania, inasmuch as the same is bestowed on us as a divine gift." This pronouncement by Socrates—with its central term *mania* remaining untranslated for now—contains an entire worldview; it proclaims above all a fundamental opinion about the meaning of human existence. It shows that man is indeed such a kind as to possess his self in freedom and self-determination, that he is able and obliged to examine critically everything he encounters, that he is above all able and obliged to determine, based on this insight, his own life. Yet, it further indicates that man, at the same time, in his selfhood, is integrated into the whole of reality in such a way that he can very well be shaken out of his self-possession, and this not only in the form of forced oppression but possibly, so long as man for his own part does not barricade himself in refusal, also in such a form that in the very loss of self-possession there is bestowed on him a fulfillment not achieved in any other way.⁵

Pieper acknowledges that Plato himself did not always conceive mania as something positive. In the *Ion* and the *Meno*, Plato identifies mania as sickness or a derangement where something is lost. There is in the idea of mania a distinctive negative element, not necessarily destructive or hurtful, but a passivity or darkness which cannot be reduced to light. However, Pieper believes that on the strength of what is presented in the *Phaedrus*, the sickness of mania, is necessary for man's health.⁶ Borrowing the language of modern psychotherapy, Pieper writes that if divine madness is a sickness, "it is even a worse sickness not to be able to be 'sick' in such a way" (*EDM*, 290/52). The inability to be affected by the world, to live solely

⁵ Josef Pieper, "Divine Madness": *Plato's Case Against Secular Humanism*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 7–8 [originally "Göttlicher Wahsinn": *Eine Platon-Interpretation* (Stuttgart: Schwabenverlag, 1989)].

⁶ For a detailed account of how Plato's conception of divine madness can be reconciled with human sanity, see John P. Harris's "Divine Madness and Human Sanity in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Mouseion*, 3rd series, 6 (2006): 387–406.

within the light of one's conceptions of reality, as if like a monad, would truly be a form of madness. Instead, affectivity opens us to the alterity of the other.

The Role of Affectivity in Philosophizing

One first begins to surmise the role of affectivity in Pieper's thought from how he describes the nature of the philosophizing in *Leisure as the Basis of Culture* and *In Defense of Philosophy*. These two texts provide a description of the philosophy and the philosophical act that stands in stark contrast to one offered by modernity. In *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, Pieper begins by asking us to consider how the notions of "work" and "leisure" define what it is to be human.⁷ Since the Enlightenment, there has been an overwhelming tendency to understand the human person in terms of work, with the subsequent effect of totalizing human existence into a means–end schema. This tendency has led moderns to understand philosophy exclusively as a kind of intellectual work.⁸ For Pieper, Kant is emblematic of this tendency because he held that knowledge was exclusively discursive in nature, characterized by the activities of comparing, contrasting, abstracting, deducing, and demonstrating (*LBC6*, 7/ 27). Kant reasoned that, since philosophy was even less dependent on sensory perception than the natural sciences, it must be characterized as consisting of the rigorous mental effort of reason alone. In the end, Kant declares that philosophizing requires a herculean effort, and on the basis of this criterion, separates all pseudo-philosophy from true philosophy.

However, if we adopt Kant's position, we are likely to forget what was

⁷ Josef Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 21–22. The English text is a combination of the following original German texts: *Was Heist Philosophieren*, in *Schriften zum Philosophiebegriff*, ed. Berthold Wald, vol. 3 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1995); and *Müsse und Kult*, in *Kultur-philosophische Schriften*, ed. Berthold Wald, vol. 6 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1999), 4–5. This work will be cited as either *LBC3* or *LBC6*, according to which volume number is accurate for the German, and with German and English pagination, respectively in parentheses in body text.

⁸ The late Stephen Toulmin has argued that the rigorous rational method of modern philosophy was not an absolute necessity but more of an insular response to the religious-economic-political situation of the early seventeenth century. He argues the turmoil of the early 1600s pushed philosophers away from the more humanistic style of philosophizing, found in thinkers like Montaigne, which dealt with complexity and worldly praxis, and towards a more abstract, theoretical approach (see *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990]).

an important distinction for the ancient and medieval philosophers: that human beings also possess a properly intellectual, spiritual knowledge that can be characterized only by a purely receptive attitude of contemplation. Pieper reminds us that medieval philosophers distinguished human understanding in terms of both *ratio* and *intellectus*. The Latin term *ratio* reflects the discursive element of human understanding which is the proper possession of a human being as a rational animal. *Intellectus*, by contrast, is the capacity for simple intuition of the truth of things. Intuition in this case can be understood as apprehensive awareness of the being of things. Interestingly, medieval theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas speak of *intellectus* as a sort of supra-human form of understanding because the wholeness of this vision seems to suggest participation in a higher realm of knowing which cannot be achieved piecemeal by human reason in its normal discursive mode.

Because of its intuitive character, *intellectus* signifies a type of knowledge that comes without effort and is indeed something gratuitous in nature. From this, we begin to understand what is unique about the nature of the human subject: activity alone cannot define our essence—we must look to what is receptive or affective as well. This capacity to receive is what opens us up to a spiritual transcendence.

Over-emphasizing the reality of work has the effect of locking subjects within themselves to show that, through their own effort alone, they are capable of achieving a certain outcome. For Pieper, the human subject who is supposed to be responsible ends up becoming an autarkic self. This difference is important because, without *ratio*, there is no possibility of morality, while with only *intellectus*, there is no possibility of erotic transcendence to the divine.

In Defense of Philosophy presents Pieper's defense the traditional notion of philosophy and what it is to philosophize against its modern criticism. His defense of philosophy is essentially Platonic in character.⁹ Pieper's working thesis throughout this text is that to "engage in philosophy means to reflect on the totality things we encounter, in view of their ultimate reasons, and, thus understood, philosophy is a meaningful and necessary endeavor which man as a spiritual being cannot dispense" (*IDP*, 79/12). Pieper anticipates criticism of his thesis that, again, seems to hinge on the modern idea of reason and its capacity for work. This will take its concrete

⁹ Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, trans. Lothar Kraut (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992) [originally *Verteidigungsrede für die Philosophie*, in *Schriften zum Philosophiebegriff*, vol. 3, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1995)]; hereafter cited as *IDP*, with German and English pagination, respectively, in parentheses in body text.

form in the scientism and analytical philosophy of his day. The first criticism of Pieper's thesis is that it leaves philosophy without a definite object. How can being be the object of any rational science? A science must have defined objects and corresponding methods if they are to make progress toward truth. Here, again, we encounter the idea of reason as work, but now under the guise of the exactitude of scientific language and techniques.

