

THE LIFE OF REASON – R.S. PETERS' STOIC PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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Abstract: Although R.S. Peters is one of the founding fathers of the analytical paradigm in the philosophy of education, in this paper I develop his less known synthetic view on education. To that purpose, I explore Peters' integrative view on the relationship between reason and passion (the emotions), his view on the levels of life, and even his view on religious education. What emerges from this exploration is the claim that Peters is, in an important sense, not a Kantian philosopher and the thesis that Peters' work on the analysis and justification of education gets its ultimate inspiration from an anthropological and metaphysical background, which Ray Elliot identified as Peters' Stoic attitude.

Keywords: R.S. Peters; rational passions, Kantian philosophy of education, stoicism, religious education

1. Introduction: is Peters a Kantian?

Like all other views on the nature and the education of the emotions, Peters' view is built upon a theory of human nature. John White identifies this underlying theory as *Kantian*. He singles out two main tenets. One tenet is the bifurcation in human nature:

Peters' attitude towards the emotions is irresistibly reminiscent of Kant. He shares the views that human beings ought to realise their rational natures and that they are often impeded in this task by non-rational influences, their passions and inclinations. Kant's rationale for his view depends on his 'two-world' view of man as consisting of a noumenal self and a phenomenal self. Peters does not use this distinction, but for him there is still something of a bifurcation in our nature: on the one hand the area of convention and reason, and on the other that of emotions and motives. Generally speaking, as with Kant, he holds that it is the job of the first part of our nature to keep the second part from sullying it or diverting it from its proper tasks. (White, 1984, pp. 205-206)

The other tenet is the concept of rationality:

As with Kant, problems arise over the most central concept of Peters' philosophical psychology and ethics, the concept of rationality. Acting rationally is not to be understood in terms of satisfying one's wants: Peters' rich concept of wanting ... incorporates within it the idea of having reasons for acting. Detached from desire, the concept of reason in both Kant and Peters becomes obscure, the transcendental arguments of *Ethics and Education* leaving the reader as unenlightened as Kant's delineation of the noumenal self in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Groundwork*. (ibid., p. 208)

White offers an interesting description of what he takes to be Peters' background assumptions about human nature and rationality. At a closer look, however, it is debatable whether Peters really worked from these assumptions. With regard to White's interpretation, I want to ask the following critical questions. Does Peters really subscribe to these two tenets? Is Peters really a Kantian?

In this paper, I throw some doubt on the standard interpretation — and perhaps even on Peters' self-interpretation — of Peters as a Kantian philosopher. To that end, I begin with exploring his integrative view on rationality and its relation to the emotions. Next, I expand this view further into Peters' synthetic view on life and education, central to which is his Stoic attitude.¹

2. The integrative view: reason and passion

As to the relation between reason and passion, two opposite views can be discerned in the history of philosophy. According to the 'dominating reason' view, reason, as the essence of human nature, dominates and ought to dominate passion, whereas according to the 'ruling passions' view, conversely, the passions rule the waves of life, inclusively the life of reason. In modern philosophy, the first view is typically exemplified by the practical philosophy of Kant, while the second by that of Hume, who famously claims that "[r]eason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (Hume, 1739-40, p. 415). Peters does not side with either view and criticizes an assumption they both have in common: the *antithesis* between reason and passion. As against this common assumption, he defends the integrative view that reason and passion not only mutually influence each other but also intrinsically form a partnership.

2.1. Rational passions

Given the fact that in ordinary language the term 'passion' suggests some kind of turbulence or passivity, do the emotions necessarily exclude rationality? Although Peters admits, very plausibly, that some emotions tend to be irrational or unreasonable, he claims that in general they do not necessarily exclude rationality and that we can speak of (at least some of) them as reasonable and perhaps even rational:

... there is the obvious point that what we call emotions are good examples of passive states; but we can speak of them as being both unreasonable and irrational. This suggests that, on certain occasions, we can at least speak of them as reasonable, if not as rational. ... It does not seem, therefore, that the passive states, which we call emotions, are *necessarily* either irrational or unreasonable. Nevertheless there is a tendency for them to be. (Peters, 1971, pp. 160-61)

