



Philosophy and Eschatology: A Quest for Truth and Meaning

Patrick Owo Aleke

Department of Philosophy, St Joseph's Theological Institute, Cedara, South Africa

Email address:

patpoma@yahoo.co.uk, paleke@sjti.ac.za

To cite this article:

Patrick Owo Aleke. Philosophy and Eschatology: A Quest for Truth and Meaning. *International Journal of Philosophy*.

Vol. 9, No. 4, 2021, pp. 253-260. doi: 10.11648/j.ijp.20210904.21

Received: November 30, 2021; **Accepted:** December 20, 2021; **Published:** December 29, 2021

Abstract: Do philosophy and eschatology have anything in common? In an age when philosophical naturalism is taken as a norm especially among some philosophers of the Anglo-American tradition, does it not seem out of place to put philosophy and eschatology side by side? Is eschatology not merely a utopic thinking? These are some of the questions that might come to mind when the notion of eschatology is raised within philosophical circles? *Prima facie*, it seems that philosophy and eschatology are two contradictory disciplines or outlooks on reality since philosophy primarily relies on the critical use of human intelligence and reason whereas eschatology has religious overtones and thus is a theological discipline. This would seem so in an age in which philosophical naturalism is on the rise. However, a critical consideration would show that philosophy and eschatology are not as distant from each other as they might seem from a superficial analysis. If philosophy and eschatology are not mutually exclusive, then where does their convergence lie? Ultimately, both philosophy and eschatology search for truth and meaning in human existence because, ultimately, both philosophy and eschatology examine the entire meaning of human existence or, as it is put in popular parlance, they are concerned with the question of human destiny. So it is not out of place to argue that philosophy ultimately is eschatological thinking. In this paper therefore, it is argued that there is a mutual complementarity between philosophy and eschatology and that the primary locus for an adequate understanding of the intrinsic relation between philosophy and eschatology is the question of the existential meaning of the human person. I will contend that it is because the ancients considered philosophy to be eschatological thinking that some ancient thinkers viewed philosophy as a spiritual exercise and preparation for one's death. In fact, the understanding of philosophy as eschatological thinking is manifest at least implicitly from the ancient through the mediaeval to the modern era. Furthermore, I argue that it is because of the complementarity between philosophy and eschatology that philosophical theology or philosophy of religion is still relevant till today. Finally, whether eschatology is considered from a Christian point of view or from the viewpoint of African religions, it must be understood as a search for the meaning of human existence by seeking the connection between two fundamental questions, namely, the question concerning the human person and that concerning God.

Keywords: Philosophy, Eschatology, Human Person, Christ-event, Meaning

1. Introduction

The mention of philosophy and eschatology raises some questions such as: Have philosophy and eschatology anything in common? Are both disciplines not contradictory since *prima facie*, they seem to have different outlooks; philosophy relies on human reason and intelligence while eschatology is a theological discipline and so relies on revelation and faith? Is the juxtaposition of philosophy and eschatology not a disservice to philosophy especially in an

age in which philosophical pluralism is taken for granted and philosophical naturalism is on the rise and sometimes taken to be the default position? Would the placing of philosophy and eschatology side by side not lead an unfortunate position of calling philosophy *ancilla theologiae* as it was in the mediaeval period? Irrespective of how distant from one another the two disciplines – philosophy and eschatology – might seem to be, a critical consideration would show that the two disciplines are not contradictory but in fact, complementary. Philosophy and eschatology are not mutually

exclusive. One could argue that the two disciplines explore one reality from different points of view and from different starting points.

If philosophy and eschatology are not mutually exclusive, then where does their convergence lie? Ultimately, philosophy and eschatology are a search for truth and meaning in human existence because, ultimately each examines the meaning of human existence or as it is put in popular parlance, they are concerned with the question of human destiny. So it is not out of place to argue that philosophy, ultimately, is eschatological thinking. Whereas in its search for the meaning of human existence, philosophy relies solely on the use of human reason, eschatology in its search for the meaning of human life relies on reason illumined by faith. In other words, revelation and faith are quintessential in eschatology. For that reason, eschatology in its quest for meaning moves beyond this worldliness to the transcendental realm. Nonetheless, immanence and transcendence of eschatology assertions should be not understood as a movement towards a temporal future in linear or horizontal continuity [18, 20, 5]. In eschatological discourse, it is important to keep a balance between, the “now” and the “then”, the “present” and the “future”, the “yet” and the “not-yet”, realised eschatology and future eschatology [20].