Echoing the voice of Alfred North Whitehead, who argued that philosophy asks the most basic of all questions, "what is it all about?," and that the idea of "exact human knowledge is a self-illusion," Pieper understands philosophical inquiry as a type of questioning in search of an answer but never fully possessing it. Philosophy is a reflection on the totality of things, but not in the modern sense of systemization of all beings into a logical schema. Instead, totality means, for Pieper, that the philosopher must be careful not to leave anything out of his account. This is at odds with any notion of philosophy as offering a pseudo-scientific account of reality. The one who philosophizes must be open to encountering things as they are. The *ob-iectum*, Pieper says, even if I can ignore or pretend it to be otherwise, will assert itself—it will disturb me, make me think (*IDP*, 81–82/15). Because philosophizing is the most basic form of inquiry without a defined object or method, there can be no illusion of technique, because any technique would necessitate a specified object, an object approached in a certain manner or formality. For Pieper, philosophy, in the first instance, is not a matter of technique or systematization; one cannot be "taught" how to philosophize, but can enter into philosophical contemplation only when the mood is appropriate. The openness which mood suggests is the openness for and abiding with the whole human reality offered to us in myth, and sacred Tradition as well. We are moved to philosophize because we have the capacity to be affected by the whole reality of things around us. For the tradition, human beings philosophize when they are moved by wonder, or by the cathartic shock of death or eros.

The capacity to be affected by things is the mark of true philosophy for Pieper because *the act of philosophizing is itself the essence of philosophy*,¹⁰ and

¹⁰ For Pieper, authentic philosophizing should not try, in the first instance, to establish or legitimate philosophy as a subject matter alongside the human and natural sciences, but rather it should deal with questions of how we are existentially put in contact with the reality of things. This is not a matter of formality alone, but of finality and efficiency as well. When finality enters the mix, then the role of the good as the existential perfection of the philosophical act becomes evident. One needs only to consider Pieper's *Happiness and Contemplation* as a study of the good in the philosophical act. Berthold Wald does an excellent job of showing this same point from the perspective of Pieper's

whatever promotes or affects that activity is essential. Philosophic *theorien* comes to its full actualization in the profound silence of one who contemplates the reality of things. If there is a foundation to philosophy for Pieper, it does not come in the form of an undeniable proposition or the technical method of the academic specialist, but in the ability of one who philosophizes to remain silent in contemplation. Silence, in this sense, is the quieting of the ego's concerns so that one can both open oneself to the reality of things and allow oneself to be affected by the otherness of the other. This silence is necessary, Pieper argues, because the object of philosophical contemplation is invisible to ordinary vision, and the stronger the determination to hear, the more complete this silence must be (*IDP*, 102/47). Philosophizing demands this silence because it deals with those most basic questions: What is it all about? These types of questions are pursued for their own sake, and this means they are directed in their most radical sense outside the everyday concerns of the subject. This bespeaks a kind of openness that is at the basis or *ground* of the philosophical act, which is in turn the ground of philosophy itself. In short, the ground of philosophy is the human person's capacity for openness or affectivity. In other places, Pieper characterizes contemplative *theoria* as lying under the open sky of the stars, but he cautions us not to understand this transcendence as some passage to an apart sphere, but as the openness to the everyday realities of life, where they show themselves in their most marvelous character (*LBC3*, 47/113). Because we are not purely spiritual beings, it is not possible to dwell in this sphere indefinitely, and we must instead return to the comfort and regularity of everyday life in our environment that is ruled by customs and habit (*LBC3*, 40/105). Nor is it possible to enter such a sphere from the sheer force of effort alone. Rather, one must lose his or her wits and be ecstatically transported or displaced into this realm.

Losing one's wits and an ecstatic transport are essential to Plato's notion of *theia mania*. Plato thought that madness and prophecy are intimately related, and his explanation appeals to the ancient inventor of names who linked the names mania (*μανία*) and prophecy (*μαντεία*). At the same time, Plato also distinguishes the prophecy, inspired by mania, as more perfect and superior to those made by the sane mind *σωφροσύνη* (*sōphrosynē*). The notion of mania or madness, as a sort of inspiration, is essential for Pieper in order to rehabilitate Plato's *theia mania* for contemporary thought. The interpretation of mania, as prophetic inspiration, will

place in contemporary thought in "Josef Pieper in the Context of Modern Philosophy," in Schumacher, *Cosmopolitan Hermit*, 24–62.

lead to an understanding of human life as openness and affectivity to the absolute otherness of the divine (*EDM*, 293/56). This interpretation will explode all those conceptions of human beings which define the human person with reference only to its sovereignty, whether that sovereignty is understood in terms of consciousness, praxis, or being. Instead of the self-recollection and self-having, the human being afflicted with *theia mania* will be privy to a knowledge that can be theirs only in the form of a gift that is possessed, neither as part of the structure of their being nor as a power under their control:

Man is so constituted that, on the one hand, he can be thrown out of the autonomous independence of his thinking by inspiration, which comes to him as a sudden, unpredictable force from the outside. On the other hand, this very abandonment of critical sovereignty may bring him an abundance of insight, of light, of truth, of illumination as to the nature of reality, which would otherwise remain completely out of his reach. For we are dealing not with self-governing human genius, but with something bestowed by another, a higher, divine power. Nor is this merely an abstract possibility: man's being is at times overpowered by inspiration. It is something that actually happens. But when it does happen, it does so in such a manner that *sophrosyne* and all that goes with that is forcibly annulled, however much the dignity of the person depends upon it. (*EDM*, 293–94/56)

Pieper wants to show that Greek philosophy concerning divine madness does not need to be at odds with Christian faith and revelation, and he finds confirmation of this in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Pieper recognizes that St. Thomas's treatment of Christian prophecy as *raptus* has elements that are akin to the Platonic *theia mania*. Thomas describes the event of revelation neither as an abiding form nor as a habit of the intellect, but rather as a kind of *passio*, since a prophecy is never the possession of the prophet, but is only a gift, a knowledge, through divine grace. What is important for Pieper is that grace and *raptus* both refer to a notion of person that has at its core an openness which is spiritually constituted by this unique form of affectivity.

The ecstatic character of philosophizing cannot be minimized, because what the philosopher strives for is not a representation in the sense of a *Vorstellung*, but the inner reality of the thing, its *eidos*, or idea in the Platonic sense. This inner connection between the object of philosophy

and the affectivity of one who philosophizes must not be overlooked or we will fail to grasp the role of affect in philosophy; as much as the one who philosophizes seeks to understand reality, she is also aware of an unfathomable dimension to things, and with this realization, we enter into a sort of *via negativa*. In *the Silence of St. Thomas*, Pieper describes the unfathomable (*unergründlich*) character of things as part of their very nature or essence whose origin lies beyond the power of human understanding in the hiddenness of divine knowledge alone. Paradoxically, creatures as the expressions of the divine intellect and will are both knowable and unknowable for us in different respects. They are knowable because they really are something, but they are unknowable in the truth of their being, which is their being creatively thought by God. Pieper writes: "Consider this sentence from the *Questiones Disputatae*: This is what is ultimate in human knowledge of God: to know that we do not know God, 'quod (homo) sciat se Deum nescire.'" ¹¹ In commenting on Plato's philosophy, Pieper argues that the thinker's experience of the unfathomable nature of things is itself both positive and personal, because this experience lends itself to shaping an overall worldview and because only someone who has experienced this mystery firsthand can be a "knowing unknower." The injunction of the Delphic oracle to know thyself, when fully realized, means for Socrates that he is a "knowing non-knower." ¹² This is the paradox of philosophy that both Plato and St Thomas confront in their writings. To be a knowing non-knower means, for Pieper, that "human knowledge is not characterized by comprehension and possession nor by simple non-possession but by not-yet possession." ¹³ There is always more to know and certain realities exceed our powers to know in this life. Hope becomes the structure of the philosophical act.