Some emotions, such as indignation and jealousy, might be perfectly reasonable in that they can be based on true beliefs about and appropriate appraisals of the pertinent situation. Yet the rationality of these emotions still depends upon standards of appropriateness that are upheld in a specific cultural context or against the backdrop of a particular world-view. Although it is not necessarily unreasonable or irrational to be overcome by emotion, the contingent fact remains that the emotions as passive and turbulent mental states contain the potential for unreasonableness and irrationality in them. Emotions possess this tendency to irrationality because they are based on hasty appraisals and they also warp or cloud other judgements:

For as the appraisals, which are intimately connected with them, are of situations which are very important to us, they are often made rather intuitively and urgently, with little careful analysis of the grounds for making them. They are also the most potent *source* of irrationality in that attention to features which are relevant to making *other* sorts of judgements is often deflected by irrelevant appraisals which are conceptually connected with our emotions. (ibid., p. 161)

However, even if the emotions are liable to unreasonableness and irrationality, they are not impervious to reason and will. As Peters' appraisal view makes clear, reason is not the slave of the passions but is capable of exercising a marked influence on them by the rationalization of emotion-appraisals and the rational control over emotional passivity.

Conversely, the passions also have a distinct influence on the use of reason. According to Kant, (pure) reason is independent from our emotional inclinations, while according to Hume, reason is merely the ability to make inductive and deductive inferences cut off from the discrete existence of the passions. As against both of these views, Peters argues for the *conceptual connection* between the operation of reason and a specific type of passions, which he calls 'the rational passions'.

Peters claims that reason cannot properly function unless it is supported by *rational passions*. The operation of reason as a transcending movement is unintelligible without these specific emotions in the service of reason:

There is a level of conduct connected with the use of reason which is only intelligible on the supposition that we postulate certain distinctive passions as well as the ability to infer, demonstrate, etc. The obvious overriding one is the concern about truth, without which reasoning in general would be unintelligible. ... anyone who is concerned about truth must be concerned about correctness — about getting his facts right; he must care about consistency and clarity; he must abhor irrelevance and other forms of arbitrariness; he must value sincerity. And so on. (Peters, 1971, pp. 169-70)

The love of truth is also connected with not only the love of order and system but also the hatred of contradictions and confusion. The use of reason requires suitable emotional dispositions, such as the determination to find out what really is the case in combination with the feeling of humility and the sense of givenness necessary for accepting the possibility that one may be in error. A person who is influenced by passions of this specific type is a reasonable man, whereas the unreasonable man "is a victim of prejudice and egocentricity ... biased and short-sighted ... obtuse, wilful, arbitrary and pigheaded" (Peters 1973, p. 79). The rational passions are, therefore, "of cardinal importance in high-grade experience. They act as monitors maintaining rational thought and action". (Peters, 1971, p. 166).²

The rational passions sustain not only the operation of theoretical reason but also that of *practical reason*:

These passions ... are internalisations of principles which give structure and point to theoretical enquiries; but they are also involved in practical activities and judgements in so far as these are conducted in a rational manner. (ibid., 1971, p. 170)

The concept of rational passions is primarily connected with that of different passions surrounding the concepts of truth and objectivity. Reason is universally

at work in theoretical enquiries as well as in practical activities and judgements. The universality of reason in the theoretical domain corresponds with its *impartiality* in the practical domain. So, the concept of rational passions is secondarily connected with that of different passions surrounding the concepts of truthfulness and fairness. As internalized rational principles, the rational passions in the service of practical reason function, therefore, as universalistic motives and self-transcending emotions. Rational passions, as stable moral sentiments, such as the sense of justice, respect for persons and benevolence, provide the moral motivation to apply the otherwise inert principles of justice and impartial consideration.

2.2. The levels of life

To briefly summarize the line of thought until this point, reason has a passionate dimension and passions have a reasonable dimension. The life of reason is not inconsistent with a life of passion. So, against the antithesis between reason and passion, Peters defends the integrative view that reason and passion mesh with each other. In the light of this view, he subsequently reinterprets Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development. Peters supplements Kohlberg's cognitivism with an affective aspect.³ Against the backdrop of the integrative view, he develops this supplementation into a sketchy but suggestive theory of *the levels of life*. Given that the antithetic contrast between reason and passion is untenable, Peters proposes, as an alternative, the contrast between different levels of life, with at each level a specific interconnection of rationality and the emotions. Roughly parallel with Kohlberg's theory, he distinguishes between three levels (Peters, 1971, pp. 162-71; 1973, pp. 91-101):

- A. Arational or Irrational;
- B. Unreasonable; and
- C. Reasonable or Autonomous.