To properly articulate the complementarity between philosophy and eschatology, a correct understanding of eschatology, and that of the human person from both philosophical and theological points of view is vital. Lack of a proper articulation of eschatology leads to confusion of eschatological and apocalyptic assertions or even the reduction of eschatology to false apocalyptic futurology [17]. Such a conception of eschatology reduces it to the apocalyptic predictions of the “end of world”. The hermeneutics of eschatological assertions as “end of the world” is to be understood within the context of the question of human nature and destiny bearing in mind that the human person is the locus of eschatological assertions. From this perspective, the “end of the world” conception of eschatology is not an apocalyptic catastrophic collapse or termination of the universe. Rather, it should be understood within the context of what Karl Rahner calls collective eschatology ([20]: 444-447, [8]: 163-165). This collective eschatology arises from the fact the human person is not just an isolated individual but a community and social being. The community referred to is not just the community of humans but of the entire universe of beings. In this perspective, eschatology understood as the “end of world” is to be viewed from a teleological viewpoint. It is about the finality of world as a universe of beings. The reality of collective eschatology that Rahner highlights is also affirmed by Wolfhart Pannenberg who asserts that “the eschatological conceptions of early Judaism, which was taken over as such by primitive Christianity, were directly concerned with the future of [humankind]”. Nonetheless, he insists the future in question does not “consist of prophecies of particular individual happenings which are to come about at some time

in the course of events, preceded and followed by a period of time” ([16]: 197). The question about the meaning of the eschatological future is an important one especially in the Christian tradition. I will return to that below.

In this paper therefore, I make two principal claims. Firstly, that a comprehensive exploration of eschatology is possible within the religious and theological context of eschatological discourse. Any eschatological discourse that is divorced from that context gradually becomes false apocalyptic predictions or “end of the world” utopic thinking. Secondly, that the locus of eschatological discourses whether from theological or philosophical perspective is the human person. Because of the importance I attached to the religious and theological context of eschatology and the importance of the human person as the locus of eschatological discourse, the first section of this essay will focus on the Christian conception of eschatology while in the second section I will explore philosophy as an eschatological thinking.

2. Eschatology in Christian Tradition

In its traditional understanding, eschatology is the doctrine about the last things – death, judgment, heaven purgatory and hell. In other words, eschatology considers questions regarding “resurrection, judgment including purgatory, eternal salvation and condemnation” ([5]: 19). From what are considered to be *eschata* in the Christian tradition, it is obvious that eschatology as a doctrine centres on the destiny or finality of the human person. So in the Christian tradition, one cannot discuss eschatology without placing the ultimate end of the human person at the centre. It is because of this that Rahner asserts that eschatology is “the doctrine about man [sic] insofar as he is a being who is open to the absolute future of God himself” ([20]: 431). Christian eschatology presupposes two things (i) the nature of the human person as “a free and created spirit who has been given God’s self-communication in grace ([20]: 431) and (ii) the redemption of the human person through the Christ-event, that is the death, resurrection and glorification of Christ. Emphasising the human person as the locus of Christian eschatology Rahner writes:

Eschatology is not really an addition, but rather it gives expression once again to man as Christianity understands him: as a being who ex-ists from out of his present “now” towards his future. Man can say what he is only by saying what he wants and what he can become. And as a creature, basically he can say what he wants in his freedom only by saying what he freely hopes will be given to him and will be accepted by his freedom. Because of man’s very nature, therefore, Christian anthropology is Christian futurology and Christian eschatology ([20]: 431).

The quotation from Rahner highlights some fundamental points that are vital for an adequate understanding of eschatology. The first point is that eschatology is not a discipline isolated from other theological disciplines but an integral part of Christian theology. It is Christian anthropology and Christology viewed from a different

standpoint. Because of the intrinsic relation between Christian eschatology, Christian anthropology and Christology, Rahner ([18]: 335) concludes that “Christian anthropology and Christian eschatology are ultimately Christology, in the unity (where alone they are possible and comprehensible) of the different phases of beginning, the present and the completed end”. The second point is that the Christian always lives his or her present life in the anticipation of the future which he / she receives as a gift. The future that the Christian person anticipates is not an unrealised future but non-temporal future which has both the “now” and the “not-yet” dimension. So eschatology understood as anticipation of the future is not mere futurology or some kind of prediction. The Christian person’s anticipation and knowledge of the future are rooted in his or her present conviction of being redeemed in Christ ([18]: 335).