Let us stop for a minute and consider the significance of this for knowledge and the human subject. If the whole of reality could be drawn up

¹¹ Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas*, trans. John Murray, S.J., and Daniel O'Connor (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine, 1999), 64 [originally *Unaustinkbares Licht: Das negativ Element in der Weltansicht des Thomas von Aquin in Darstellungen und Interpretationen: Thomas von Aquin und die Scholastik*, ed. Berthold Wald, vol. 2 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001), 125]; hereafter cited with German and English pagination, respectively.

¹² Josef Pieper, "The Platonic Idea of Philosophy," in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays in the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 165 [originally *Über der Philosophie-Begriff Platons*, in *Schriften zum Philosophiebegriff*, vol. 3, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1995), 164]; hereafter cited with German and English pagination, respectively.

¹³ Pieper, *Silence of St. Thomas*, 129/69.

into a totalizing schema, in the modern sense, which could become the complete possession of human intellect, then, after philosophizing, the human subject would return to itself satisfied to reside in the weight of its being like a little god. But Pieper's view is just the opposite: it seems to emphasize the ecstatic relational character of knowing; my knowledge is not in the first instance a fast possession, but a reflection of my own staying with an object. It finds its ground not in the freedom which is so touted in Martin Heidegger's thought, but in our receptive capacity to be displaced into a relationship. In an ontological sense, our relationship is prior to our ontic freedom!¹⁴ This has obvious theological consequences or possibilities for Pieper in thinking through the role of faith, hope, and charity.

Pieper understands Platonic eros as that natural desire or inclination in human beings to return to a state of wholeness. This is the object of the human person's remembrance and longing. The one who philosophizes experiences *eros* as a transformative force that opens her eyes to the totality of the world and human existence, as long as she is open to this experience (*IDP*, 88/26). The source of this transformative power is eros's own loving attitude toward the beloved:

Just as in the erotic convulsion something happens that does not simply lie within man's free disposition, so the philosophical search for wisdom cannot be understood as an act set into motion exclusively by man. In the act of philosophizing, a sovereignly planning reason does not face the world of "possible objects" to which it then freely devotes itself in accordance with the goal it has set. Rather, philosophizing arises from an insatiability we cannot master but demands satisfaction over and above our bodily needs.¹⁵

In contrast to the philosopher, the sophist, as understood by Pieper, is one who cannot maintain the silence so necessary to the philosophical act because her thought is always already motivated by ego concerns or selfish

¹⁴ I believe Pieper would certainly maintain St. Thomas's metaphysical distinction between *esse* and *essentia*. If our being is received, then our substantial being is in some sense relational, i.e., dependent upon God. Yet, I think this insight works throughout our whole existence for Pieper. Even as animals, we cannot conceive of our biological essence without reference to other members of our species and to the environment which supports us. Hence, I want to juxtapose the scholastic *operari sequitur esse* with the modern, Kantian sense that freedom and spontaneity are the hallmarks of a human being.

¹⁵ Pieper, "Platonic Idea of Philosophy," 169/170.

satisfaction, whether it be for pleasure, honor, or power.¹⁶ In a sense, the sophist in some ways resembles the autarkic self that seeks self-sufficiency in the satisfaction of her ego needs. A good example of this is Lysias's speech in the *Phaedo*, where the eros of love is reduced, according to Pieper, to a "crude sexualization of the beloved." Under the sophist Lysias, the power of persuasion has been harnessed to convey a pragmatic doctrine of love. According to Lysias, in the area of love and relationships, it is better to separate sexual desire from love to manage relationships properly so as to maximize one's pleasure and to minimize the threat of potential pain. The real problem of such a teaching, according to Pieper, is not the advocating of lascivious behavior—this being a mere aside—but that it makes an assertion about the nature of the human subject:

To put the general conception in a nutshell, it is that man is a completely autonomous being whose nature is given to him like a raw material that can be worked in the manner in which he pleases; a being who determines his own purposes, who himself arranges his existence by rational techniques of living, and whose dignity, therefore, demands that he fends off any interference with his realm of perfect self-possession—whatever the source of the interference may be. (*EDM*: 287/48)

Protagoras is another figure that personifies this position when he proclaims: "Man is the measure of all things—alike of the being of things that are and the being of things that are not."¹⁷ Protagoras's statement, however, can be understood to extend beyond mere things to human beings themselves: man becomes the measure of his own being. Pieper sees Jean-Paul Sartre as the contemporary inheritor of this position when he denies that human beings have a true nature or essence. The Sartrean thesis arises from the situation in which the subject finds herself. In *Being and Nothingness*, the nothingness which haunts the subject (*pour soi*) arises from its opposition to the object (*en soi*). To overcome its own nothingness, the subject must act. Indeed, to act is the only way to exist. In comparison, Pieper situates the human person as creature within the dynamism of fullness and emptiness. Here, the "emptiness" signifies the existential lack of

¹⁶ In this sense, I am indebted to Franck's "Platonic Inspiration of Pieper's Philosophy," 263–68.

¹⁷ Plato, *Theaetetus* 152a3–5, trans. F. M. Cornford in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

our creaturely mode of existence; however, the manner of our fulfillment is not indifferent to the very nature of our being.¹⁸

Affectivity and Moral Life: The Cardinal Virtues

For Antisthenes, one of the early followers of Socrates, virtue is achieved only by hard work, but for Plato, the self-sufficiency of the virtuous person may itself block their access to the whole of the good which is promised to man. A precarious balance between these positions is what St. Thomas achieves in his theological anthropology. In his writings on the cardinal and theological virtues, Pieper sets for himself the task of presenting a view of the human person that makes room for the reality of both nature and grace. This perspective must show the interpenetration of the two spheres through man's affective capacity. Faith, hope and love can be seen as concrete experiences and not simply as otherworldly aspirations; prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance must open to a transcendence beyond themselves. In his text *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, Pieper presents us with an account of cardinal virtues which does exactly this. In each of the sections dealing with a particular virtue, Pieper shows how this virtue is related to an end which is beyond the power of human being alone to achieve, and thus opens up the question of affectivity.¹⁹ It is possible then to relate Pieper's text on the virtues to broader themes in philosophy.