These levels of life should not only be interpreted diachronically, as the Kohlbergian sequence of stages, but also synchronically, in the sense that even reasonable and autonomous adults are still liable to irrational and unreasonable thinking and acting. Actually, Peters adds a novel, basic level to the Piagetian-Kohlbergian levels of moral development under the inspiration of Freud, namely the arational or irrational one (A). In addition, he compresses two of their levels — namely, the egocentric (premoral) and heteronomous (moral realistic)

ones — into a single level: the unreasonable one (B). The three different levels of life specify different levels of reasoning, each with its own type of passions. Accordingly, Peters distinguishes a high(er)-grade type of experience from a low(er)-grade type experience in his hierarchy of levels. I briefly describe each level.

First, there is a basic level of life below the absolute minimum level of rationality and conceptuality:

There is a level of thinking and affect which precedes the development of the conceptual apparatus necessary for life as a purposive, rule-following agent, and which persists after the development of this apparatus which we associate with 'reason'. The individual thus retains this capacity to react much more 'intuitively' to affectively significant stimuli that are fragmentary and may be well below the threshold of conscious discrimination. (Peters, 1971, pp. 164-65)

Very young children at this level are called 'arational' or 'non-rational' because there is not yet a rational background present, while adults relapsing to this level are called 'irrational' — that is, contrary to rationality — precisely because they relapse from such a background. Freud characterizes this level negatively in terms of the lack of the rational categories of non-contradiction and causality, as well as that of the reality principle, and positively in terms of the vicissitudes of (unconscious) wishes and aversions (Peters, 1965, pp. 376-79). In Peters' theory the basic level of life represents the *animality* of man.

Secondly, there is the unreasonable level of life, at which beliefs tend to be infected with particularity or arbitrariness and emotions tend to be of a 'gusty' type, such as lust and envy which are dominated by the pleasures and pains of the moment. Although, at this level, there is a rational background present and persons are responsive to reasons, the reasons they have are very weak and not objectified by the reasons of other people:

Being unreasonable ... is not connected, like being irrational, with a level on which reason gets no grip. Rather it is connected with a level of life when there are reasons, but the reasons are of a pretty low-grade sort. It is a level of life in which notions such as 'bias', 'prejudice', 'short-sighted', 'obtuse', 'wilful', 'bigoted' and 'pig-headed' have a natural home. (Peters, 1971, p. 168)

Since the reasons are largely self-referential in that they are considerations without giving due weight to the reasons of others, it is readily understandable that Peters includes the Piagetian-Kohlbergian egocentric (pre-moral) and heteronomous (moral realistic) levels in his unreasonable level. So, both the egoist and the conformist are, each in his own way, unreasonable and inauthentic.

Thirdly, and finally, there is the reasonable or autonomous level of life — the point of culmination of *the life of reason*. Also at this level, the specific cognitive and affective aspects are bound together. The person's capacity for rational reflection and critical thinking in the service of truth and objectivity takes front stage. Yet the exertion of this capacity is impossible without the motivating role of the rational passions, in particular the concern about truth. By exercising the capacity for reflection and criticism weak *prima facie* reasons are eliminated, whereas strong ones are transformed into all-things-considered reasons. By the same use of reason transient emotions are either canalized in innocuous directions or transformed into stable sentiments. The effective adoption, under the influence of the rational passions, of such a rational attitude towards life transforms it not only into a reasonable life but also into an autonomous or authentic life. The life of reason is, however, precarious as it is vulnerable to relapses from rationality into unreasonableness or irrationality.

Demonstrably, then, Peters' integrative view of reason intermeshing with passion develops into a theory of human nature and an attendant conception of rationality. In the light of his theory of the levels of life, it is arguable that Peters does *not* subscribe to the two main tenets White singles out: the bifurcation of human nature and the Kantian conception of rationality. Peters' theory of human nature is much more holistic than White suggests and there exists a striking cohabitation of reason and passion at each level of life that is orthogonal to the Kantian isolation of rationality from the emotions. In this important sense, Peters is not a Kantian philosopher. At the same time it can hardly be denied that his philosophical approach was deeply influenced by Kant — especially in his *Ethics and Education* (1966). Yet, whatever Peters' self-interpretation was, the Kantian influence mainly stayed at the *formal* level, particularly in his use of transcendental arguments. At the content level, it transpires that Peters is deep down a Stoic, as I will argue below.