What does the future in Christian eschatology refers to, if it is not to be understood in terms of linear or horizontal temporal order or a successive period of time? Christian eschatology is understood within its Christocentric foundation. Without the Christ-event – the passion, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus – there would be no meaningful Christian eschatology. Hence the Christian future is the Absolute Future, that is God ([19]: 59-68, [20]: 434; [12]: 343-347) since the realisation of Christian eschatological hope culminates in union with God. Because of the divine nature of eschatological future in the Christian tradition, Balthasar opines that eschatological future is not horizontal but vertical and hence it is supra-temporal ([5]: 48). He contends that despite the elements of Jewish eschatology that were assimilated by primitive Christianity and which are found in the New Testament, and might lead to misinterpretation of Christian eschatological future in terms of temporal dimension, it is the Christ-event that gives meaning to Christian future. Hence New Testament concepts derived from apocalyptic writings are not to be understood horizontally. He summarizes the Christian conception of eschatology thus:

apart from unimportant incidental vestiges of Jewish eschatology, the New Testament no longer entertains the idea of a self-unfolding horizontal theo-drama; there is only a vertical theo-drama in which every moment of time, insofar as it has Christological significance, is directly related to the exalted Lord, who has taken the entire content of all history—life, death and resurrection—with him into the supra-temporal realm ([5]: 48, italics in the original).

The understanding of the future in Christian eschatology reinforces a point I have already hinted, that is, that the hermeneutics of eschatological assertions requires that an authentic eschatology should not be confused with apocalyptic predictions of the future or the contemporary understanding of eschatology as the “end of time” or the “end of the age”. Eschatological knowledge of the future is in fact an extrapolation of the present existential condition of human beings both as individuals and as a community. Rahner articulates the relation between the “now” and the “then”, the

present and the future in eschatological assertions as follows:

[B]iblical eschatology must always be read as an assertion based on the revealed present and pointing towards the genuine future, but not as an assertion pointing back from an anticipated future into the present. To extrapolate from the present into the future is eschatology, to interpolate from the future into the present is apocalyptic” ([18]: 337).

The passage from Rahner highlights the defining feature of eschatological assertions, which is, that it is the present state and experience of the human person that is projected into the future. In other words, the knowledge of the future is founded on the knowledge of the present. For Rahner, if we misunderstand the present-future relation in Christian eschatological discourse, the resulting eschatology becomes utopic. Expressing the kind of projection that is fundamental to biblical eschatology assertions he writes:

[If] we want to read the eschatological statements of the New Testament correctly, because of the very nature of man they are necessarily conclusions from the experience of Christian *present*. What we know about Christian eschatology is what we know about man’s present situation in the history of salvation. We do not project something from the future into the present, but rather in man’s experience of himself and of God in grace and in Christ we project our Christian present into the future. For we cannot understand his present in any other way except as the beginning of and the coming to be of a future and as the dynamism towards it. Man understands his present only insofar as he understands it as the approach towards and the opening up of a future ([20]: 432).

It is important to note that what I have said so far about the need to avoid confusing eschatology with apocalyptic does not imply an undermining or rejection of apocalyptic assertions. What is to be rejected are false apocalyptic assertions that relies on unrealistic predictions of the future as they reduce eschatology to an impending catastrophic end of the world. While it is important to distinguish between real eschatology and authentic apocalyptic, it is essential to mention that authentic apocalyptic also has the same present-future relationship just as eschatology. However, in apocalyptic statements or images, the present situation is presented in future tense. In other words, apocalyptic assertions are presented as a report of an eyewitness who already has foreknowledge of what will happen in future ([20]: 432). This is the case because apocalyptic literature is by nature crisis literature. The eyewitness form of apocalyptic writings is evident in the book of Daniel (especially in chapters seven and eight) and Book of Revelation. The eyewitness account form of the future that is characteristic of apocalypse does not undermine the importance of apocalyptic assertions so long as their hermeneutics is put within a proper context.