Prudence, being the first of the cardinal virtues, is what puts man in touch with the real in anticipation of action. Prudence, Pieper explains, has been called the cause, measure, and form of all the other moral virtues. It is

¹⁸ On this point, Lance Richey does an excellent job investigating the complex relationship between creation and essence in the thought of Sartre and Pieper; see "Existentialism and Christian Humanism: Josef Pieper's Critique of Sartre Revisited," *Logos* 18, no. 3 (2015): 33–56.

¹⁹ In this section, I am trying only to demarcate the metaphysical dimension in Pieper's retrieval of virtue theory in light of the human person's creatureliness. Thomas Hibbs touches on this when speaking of the virtue of love, but what I have tried to show is the broader implication of this for all the cardinal virtues ("Josef Pieper and the Ethics of Virtue," in Schumacher, *Cosmopolitan Hermit*, 116–40). Because we are creatures, there is always something prior, gratuitous to our actions, whether it be called the "the other," "the good," or God's love or mercy. Our actions are a response to this gift. From this perspective, it is easy to understand Pieper's insistence on Platonic eros as essential because the creature is already directed outward toward its fullness, which it can possess only through grace. Hibbs points out that Pieper's conception of virtue is more in line with Aquinas's natural theory than other contemporary attempts. It seems evident the reason for this is Pieper's acceptance of Divine governance.

the source of man's perfected ability to size up situations in terms of what the tradition called the *bonum honestum*. It is the measure of moral virtues because they are enlightened by prudence's deliberation. And finally, it is the form of all moral virtues, since they proceed by choice and are willed freely. Our moral conscience is to a large degree determined by the state and intactness of prudence.

Still, in the midst of this discourse, Pieper reminds us that the first element of prudence's deliberation consists of the receptive capacity to take in the reality of the real. The prudent person's deliberation is not a self-enclosed interrogation, separated from the concrete real by some sort of formally grounded method. Instead, it begins with a receptive attitude that must remain unbiased in its origin. The clear-sightedness of *solertia* works together with unbiased memory (*memoria*) and open-mindedness (*docilitas*) in order to discover possibilities for action.²⁰

Second, Pieper reminds us that prudence itself is not determinative of the ultimate ends of human life, but merely the means to these ends: "The bright realm of free human action dominated by knowledge, is bordered on all sides by the darkness of nature's part within ourselves and by the deeper impenetrable darkness of the immediateness of Divine Governance of our volition and action" (*CV*, 22/23). This theme is not unique to *The Cardinal Virtues*, but can be found in texts like *The Silence of Thomas* as well. Pieper's point is metaphysical in character, and yet it also has profound consequences for the understanding of philosophical anthropology and psychology. The constitution of the human subject is receptive to influences from both the deepest core of its own being and the transcendent immanence of God's providence. We have here a relational self that responds to the immanent call of the exteriority of its nature and God. Albeit poetic in form, Pieper's insight is as follows:

The original desire for the good takes its energy from the ever-pulsating momentum of that Origin in which man, answering the creative call of God, flew across the abyss which parts nothingness

²⁰ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, trans. Clara and Richard Winston, Laurence E. Lynch, and Daniel Coogan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 14–16 [compilation of the German originals *Traktat über Klugheit: Über die Gerechtigkeit, vom Sinn der Tapferkeit*, and *Zucht und Mass*, both of which can be found in *Schriften zur Philosophischen Anthropologie und Ethik: Das Menschenbild der Tugendlehre*, vol. 4, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2006), 12–15]; hereafter cited as *CV*, with German and English pagination, respectively, in parentheses in body text.

from existence. It is the moment with which the possible bursts with a roar into the radiant dawn of its first realization: the swift current of a stream that, originating in the bright darkness of mere Nature, crosses by the dictate of conscience into the realm of freedom. (CV, 36/34)

For Pieper, eros opens up for us the possibility of the divine, but eros is not sent to the lover for his own advantage or use. Because love is a gift, it cannot be made instrumental in the manner that Lysias's speech would have it. Nevertheless, Pieper argues that all erotic emotion is indeed something intended for man. Love as mania transports the lover in a manner not unlike the revelation of the prophecy. However, it can be received only in purity because the gift of eros is the gift of love and not desire.

For example, the encounter with sensuous beauty gives rise to erotic feelings; it does this by way of stirring the recollection of the lover. But eros is the awakening of the recollection of something whose gratification exceeds the possibility of the finite realm (*EDM*: 314/81). Plato describes the state of one who experiences such recollection: as soon as such a one beholds the beauty of this world, he is reminded of true beauty, and his wings begin to grow; then he is fain to lift his wings and fly upward, yet, he has not the power (*Phaedrus* 249e1–4). Pieper believes that everyday language seems to bear out this same idea, inasmuch as we speak of a beautiful thing as “ravishing” and the person who encounters the beautiful as being “ravished” or “moved” by it. Already implied in the everyday speech about the beautiful is the idea of the loss of security and self-possession, along with the idea of the beautiful causing a kind of transport against which the lover is passive. This creates in the lover a situation of unrest. The lover, who gazes upon beauty, finds himself in a situation that Plato describes as wishing to fly upward but being unable to do so, or like a teething child who feels the pain of the tooth that is erupting. At this point in the dialogue, Pieper reminds us that what is being discussed is the difference between love and lust.

In his book entitled *About Love*, Pieper distinguishes love from willing as the primal act of the will. Normally we have been taught, Pieper argues, to reduce all willing to a willing-to-do something in the sense of deciding in favor of an action based on motives. This resembles more or less the situation that Lysias describes in his *logos erotikos* as being in love. However, Pieper would not agree that this alone describes all the acts of the will, because besides this normal sense of willing-to-do there is a purely

affirmative assent (*rein bejahende Zustimmung*) to what already is.²¹ To love is to affirm the existence of the other, because to love another is to be given over to the *assent* of affirmation, and this is an ecstatic state. When I look upon the other whom I love, according to Pieper, I say, “how good it is that you exist!” Aquinas echoes this same idea when he writes that the first thing that the lover wills is for the beloved to be and to exist (*Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 26, a. 4). Pieper even cites the early phenomenologist Alexander Pfänder, who calls love “an act of partisanship for the existence of the beloved” and even a “continual affirmative keeping the beloved in existence.” Taking an idea from Heideggerian scholarship, it is easy to see the ecstatic state which the assent to affirmation admits is a kind resonance of the lover with the beloved in the manner of moods as the German *Stimmungen* admits.