What is more, Peters' integrative view widens still more into, what I call, his 'synthetic view' of the world and human life. While expounding this view, I also take a look at its consequences for Peters' conception of education and its aims.

3. The synthetic view: educating for life

Against the backdrop of Peters' later writings, answering the question 'How do we adequately conceive of moral development and moral education?' amounts

to answering the question ‘How do we adequately conceive of *education and its aims* as such?’ In his earlier writings, Peters starts off with an analytic view to answer this question about the nature of education. The concept of education is analysed in terms of the conditions of desirability, knowledge conjoined with understanding, and intrinsicness in relation to an initiation into a form of life. (Peters 1963; 1966, part one) This conception of education as an initiation into the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake has been criticized, among others by John White (1984), for being (too) narrowly *rationalistic* as it focuses one-dimensionally on the development of the child’s cognitive faculties.

However, in the light of his later writings, it transpires that Peters eventually does not hold such a narrow conception of education. In this later work, Peters’ thinking develops towards a far more broad conception that places education in the context of his overarching metaphysical world-view and philosophy of life, that is, his *synthetic* view.

Peters identifies education not only with *moral* education —“all education is ... moral education” (Peters, 1970, p. 73) — but also, by the transitivity of identity, with *liberal* education: “my conception of moral education is indistinguishable from the ideal of a liberal education” (ibid., p. 81). At first sight, this might be surprising, but on a closer look, in the light of several of Peters’ assumptions, it is fully understandable. Given the more specific concept of education that Peters contrasts with the more generalized one and his broad ethical pluralism which includes worthwhile activities on the list of essential moral features, the identification of education as such with moral education is readily comprehensible. And in view of, once more, that specific concept of ‘the educated man’ and Peters’ conception of liberal education as an education for a ‘humane’ and ‘civilized’ life, the further identification of education with liberal education plausibly follows. Of course, one cannot deny that *reason* plays a pivotal role in moral as well as liberal education, and thus in education as such. Educating for life is, according to Peters, educating for *the life of reason*, in which the ideal of reasonableness and the concern about truth take central stage.

Some may find this rational view objectionable. But is it? Is this objectionable? Is this indefensible? I think not. Peters’ educational theory is evidently erected on the ancient ideas that mature human beings are rational animals and that the unexamined life is not worth living. Yet, although reason plays a leading part in this venerable tradition, theories in that tradition are not necessarily

rationalistic. Whatever the interpretation of these ancient ideas might have been in the history of philosophy, Peters does not identify reason as the highest good in his educational theory:

I do not wish ... to hold up reasonableness as the *summum bonum* or anything as pretentious as that. ... Reasonableness, rather, is to be understood as a way of going about life which is compatible with all sort of different emphases, with the pursuit of a variety of excellences. ... Reasonableness surely requires only a manner of travelling, not any particular destination. (Peters, 1973, pp. 101-102)

We can sum up this line of thought by putting forward the thesis that reasonableness or reason does not so much pertain to the content as to the *form* of conscious life. Education for the life of reason is, then, the sustained attempt to elicit and build up the rational form of the moral mode of experience in the broad sense. Educating children to become reasonable beings is educating them into a principled, rational morality in the broad sense. Reason is thus not a concrete aim, but only a formal one of moral and liberal education.⁴ The aim of education is the attainment of the reasonable or autonomous level of life. Arguably, this rational form of conscious life also includes an *affective* aspect, besides a cognitive one. The education of the *rational passions* is as central to the formation of the rational form of life as that of the rational principles: "... moral education is centrally concerned with the development of certain types of motives, especially with what I have called the rational passions" (Peters, 1970, p. 75). If there exists an intrinsic unity between reason and passion at all the different levels of life, then the education of the emotions is essential to education as such.