When properly understood, eschatology and apocalyptic have the same goal. Both ultimately are concerned with the attainment of a meaningful human life in the present and a future realisation of the ultimate human destiny, that is, union

with God or beatific vision. Articulating the difference between authentic apocalyptic and genuine eschatology, Rahner ([20]: 433) asserts:

[A]pocalyptic can be understood as a mode of expression through which man really takes the concreteness of his eschatological future seriously, and does not forget the fact that his final and definitive future really arises out of his present life, both individual and social, and that this future is the final and definitive validity of his free actions. These actions, of course, are of a more radical nature because of God's self-communication. But eschatology is man's view from the perspective his experience of salvation, the experience which he now has in grace and in Christ. It is a view of how the future has to be if the present as the beginning of the future is what man knows it to be in his Christian anthropology.

Considering the close relation between eschatology and apocalyptic, it is understandable that there is a tendency to confuse eschatology with apocalyptic or even to equate the two. It is arguable that the prevalent confusion between eschatology and apocalyptic can be traced to the New Testament. This situation arises because of the influence of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology on primitive Christianity as it is evident in 'the Synoptic "little apocalypse" (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 17 and 21)' ([5]: 34-39). Balthasar is of the view that the presence of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology in the New Testament results from the primitive Church's misunderstanding of 'the true meaning of Jesus's own "expectation of the imminent end"' and her adoption of 'the Jewish perspective of an end to earthly, history' ([5]: 44).

Irrespective of the presence of some assertions or images in the New Testament that seem to suggest that eschatology and apocalyptic are equivalent, a proper understanding of the Christocentric foundation of Christian eschatology eliminates the possibility of equating the two since the Parousia, the second coming or the Day of the Lord or the Day of Judgment is not thought of only in terms of gloom and catastrophe but is depicted fundamentally as the day of salvation or restoration, that is, the day of the final resurrection.

So far in this section I have explored the idea of Christian eschatology. In my exploration, it is affirmed that Christian eschatology has the human person and his or her existential condition and destiny as its locus while the Christ-event is its foundation. Because of the centrality of the Christ-event in Christian eschatology, Balthasar ([5]: 20) asserts that the eschatology of Jesus is primary while the eschatology of human beings is secondary. In this sense, from the point of view of Christian eschatology Christ Jesus is the *eschaton* par excellence. Also in the section, it is affirmed that a correct understanding of eschatology requires an adequate understanding of the "present and the future", the "yet and the not-yet" dimensions of eschatological assertions. Lastly it is pointed out that a correct understanding of eschatology necessitates that it not be confused with apocalyptic. In the next section, I will explore a conception of philosophy as eschatological thinking.

3. Philosophy as Eschatological Thinking

In the introduction to this paper, I made a claim that although it might seem *prima facie* that philosophy and eschatology are contradictory disciplines a critical reflection shows that they are not mutually exclusive but, in fact, complementary. In the previous section, I examined the Christian conception of eschatology and affirmed that the locus of eschatology is human persons and their destiny or ultimate end. In this section I explore the relation between philosophy and eschatology. It is important to note from the outset that my exploration in this section will not be exhaustive. It is rather an outline. Briefly examining some philosophers, I will contend that ultimately their philosophical positions or practices are the product eschatological thinking.

The foundation of my claim that philosophy is essentially eschatological thinking is that philosophy is a critical reflection that, overtly or covertly, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, concerns itself with the questions of human nature, human experience and existential condition, the meaningfulness of human existence and ultimately the question of human destiny. Put differently, philosophy is the quest for the truth and meaning of human existence and finality. Hence, it is eschatological thought. Andrew Beards in his exploration of "What is This Thing Called "Philosophy"?" gives a description that implicitly shows that philosophy is eschatological thinking. He writes: "Studying philosophy, then is not like studying a particular science or a historical period. It is the study of something much closer to home: it is the study of essential aspects of who we are and of what our world is" ([6]: 2).