To love another is both to affirm and to *assent* to the fact of how good it is that the beloved exists. However, it is critical to see that human love is not just about affirmation, as if one could decide on purely rational grounds who one loves. This again could be conceived as closing the person off in his or her autarkic self. Instead, for human beings, the affirmation of the beloved comes by way of assent. Without going too far into the dynamics of the will and intellect in the Scholastic tradition, it is important to remember that our will follows our intellect and that our intellect is itself informed by the reality of the thing. The intellect’s affirmation of the goodness of the beloved results from our assent to the being of the beloved. In short, one could say, “I affirm the existence of the beloved because I have to!” In the face of the beloved, if I am not to deny my true self as a knowing agent, I must affirm the goodness of what I see before me. One can almost speak in terms of obedience to the truth of what is seen. To do otherwise is to risk losing oneself, not to the emotionality of eros, but to the rationalism of modernity, by allowing an existential rift to arise within my being. There is a play of externality and immanence in the life of the human subject where affectivity is foundational to our being.

As the second cardinal virtue, justice flows directly from prudence as the realization of the good perceived. Justice requires us to give the other their due. Interestingly, the object of justice is always the other, the outsider; the one who is not another self in the sense of those we love, e.g., like family

²¹ Josef Pieper, *About Love*, trans. Clara and Richard Winston (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1974), 20 [originally *Über die Liebe*, in *Schriften zur Philosophischen Anthropologie und Ethik: Das Menschenbild der Tugendlehre*, vol. 4, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2006), 315]; hereafter cited as *AL*, with German and English pagination, respectively, in parentheses in body text.

members, friends, or anyone whom we would treat as other selves. The other is instead approached in their otherness, in the demands they make upon us in justice. This takes us outside of ourselves and our intentions, since justice is realized in the external act alone, where the other receives their due. Our intentions or subjective states are not primary here; what is important is that our will is oriented towards the other in restitution. In this sense, Pieper spells out how the words for duty and debit are related.²² Pieper makes clear that what is owed to the other in justice, what we call their due (*suum cuique*), is itself something prior to the act of justice. The virtue of justice can restore only a due that should be present; it does not, out of itself, produce what is due a person.

Nevertheless, even though justice requires the continual owing and paying of debts, Pieper argues that the world cannot be kept in order through justice alone. The world's balance cannot be restored through the restitution of debts, because some obligations cannot of their very nature be remitted. This is caused by the disparity in the relationship itself between debtor and creditor. For example, there is no equality in man's relationship with God as his creator, and there is nothing man can offer that will discharge his debt. Still, Pieper maintains that this does not imply that man is merely a nonentity (*ein Nichts*) before God. Because, for Aquinas, with divine justice, there is always divine mercy; man is not a Sartrean subject, since what is due to man ultimately has its basis from something prior, and it is divine goodness in the form of mercy that is always prior, forming the condition of possibility which establishes the being of man. In essence man's being is gratuitous, a gift from God. It is for this reason that God's mercy extends beyond mere justice.²³ How should man bear the weight of a debt that can never be paid in full? For the Catholic tradition, the proper response to this existential debt is to throw a party.

Much of what Pieper writes about the feast is in large part inspired by his understanding of the ancient notion of religion and the virtue of *pietas*.

²² There seems to be an error in the Richard and Clara Winston English translation on p. 58. The German text suggests a double negative: "There are no words indicating moral obligation which do not at the same time pertain to the realm of justice."

²³ *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 21, a. 4: "So, in every work of God, viewed at its primary source, there appears mercy. In all that follows, the power of mercy remains, and works indeed with even greater force; as the influence of the first cause is more intense than that of the secondary causes. For this reason, does God out of the abundance of His goodness bestow upon creatures what is due to them more bountifully than is proportionate to their deserts: since less would suffice for preserving the order of justice than what the divine goodness confers; because between creatures and God's goodness there can be no proportion."

The practice of religion demands acts of sacrifice as fundamental to the life of the cult. The offering of sacrifice is seen as an act of justice, one that is in accord with natural law and man's condition as a creature (*CV*, 105/106). What is sacrificed is portions of time and space that are cut from the work-a-day world. But this is only the external form of the feast. Pieper makes it clear that the inner form is an event of affirmation, a thanksgiving, wherein the world and all life within it is affirmed as good.²⁴ There can be no doubt for Pieper that divine worship seeks to make the world whole again: "My purpose is to make clear that Christian worship sees itself as an act of affirmation, that expresses itself in praise, glorification, thanksgiving for the whole reality and existence" (*TW*, 245/38). And it is through the feast that man is brought again into an existential concord or attunement with the world (*TW*, 232/21). Even solemn feasts like All Soul's Day or Good Friday bring with them a consolation, a form of rejoicing, according to Pieper, which is similar to the catharsis Plato and Aristotle speak of in the witnessing of tragedy (*TW*, 238 /28). In the end, the religious feast reestablishes the accord between man and God not through a kind of work, but through leisure, which allows for the celebration feast and conversion of the heart.

"Fortitude presupposes vulnerability"; no other virtue addresses man's affective existence in so stark a fashion. Fortitude is tied to affectivity because it is the ability to accept (*hinnehmen*) injury where every injury we suffer is an assault on our bodily intactness and spiritual integrity. Ultimately, Pieper believes, every injury is a prefiguration of death, and so, in fortitude, the human person stands in relation to the possibility of his or her non-existence/non-being. Nevertheless, courage also stands as a medium between rashness and cowardice, both of which signify in unique ways the interior status of the person's self-relation to the world. To be rash or cowardly is a particular way we hold ourselves to particular possibilities of action or goods that are difficult to realize. Fortitude, being the third of the cardinal virtues, comes after prudence and justice, and it is informed and formed by prudence to receive its character as a virtue. Nor would fortitude be fortitude without a just cause as well. Pieper argues that fortitude is the inner disposition that clears the way and protects the realization of prudence and justice (*CV*, 121/125). Courage as a moral virtue

²⁴ Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, trans. Clara and Richard Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine, 1999), 26 [originally *Zustimmung zur Welt: Eine Theorie des Festes*, in *Kulturphilosophische Schriften*, vol. 6, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2012), 236]; hereafter cited as *TW*, with German and English pagination, respectively, in parentheses in body text.

is involved with our capacity to deal with fear. The brave person, Pieper tells us, is not unafraid, but neither does she shrink from fear when natural optimism fades and faith in technique or training begins to flounder.

For St. Thomas, the essence of fortitude is expressed more in the aspects of endurance and patience than in that of attack. This distinction is crucial if we are to understand the role of affectivity as not being one of pure passivity. It is only from the external perspective that endurance appears as mere passive suffering. Viewed internally, however, the enduring of fortitude is characterized as the active holding onto or clinging to the good which is reminiscent of hope itself. Similarly, patience is the serenity of mind, the exclusion of sadness and confusion of heart which is necessary for the realization of the arduous good (*CV*, 125/129). While attack is no less a part of fortitude, since it embodies self-confidence and hope, capitalizing on the wrath which is our response to an injustice, it falls short for Aquinas and Pieper because the Christian understanding of fortitude affirms a deep connection between moral and mystical fortitude. The essence of the latter is the grace-filled abandonment to God (*CV*, 134–35/140).