The claim that is made here does not imply a denial of the branches philosophy or philosophical sub-disciplines. Rather I contend that every philosophical question or investigation is worthwhile because of its relationship to the human person and human experience broadly understood. It is from this perspective that Immanuel Kant avers that all philosophical questions are ultimately reduced to one: what is man? Further, one can argue that the special interest that practical philosophy – ethics, moral philosophy, social and political philosophy – and philosophy of religion arouse in our age, is an indication that philosophy is eschatological thinking. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* gives a description of philosophy which could be interpreted as eschatological thinking thus:

Men and women have at their disposal an array of resources for generating greater knowledge of truth so that their lives may be ever more human. Among these is philosophy, which is directly concerned with asking the question of life's meaning and sketching an answer to it. Philosophy emerges, then, as one of noblest of human tasks (*Fides et Ratio* No. 3; [11]: 2).

A critical examination of the different philosophical periods shows that from its beginning, philosophy as a critical reflection is a form of eschatology thinking. The inscription at the Oracle of Delphi: "Know thyself"

encapsulates the eschatological nature of philosophical investigations. Although it might not be explicit, Socrates' philosophical orientation can be interpreted as eschatology thinking. The two dicta that are attributed to Socrates – “An unexamined life is not worth living” (Apology 38a5-6, [17]: 33) and the greatest task of the human person is the care of one's soul (Apology 30a-b; [17]: 28) are an indication that his philosophy is centred on the human person and the finality or the goal of the human person. The care of the soul is very important to Platonic Socrates because, in the view of Plato, the human person is the soul and the soul is immortal. So taking care of the human person includes constant reflection and the examination of one's experience and actions because the future of the person depends on the activities of the present. It is not an exaggeration to say that the ethical turn geared at attainment of virtue that is the central feature of Socrates' philosophy is an indication that his philosophy is an exercise in eschatological thinking. It is from an eschatological perspective that we can properly understand the Socratic maxim, knowledge is virtue. It is the virtue that gives rise to an authentic human existence in the present, while at the time looks towards and shapes the future.

It is not only Socrates's philosophical thought that is eschatological in orientation among the ancient philosophers. A critical look at Aristotle's ethics leads one to conclude that it also is eschatological thought. It is within the perspective of eschatological thinking that we come to proper understanding of Aristotle's position that the highest good for the human person is happiness, that is the act of living well rather than the quest for pleasure, honour or accumulation of wealth [2].

The conception of philosophy as eschatological thought is similar to Pierre Hadot's position that among the ancient, especially in the Hellenistic and Roman Schools, philosophy was considered as spiritual exercises ([9]: 82-109). Philosophy as spiritual exercises focuses on the human person and the quest for authentic existence in the present and in anticipation of the future. One engages in philosophy as spiritual exercises by, learning to live, learning to dialogue and learning to die [9]. This understanding of philosophy emphasises that philosophy is not primarily geared towards an accumulation of facts but towards the transformation of the human person. According to this view of philosophy which in essence is a kind of eschatological thinking, philosophy 'is not [just] a theoretical construct but a method for training people to live and to look at the world in a new way. It is an attempt to transform [humankind]' ([9]: 107).

Although there was a distinction between philosophy and theology during the Mediaeval era, there was also a close and dynamic relationship between them and between faith and reason. The relationship was so close that some thinkers argued that philosophy is *ancilla theologae* (handmaid of theology). So it will not be out of place or an exaggeration to say that philosophy in the Mediaeval period was eschatological thinking. Philosophical thought during that period was an exploration of the present human condition as

anticipation of the future.

St Augustine was so convinced about the intimate relationship between philosophy and theology that he argues that, although reason is a necessary condition for philosophical inquiry, it is insufficient. In his view, reason needs the guidance of faith in order to attain genuine wisdom ([15]: 28). According to St Augustine, human beings are capable of reasoning and believing because they have rational souls ([15]: 28). This implies that the nature of human persons as incarnate spirits is fundamental for both philosophical inquiry, religious belief and theological enterprise. In this sense one could say that St Augustine's philosophical thought is eschatological. The eschatological nature of St Augustine's philosophy is aptly captured in his dictum in the Confessions book one chapter one: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You” ([3]: 11). The words from St Augustine, indicate that the ultimate end of the human person is God. This is a common feature of Mediaeval philosophical thoughts. The end of the human person is God because the human is created in the image and likeness of God and as such is *Imago Dei*. This conception of eschatological thinking emphasises that eschatology as the doctrine of the last things does not conceive the end to be a termination or total collapse but as finality and the attainment of ultimate purpose.

St Thomas Aquinas, arguably the greatest Mediaeval philosopher-theologian also understands the end in terms of teleology. Eschatology to him, therefore, is not about future end understood as collapse or destruction but as the realisation of the finality of creatures which is union with God. Eschatology in this view could be interpreted as beatific vision. He writes in *Summa Contra Gentiles* book three, chapter 25 number two:

The ultimate end of each thing is God, as we have shown¹. So, each thing intends, as its ultimate end, to be united with God as closely as is possible for it. Now, a thing is more closely united with God by the fact that it attains to His very substance in some manner, and this is accomplished when one knows something of the divine substance, rather than when one acquires some likeness of Him. Therefore, an intellectual substance tends to divine knowledge as an ultimate end ([21]: 97).

It is important to note that from Aquinas' perspective, even when eschatology is understood as the end of world, it has teleological connotation. This is because in his view 'all creatures, even those devoid of understanding, are ordered to God as to an ultimate end, [and] all achieve this end to the extent that they participate somewhat in His likeness' ([21]: 97). The implication of this Thomistic position is that eco-related eschatological discourses should be framed within the context of the goal or finality of the universe or the world. This would involve some anthropocentric dimension (though not anthropomorphism) since the human person is the locus

¹ Aquinas explored this in book three, chapter 17 of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In chapter 18, he explored “how God is the end of all things”.

of eschatological discourse and it is the human persons that give voice to all creation in its yearning for fulfilment. This anthropocentric standpoint cannot be ignored or discarded since no eschatological discourses or eco-related eschatological discourses would arise in the first place, if there are no human persons or intelligent and rational beings capable of raising questions about finality and destiny.

While it might seem that there is a complete break between philosophy and theology during the enlightenment period, a critical analysis of some modern and contemporary philosophers shows that some philosophical positions during the modern and contemporary periods are eschatological in outlook. Two philosophers worth mentioning during these periods are Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger.

Kant's formal ethics or ethics of duty rests on the postulation of God's existence or the assumption that God exists and that the human soul is immortal. He is unequivocal that ethical acts make one worthy of the *summum bonum* (supreme good), which happiness [12]. However, the actualisation of the *summum bonum* is not possible in this present life. This is so because according to him, it is only the supreme legislator or God who knows whether any human act is moral or just legal. Bearing in mind that the actualisation of happiness as the *summum bonum* can only be realised in the future, one could say that Kant's ethics is an eschatology. It is important to note that the present and future, the yet and not-yet poles of eschatology are evident in Kant's ethics. This is because human actions in the present are essential for the realisation of future happiness. So a possible attainment of the *summum bonum* can be projected from the present existential condition and acts of the human person. Nonetheless, such projection is not a prediction. That is why Kant asserts that it is only the supreme legislator that can judge whether human acts are moral or legal. For Kant what differentiates legality from morality is whether one has acted according to the law or from the law. He writes:

The notion of duty, therefore, requires in the action, objectively, agreement with the law, and, subjectively in its maxim, that respect for the law shall be the sole mode in which the will is determined thereby. And on this rests the distinction between the consciousness of having acted *according to duty* and *from duty*, that is, from respect for the law. The former (*legality*) is possible even if inclinations have been the determining principle of the will; but the latter (*morality*), moral worth, can be placed only in this, that the action is done from duty, that, simply for the sake of the law ([12]: 174).

Another point that is significant when arguing that Kant's ethics is eschatological thought is that the nature of humans as rational beings who are capable of acting freely is central to his moral doctrine. So because humans are endowed with freedom and immortal souls, they can expect future happiness which can only be realised in the ultimate future but not in the horizontal future.

One can as well argue that Kant's philosophy is eschatological. An indication of this is his view that the unity of all the interests of reason (both speculative and practical)

are summed in the three questions: "What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?" (A805/B833; [13]: 677). In a sense human knowledge should lead to action and action leads to hope whose possible realisation is in the ultimate final end.