Only such stout-hearted activity of the soul, St. Thomas maintains, can support the individual through her physical injury or death (*CV*, 124/128; citing *ST* II-II, q. 123, a. 6, ad 2). Yet, would this not seem to imply that fortitude requires a strong, autarkic ego/self? This is not necessarily so, because the good which fortitude protects is a good which is *external* to the subject, and more important than the subject's own intactness. All fortitude, especially the fortitude of the martyr, requires a kind of selfless self-love, which admits to loving something more important than yourself. A willingness to risk one's life for such a good is a sign of true psychological and spiritual health and maturity. Pieper points out that modern psychology recognizes it is the lack of courage to accept injury and the incapacity for self-sacrifice along with an "egocentric anxiety" and "self-centered concern for security" which are symptoms of a deeper neurosis that can affect a person's psychic health (*CV*, 129/134). Our pre-moral, moral, and spiritual fortitude all share in what Pieper calls an "essential image" (*Wesenbild*): "Man accepts insecurity, he surrenders confidently to the governance of higher powers; he 'risks' his immediate well-being; he abandons the tense egocentric hold of a timorous anxiety" (*CV*, 133/138–39).

While temperance is the last of the cardinal virtues, it is by no means insignificant. With the virtue of temperance, Pieper argues, the goal is not simply moderation per se, but as Aquinas writes, it is the serenity of the spirit (*quies animi*). Pieper tells us that, in temperance, man turns his gaze upon his own actions and bodily existence. Instead of the Heideggerian

care (*Sorge*) as the structure of human existence, Pieper espouses the view of temperance as a kind of selfless self-preservation (*selbstlose Selbstbewahrung*). The difference between these positions is immense: whereas care speaks of the characteristic recollection and dispersion of *Dasein*'s existence alongside the world of its "concernful dealings," selfless self-preservation is the inner order (*innere Ordnung*) of the vital powers of self-preservation, self-fulfillment, self-assertion. This inner ordering is necessary because man's inner order—what I have argued as the subject's relation to itself—is not "a simply given and self-evident reality" for Pieper (*CV*, 142/148). It is part of the mystery of human existence, according to Pieper, that the very natural powers of preservation, when they are disordered, can become the most potent sources of the moral and spiritual disintegration of the person. Yet, Pieper is quick to point out that we should not imagine this unrest as a war between autonomous drives, taking place at some unconscious level. Instead, it is the whole person that becomes intemperate or unchaste. When the person falls into an intemperate state, whether it be unchastity, hedonism, false pride, blind wrath, or curiosity, it affects the person's contact with reality because all of these are forms of imprudence. Prudence depends on chastity and serenity of spirit to protect its objectivity.

The marvelous quality about temperance that Pieper seeks to understand is not how man can renounce all concern for his welling-being and life and live as an ascetic, but rather how one can love oneself and care for oneself in a selfless way. The answer according to St. Thomas is to recognize that to love God more than ourselves is in deep accordance with the very nature of our being as creatures and with the inherent striving of our will after the universal good. Aquinas writes: "Now, in natural things, everything which, as such, naturally belongs to another, is principally, and more strongly inclined to that other to which it belongs, than towards itself. Such a natural tendency is evidenced from things which are moved according to nature" (*ST* I, q. 60, a. 5, corp.). So, even within the framework of the Aristotelian substantiality of the human person, St. Thomas suggests the truly relational character of our being and subjectivity. Pieper was keenly aware of the need for a transcendent quality as the basis of temperance: "The force of this metaphysical truth formulated by Aquinas runs so deep that, in a sense, it becomes nonsensical to desire the preservation of the inner order for its own sake and consequently to will genuine preservation as such" (*CV*, 143/149).

Perfect temperance requires prudence, and Pieper is fond of St. Thomas's teaching that, even if there were a kind of instinctual governance in our bodily cravings without prudence, it would not have the character of virtue

(*CV*, 5/6). Here is the opportunity to understand the way reason and the affective part of nature come together, and how this affects the whole of our personhood. The role of reason (*ratio*) is to put us in touch with the real, and this is in harmony with Aquinas's conception of the good. Again, moderation is not the end of temperance, but merely a means. Regarding the virtue of chastity, Pieper spends considerable effort distinguishing the Scholastic sense of reason from its modern variations. First, reason in its broadest meaning is our contact with reality. In the act of understanding, we become intentionally the object of understanding as our intellect moves from potency to act. The appropriateness or fittingness of the object alone is what measures our reason and will. This is in contrast, Pieper claims, to Enlightenment theories of reason where chastity comes under the form of an imperative or value theory which is the product of determinate reason alone. Through prudence and temperance, human beings actively participate in becoming what they are. There is in the life of every subject, for Pieper, a need for responsibility, mystery, concrete action, and openness to becoming, or as the apostle Paul writes: "Now we see but a dim reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor 13:12).

Sin, Death, Cathartic Mania, and Metanoia

While the phenomena of sin and death are not usually the indices for contemporary philosophic anthropology, Pieper believes that these realities are important if we are to understand the true nature of human existence. The ancient philosophical and religious traditions can provide a powerful insight into the meaning of sin, guilt and death.²⁵

For example, the senses of cathartic mania and metanoia which Plato employs are not merely psychological explanations, but describe the effects on the whole human person when faced with the ultimate realities of evil

²⁵ Sin, death, mania, and metanoia become topics for a philosophical anthropology only if one has a conception of philosophy suitable for receiving their wisdom. Edvard Lorkovic makes an excellent point when he argues: "The medieval distinction between the two aspects of reason, *ratio* and *intellectus*, is useful here. . . . Myth is not, in this sense [*ratio*], rational. In contrast, *intellectus* 'is the name for the understanding in so far as it is the capacity of *simplex intuitus*, of that simple vision to which truth offers itself like a landscape to the eye' (p. 28). Myth can, thus, be intellectual. Through myth's symbols and images, one may apprehend or see the truth. The possibility that myth could lead to insight makes it decidedly philosophical" ("A Philosophical Defense of Myth: Josef Pieper's Reading of Platonic Eschatology," *Heythrop Journal* 62, no. 2 [2021]: 263).

and death. For the ancient religious and philosophical tradition, sin is something more than just a momentary lapse of judgment brought upon us by extremes in emotions, and death is more than the mere ceasing of bodily functions. Sin has the objective character of missing the mark, and the intentional turning away from the immanent and transcendent goal of human life—God. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato speaks of grievous maladies and afflictions caused by ancient sins and old guilt, where only madness and prophecy can lead to prayer and rites of purification (244d–e5).