While *prima facie*, Heidegger's philosophy might not seem to be eschatological, a critical examination of Heidegger's *Being and Time* will reveal that it is eschatological thought. Judith Wolfe, for instance, opines that Heidegger's *Being and Time* is eschatology because his depiction of human quest for authentic existence is projected towards the future. She writes: 'At its simplest, Heidegger's account in *Being and Time* is "eschatological" because it envisions the possibility of authentic existence as dependent on a certain (existential) relation to one's future' ([22]: 118). It is not an exaggeration to assert that Heidegger's characterisation of Dasein as a Being-in-the-world and as such a Being-towards-death is eschatological. According to him, Dasein becomes aware of his or her existential condition through the state of mind which he calls anxiety. He insists that the relationship between anxiety (*Angst*) and death (*Tod*) should not be confused with that between fear and demise (*Ableben*). He writes:

Anxiety in the face of death is anxiety 'in the face of' that potentiality-for-Being which is one's ownmost, non-relational, and not to be outstripped... Anxiety in the face of death must not be confused with fear in the face of one's demise. This anxiety is not an accident or random mood of "weakness" in some individual; but, as a basic state-of-mind of Dasein it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being towards its end ([10]: 295).

While one might be tempted to interpret the phrase "Dasein exists as thrown Being towards its end" in terms of cessation, such an interpretation would be incorrect since it would equate anxiety in the face of death with the fear of demise. Hence it is better to understand the phrase in terms of finality. In other words, Dasein's death, that is, its mortal condition [1], is the horizon in which the realisation of its purpose is anticipated.

The key terms in *Being and Time* like, anxiety, death, falling, call of conscience, alienation, temptation, etc. have eschatological undertones which are influenced by Heidegger's Christian background ([1]: 8-10). It is because of the eschatological perspective of *Being and Time*, that Heidegger asserts that death is not an event but a phenomenon since according to him, death is a way to be which Dasein takes up at birth. It worth noting that death in Heidegger's view is not a biological end. So one could argue that the relation between anxiety and death in *Being and Time* serves to emphasise a balance between the eschatological yet and not-yet. 'Anxiety and death then are not an obstacle or limit situation for the human person. They do not manifest the closing down of possibilities for Dasein. They are primarily the horizon for the self-actualisation or rather the realisation of the human person who though finite yearns for the transcendent' ([1]: 7).

In this section, I have explored the relationship between philosophy and eschatology. From some philosophical positions that represent the different epochs of philosophical thought, I have argued that philosophy when properly understood is eschatological thought in that it focuses on the present experience and existential conditions of human beings while at the same time projects into the future or finality of human beings both as individuals and community

4. Conclusion

In this essay the relationship between philosophy and eschatology is explored. It is argued that although it might seem at first sight that the two disciplines are contradictory when properly understood they are in fact complementary because both disciplines are ultimately concerned with the question of human destiny. I aver that the key to understanding the complementarity between philosophy and eschatology is the realisation that the human person is the locus of all eschatological assertions and that it is counterproductive to dissociate eschatology from its religious foundational context. To establish the complementarity between philosophy and eschatology, in this essay I began by exploring the Christian conception of eschatology and highlighted the centrality of the Christ-event in the Christian understanding of eschatology. It is also highlighted that the human person is the second pole of Christian eschatology because without the recipient of Christ's redemptive message and acts, Christian eschatological discourses would be at best incomplete. In other words, from the Christian perspective there would not be the doctrine of the last things if Christ Jesus had not died, been buried and resurrected and if there were no human persons who have benefitted from Christ's salvific death and resurrection. Pope Benedict XVI expresses the Christian view of eschatology thus: 'Every Christian discussion of the last things, called eschatology, always starts with the event of the Resurrection; in this event the last things have already begun and, in a certain sense, are already present' [7].

It is also stressed that the human person is the locus of eschatological assertions since the last things in question (death, judgment, purgatory, heaven [salvation] and hell [condemnation]) concern the finality or ultimate end of the human person. Taking into account the question of human destiny or quest for meaning which is central to the theological and religious conception of eschatology, some philosophical thoughts in different epochs were examined and it is averred that all philosophical explorations ultimately overtly or covertly concerns itself with questions concerning human experience, human existential condition and the meaning of human existence. And because philosophy concerns itself with such questions, it is concluded that philosophy is eschatological thinking.

To arriving at the conclusion that philosophy is eschatological thinking, after the investigation of the understanding of eschatology in the Christian tradition,

especially from the Catholic perspective, there was an outline of the philosophy of some key philosophers from different philosophical epochs. For the ancient era, the philosophical positions of Socrates and Aristotle, especially, Socrates' ethical turn, are taken as paradigmatic conception of philosophy as eschatological thinking. For the mediaeval period, the philosophical positions of St Augustine of Hippo and St Thomas Aquinas are outlined. St Augustine represents early mediaeval period, a period that is also called the Patristic era, while St Thomas Aquinas represents the golden age of the mediaeval era, an era that is also known as scholastic period. To show that philosophy in the modern era is eschatological thinking, the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, especially his ethics of duty, was explored. It was highlighted that because Kant's ethics is founded on the assumption that God exists (or at least on the postulation of God's existence), that the human soul is immortal and that the *summum bonum* can only be attained in the afterlife, it is eschatological thinking. Lastly the philosophy of Martin of Heidegger, especially the philosophical position of early Heidegger of *Being and Time* is outlined to show that contemporary philosophy is eschatological thinking. The eschatological nature of Heidegger philosophy is manifest in his conception of anxiety and death; and in his characterization of Dasein both as Being-in-the-world and Being-towards-death.

From the exploration of the philosophical positions of the various philosophers that are outlined, it is evident that philosophy and eschatology are complementary disciplines that attempt to address the questions of human experiences, human existential conditions and human destiny from two different but complementary perspectives.

References

- [1] Aleke, Patrick O 2019. "Anxiety and Death: An Exploration of Human Condition in Early Heidegger, *Logos: African Journal of Philosophy*, 2 (1) 1-12.
- [2] Aristotle, 1984a. *Nichomachean Ethics*, in Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *Aristotle: Complete Works*. New Jersey – West Sussex: Princeton University Press.
- [3] Augustine, 1955. *Confessions*. Translated and edited by Albert C. Outler.
- [4] 1984b. *Eudemian Ethics*, in Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *Aristotle: Complete Works*. New Jersey – West Sussex: Princeton University Press.
- [5] Balthasar, Hans 1998. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume v: The Last Act*, translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- [6] Beards, Andrew 2010. *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth and Meaning*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- [7] Benedict XVI 2008. "Eschatology: The Expectation of the Parusia", from <http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_au_20081112.html> [Accessed on 15 November 2021].

- [8] Fischer, Mark 2005. *The Foundations of Karl Rahner: A Paraphrase of the Foundations of Christian Faith, with Introduction and Indices*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- [9] Hadot Pierre 1995. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Oxford – Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- [10] Heidegger, M 1953 (4962). *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen - Niemeyer; English trans., *Being and Time*, tr. J Macquarrie – E Robinson, New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- [11] John Paul II 1998. Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship between Faith and Reason, from <Fides et Ratio (14 September 1998) | John Paul II (vatican.va)> [Accessed 10 November 2021].
- [12] Kant, Immanuel 1909. *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, Trans, T. K. Abbott, London – New York: Longmans, Green, and Co.
- [13] Kant, I 1999 (2016). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by P Guyer & A W Wood, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [14] McCool, Gerald (ed.) 1975. *A Rahner Reader*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- [15] Pacioni, Virgilio 2010. *Augustine of Hippo. His Philosophy in a Historical and Contemporary Perspective*. Herefordshire: Gracewing Ltd.
- [16] Pannenberg, Wolfhart 1973. *Basic Questions in Theology, volume three*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- [17] Plato 1997. Apology, in John M. Cooper (ed.), *Complete Works*. Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.
- [18] Rahner, Karl 1966. “The Hermeneutics” of Eschatological Assertions”, in Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, volume iv: More Recent Writings*, translated by Kevin Smith. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- [19] 1969. *Theological Investigations, volume vi: Concerning Vatican Council II*, translated by Karl-H & Boniface Kruger. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- [20] 1978. *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, translated by William V. Dych. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- [21] St Thomas Aquinas 191975. *Summa Contra Gentiles. Book three: Providence*, part, translated by Vernon J. Bourke. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- [22] Wolfe, Judith 2013. *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.