Pieper believes that modern psychoanalytic theory and practice have confirmed that these “grievous maladies and afflictions” are indeed brought on by “ancient sins” and “old guilt.” This is so, for Pieper, because modern psychotherapy itself could be understood very roughly as a contemporary counterpart to the mantic arts, similar to the ancient Greek Asclepian medicine, in which the petitioner seeks instruction and healing through dreams (*EDM*, 298/61). In both cases, the patient must relinquish his autonomy and sovereignty in order to open herself to the healing powers of the mania:

In short, a view of man which comprehends the whole of existence seems to suggest, in our time as much as in Plato’s day, that such afflictions from such origins are indeed a reality. It suggests furthermore that man obviously cannot free himself from these afflictions by a rational technique for living; on the contrary, any attempt to do so will aggravate the afflictions. Deliverance can be obtained, if at all, only by a process of healing which is at any rate negative—one whereby the seeker after health must for a time surrender his hold of the rudder of self-control and autonomy. (*EDM*, 298/60–61)

At the same time, Pieper is sensitive to the criticism of overly identifying *theia mania* with modern depth psychology. For Plato, *theia mania* is a madness that has a divine origin, and is not at all structured along the lines of modern psychosis, nor does the modern conception of the unconscious admit anything of the divine. What Pieper seeks is a way of understanding psychoanalysis where the patient does not simply surrender his or her self to the irrational, but to a kind of “healing darkness,” in the sense of a *via negativa*. In this way, the passivity of the patient involved in psychoanalysis is reminiscent of *theia mania*. However, implied in this theory of passivity is a sense of confidence inspired by the hope of being cured. One can abandon oneself only in the hope of being saved. What both the patient and believer seek is a form of *metanoia*, a radical change of mind or heart that

will cure them of their afflictions and absolve them of their sins. But the possibility of any forgiveness or cure, Pieper explains, comes primarily from the knowledge, recognition, and abhorrence of one's own guilt. Pieper feels that Simone Weil expresses this simple truth best: "We experience good only by doing it, we experience evil only by refusing to allow ourselves to do it, or if we do it, by repenting it."²⁶ The concept of repentance, as the basis for the healing of all wounds caused by guilt and hereditary sin, is a phenomenon that is accepted in both the Christian and non-Christian world. From the writings of Loa Tzu and Plutarch to the practice of Hindu monks, Pieper argues, the whole of mankind bears witness to the redemptive power of *metanoia*. But *metanoia* also bears the stamp of mania because *metanoia* takes place only where the person has abandoned the complacency of mind that imagines himself as autarkic. However, this radical change of mind and attitude cannot be effected simply by an act of will, but rather comes in the form of a divine gift. Hence, repentance in the sense of *theia mania* requires the "other."²⁷ "No restoration or redress is possible unless the guilty person calls his sin by its true name. But that having been said, the person impaired by sin must respond as well, or the relation will never be restored" (*CS*: 278/96).²⁸

Unlike his contemporaries, Pieper follows the tradition of ancient and medieval philosophy and does not separate human nature from the notion of sin and grace, because "nature" refers not just to the first endowment but also to the permanent form of our physical being and action (*CS*, 233/36–37). What the reality of cathartic mania signifies would be impossible to accept for someone like Sartre, who held that man is totally free without a nature, and for someone like the theologian Jürgen Moltmann, who held that grace is meant to be more or less the liberation from nature. In opposition to these positions, Pieper argues that sin is simultaneously against

²⁶ Josef Pieper *Death and Immortality*, trans. Clara and Richard Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine, 2000), 70 [originally *Tod und Unsterblichkeit*, in *Schriften zur Philosophischen Anthropologie und Ethik: Grundstrukturen menschlicher Existenz*, vol. 5, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2007), 349]; hereafter cited as *DI*, with German and English pagination, respectively, in parentheses in body text.

²⁷ The outer orientation and term of this movement are important if we are to remain mindful that *theia mania*, the creaturely mode of human existence, is a kind of meta-physical affectivity.

²⁸ Josef Pieper, *The Concept of Sin*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine, 2001), 96 [originally *Über den Begriff der Sünde*, in *Schriften zur philosophischen Anthropologie und Ethik: Grundstrukturen menschlicher Existenz*, vol. 5, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2007), 278]; hereafter cited as *CS*, with German and English pagination, respectively, in parentheses in body text.

God, our nature, and reason itself.²⁹ To sin is to voluntarily turn away from God and to stand in contradiction to our very nature as creatures. Consequently, the guilt (*reatus*) that belongs to sin is a real determination of our being and not merely a subjective psychological state, so much so that Pieper speaks of a stain of sin as a decrease in the radiance of the soul itself. Ultimately, because sin is an offense against God, it cannot be mitigated, but only extinguished externally by an act of forgiveness by God himself.

Similarly, the modern mind does not know how to think about death. From the point of view of the biological and medical sciences, death is a natural, universal phenomenon that consists of the ceasing of the vital physiological activity of the body. Yet, at the same time, from the perspective of the individual, death is not normal, but is considered the most fundamental evil that can befall someone because it is the violent rendering of life from the person. If a philosophical answer is even possible, Pieper thinks that it must begin by not dismissing either of these two attitudes, and it should try to think about the reality of death with an unparalleled openness. Perhaps this is possible only if one is willing to transcend the usual perspectives and entertain the ancient idea that death may be a punishment. In this regard, Pieper relies on both the Christian theological tradition and the mysticism of Plato. The notion *pathémata anthrôpou* in Plato's *Symposium* suggests the existence of the primordial fall of man and his loss of some original wholeness through guilt. The Christian theological tradition sees death as one of the greatest of all evils. Yet, even if death entered the world as a punishment, strangely, it may not be an altogether bad thing. Pieper writes: "A loss can be healing, something bad can be good for us for the very reason that it oppresses and torments us" (*DI*, 323/43). Here, there is a broad correspondence in Pieper's account between *theia mania* as a sort of healing madness and the idea of just punishment. All punishments bespeak the idea of atonement—that is to say, punishment for punishment's sake is not the absolute end. Instead, punishment acts to restore something that has been lost due to sin. Whereas human penalties, Pieper argues, have no direct correspondence between the punishment and the good to be atoned for, the punishment of death is in direct correspondence and is an *inherent* consequence of sin as the very turning away from God, who is the source of all being and goodness. The Tradition

²⁹ Pieper explains we should understand reason as *logos*, which is the basis for both the creative truth of things from God and man's participation in this truth. The idea of *logos* helps to show how sin can be simultaneously against God, human nature, and reason.

understands that the consequence of sin is not merely psychological, but deeply mortal as well. But are we to take from this that the nature of man before that fall was to be immortal in the sense it was for Plato? No, Pieper is clear on this point that pre-fall Adam's immortality was not an aspect of his nature, but a gift from God. Otherwise, he could not have lost it. Here the notion of the capacity for the reception of a gift and loss of it through sin becomes important. Following, Karl Rahner, Pieper asserts that, if Adam had not sinned, he would have died a "deathless death"—that is, Adam's death would have been "a pure, manifest, active completion . . . from within."

Now, the metaphysics of such a position is difficult for the modern mind to grasp. Aquinas speaks of death being both natural and a punishment so that death is in one sense according to our nature, but in another sense against our nature.³⁰ Aquinas distinguishes between the necessity of dying (*necessitas moriendi*), which is our present state as a consequence of original sin, from the possibility of death (*posse mori*), which would present in even paradise. The human person, being a composite substance of soul and body, is capable of death. Yet, Pieper argues that the nature of the soul or spirit is to give life by being the vital principle for the body. "Its whole energy," Pieper writes, "aims at making the body it has patterned and imbued with form, alive and keeping it alive—so that death, considered in terms of the essence of the *soul*, could never be called simply natural" (*DI*, 342/62). Through sin, the soul forfeits its paradisaical gift which Aquinas describes as a certain aptitude for immortality, and with that it loses the capacity to immunize the body against corruption (*DI*, 342/63).

Admittedly this answer is difficult to receive, but the role of the sacred Tradition and theology, as Pieper contends, is not to provide well-rounded answers like Enlightenment rationalism, but to preserve what has actually happened. This is sometimes in opposition to the sensibilities of the culture of the time. Still, the wider concern of such a theory is how it anticipates our expectation of death and its ultimate meaning for us. It is worth remembering that Christ was not bound by the *necessitas moriendi* to his death, instead, his death was a free offering of his life which was made possible by the *posse mori*. This leads to the final aspect of death which an anthropology that thematizes affectivity and *theia mania* helps to make evident: what is our relation towards our death?

³⁰ For a modern treatment of this question, see Rudi te Velde's "Evil, Sin and Death," in *The Theology of Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 143–66.

To better understand the nuance of Pieper's position, it is best to place his thought alongside the ideas of Heidegger and Emanuel Levinas. Heidegger's *Being and Time* casts *Dasein* as, in its anticipation of death, realizing the "superior power" of its finite freedom to choose and take over the powerlessness of its abandonment in "being towards death."³¹ For Pieper, such a conception suggests a heroic gesture, which defies the traditional account of the necessity of death in order to prove *Dasein's* autonomous freedom. Levinas also characterizes Heidegger's being towards death as an act of supreme lucidity and virility. In contrast, Levinas's account describes the passivity and powerlessness of the hero to his fate. At the moment of death, Levinas tells us that we are "no longer able to be able." At death, both the mastery and hope of the hypostasis evaporate.³²

Pieper's account straddles these two positions. Death comes naturally from the outside; it is the violent rending of soul and body, but it is at the same time a personal act of the individual. Man does not simply die, but makes an end for himself. This is not an act of virility or resolute freedom, but the very manner in which she surrenders her life. At the moment of death, *status viatoris* is over; there is no more being on the way, and the inner existence of man is now faced with final irrevocable form. At this moment, like no other moment in a person's life, she is disposed to make a decision about the whole of her life. Pieper's sense here is radically opposite to Heidegger's and Levinas's: it is not that death already presupposes our freedom or that we are simply powerless; rather it is death that provokes our freedom.³³ No other experience, Pieper argues, possesses such a purifying force in the association of outer coercion of impending death along with the inner freedom of personal decision.

It is the coercive nature or what Pieper calls the "purifying force" (*reinigende Kraft*) of death's approach that makes our freedom possible. If we compare this to a Kantian notion of freedom where freedom is synonymous with spontaneity,³⁴ then we begin to see where affectivity, as openness, is necessary for the enactment of human freedom. In this sense,

³¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 436.

³² Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), 68–77.

³³ Pieper borrows this idea comes from Roger Troisfontaines's original French text *J'entre dans la vie*, but Pieper cites the German translation from *Ich sterbe nicht* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Basel-Wein, 1964).

³⁴ Kant's view is of a subject that is already self-conscious and self-recollected, on the assumption that it is conscious. See Addison Ellis, "The Case for Absolute Spontaneity in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason," *Con-Kantian Texts*, no. 6 (2017): 138–64.

human freedom is primarily a form of responsibility because it is a response to the impending death of the individual. With the notion of responsibility, death is no longer merely a biological phenomenon, but becomes a moral event in the life of the person as well. Pieper gives the reader a sense of how this could be from his personal experience of World War II: "If we think back to the years of the war, . . . we never felt so inwardly 'right' and 'in order' as at moments of extreme danger; we recall this state of fundamental sense of rightness as one of higher freedom, even though it was imposed upon us purely by external peril" (*DI*, 361/83).

It is around this shared insight that Pieper marshals the collected experiences of men like Count Helmuth James von Moltke and the German prison chaplain Harald Poelchau, who, among others, either faced the gallows themselves or were witnesses to executions under the Third Reich. Two elements emerge from these accounts: (1) the "fierce energy" with which one in these circumstances tries to bring about "ultimate order" in their "interior existence" and (2) the astonishing sense of freedom that emerges in confrontation with death (*DI*, 362–63/84–85). Concerning the first, Poelchau's testimony confirms for Pieper that the dying person's consciousness of guilt cannot be described as neurotic or psychotic, but is the sober recognition of false choices one has made in their life and for which one now seeks real forgiveness either by God or man. To the second point, at the approach of death, there arises a sense of freedom in the person that is a kind of light that both dispels the darkness of fear and hatred surrounding them and provides an open space for a moment of total disposition (*Gesamtverfügung*) of the person over their life. It is in this last moment or decision, Pieper claims, that a person's existence attains its last unalterable shape or form, the one in which the individual has affirmed for themselves. This moment is unique, unrepeatable, and impossible to anticipate, even by *Dasein*, because it is the moment where Pieper says the actor and his act vanish before his eyes. Nevertheless, this final form in which one surrenders their life—hopefully one full of thanksgiving and repentance—becomes that good that the punishment of death seeks to restore to man.³⁵

³⁵ One of the remarkable aspects of Pieper's reading of Aquinas on sin and death is his ability to treat Aquinas's notions of divine justice and mercy without losing their importance for the salvation of the person. Death is restorative in character because divine mercy precedes divine justice. For a modern discussion of this topic, see Francis Caponi, "'But Mercy Is above This Sceptered Sway': Mercy and Justice in Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of Religion* 98, no. 3 (2018): 327–47.

Perhaps, it is best to conclude this essay not with a summary of our results, but with a clarification of what we are not saying. The insights here expressed in no way seek to dull the idea that each human person is endowed with a specific nature that renders them an active agent, a knower of truth, and the one responsible for their action. Instead, we have attempted to show how the notion of affectivity or *theia mania* arises from Pieper's retrieval of the metaphysical structure of person as a creature, and how this becomes a central theme in his writings, one that allows Pieper to synthesize his philosophical and theological insights within the tradition of Greek and Christian philosophy. Ultimately, the creaturely aspect of our being determines the nature of human subjectivity, which, formed by an openness, is deeply relational in character insofar as man's being is ordained to an end outside itself. This not only sheds light on the nature of the philosophical act but also helps us to recover anew ancient notions like virtue, sin, death and guilt, and integrate them into a philosophical anthropology that can speak to the contemporary world.