3.1. Religious rationality

Peters' conception of education is *not* narrowly *rationalistic* in the sense that education for life incorporates education for leading a passionate life in so far as this is compatible with leading a humane and civilized life. Yet, there is more to what Peters envisions as leading a life of reason. Surprisingly perhaps, being a truly reasonable man (or woman) also involves being aware of the *limits* of reason. Accordingly, educating for the life of reason is certainly not rationalistic because it implies educating for the appreciation of the *boundaries* of reason. Remarkably, Peters (1973, pp. 103-28) relates these limitations of reason to the *religious* dimension of a principled, rational morality. Religion, in a sense to be specified, is not opposed to the life of reason. Even for a reasonable man there is

a specific religious dimension to life precisely because it is his aspiration to lead a life a reason. Paradoxically perhaps, the appreciation of reason's boundaries engenders a transforming experience which constitutes, according to Peters, the possibility of religious experience for a reasonable man. The awareness of reason's limits has then further a positively transforming impact on the status of a rational morality and other aspects of the moral life.

This religious dimension of a rational morality has nothing to do with religious education understood as educating into one or other concrete religious denomination, such as a Christian or an Islamic one. What Peters calls 'religious experience' for a reasonable man — the transforming experience provoked by the awareness of reason's limits — has to be understood as an additional dimension of the *rational form* of consciousness against the background of Peters' synthetic view on world and life. I briefly sketch this ultimate dimension of his educational theory.

Although Peters has no worked-out philosophy of religion, he gives an answer to this key question: 'In virtue of what kinds of shared experiences do human beings come to agree about religious judgments?' (ibid., p. 106). According to Peters, religious judgements are neither based on revelation nor on religious facts, but on *emotional experiences of awe*:

Religion ... originates in experiences of awe, an emotion to which human beings are subject when they are confronted with events, objects, or people which are of overwhelming significance to them but which seem, in some important respect or other, inexplicable or shot through with contingency. (ibid., 1973, p. 106)

When significant events cannot be placed in the orderly system of ordinary events and explanations of them come to an end, these contingent events are prone to provoke feelings of awe in human beings. As an appropriate response to such impressive events, human beings engage in symbolic practices, such as worship and other rituals, to express these strong feelings, comparable with the method to canalize the passivity of emotions by expressing them in symbolic behaviour.

Peters applies, then, this general idea about the origins of religion in the phenomena of inexplicability and contingency to the specific case of *the reasonable man*. Whereas for primitive people the powers of nature are the primary objects of awe, for enlightened people more universal objects for such feelings of awe are made available by the development of Western civilisation. Two specific

objects engender awe in the reasonable man, namely the *universe* and the *human condition*. This is, of course, reminiscent of Kant's selection: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (Kant, 1788, p. 169 [162]).

Why do 'the starry heavens above me' and 'the moral law within me' incite feelings of awe — 'religious feelings' in Peters' sense — in a reasonable man? First, in trying to explain rationally the creation and continuation of the universe human beings reach the limits of reason, because in this special case they try to explain the spatio-temporal framework that is presupposed in all other causal explanation. "And to grasp this is to open up the possibility of a new level of awe which is possible only for a rational being who appreciates the limits of reason" (Peters, 1973, p. 108). A reasonable man can realize the inexplicability of the explanatory framework itself and appreciate in awe the ultimate contingency of the universe. He might in so experiencing also express his feeling with the use of the word 'God'.

Secondly, in reflecting rationally on their unique position in the natural world human beings again stumble on the boundaries of reason. It is perplexing how they, as free persons worthy of respect and, as it were, destined for eternity, relate to their temporary predicament in this world. Human life, inclusive the life of reason, appears as a mystery impenetrable for rational explanation. This baffling predicament that "we have to make something of the brief span of years that is our lot, with the variable and partly alterable equipment with which we are blessed" (ibid., p. 110) provokes feelings of awe in those reflecting on it. A reasonable man can recognize this finite predicament of any man trying to make something of his life and appreciate in awe the existential contingency of "the inescapable cycle of the human condition, birth, youth, reproduction, bringing up children and death, together with its contrasts such as joy and suffering, hope and despair, good and evil" (ibid., p. 112).

These feelings of awe with regard to the universe and the human condition are emotions to which a *reasonable* man is prone when rationally thinking about these two more universal objects. These emotions are, therefore, supplementary 'rational passions' and as such they also belong to the affective aspect of the rational form of conscious life, much in the same way as benevolence and the concern about truth do. Yet, in contrast with the other rational passions, the

feelings of awe represent the *deeper* dimension of the affective aspect included in the rational form of the moral mode of experience. So, as ‘religious feelings’ in Peters’ sense, they form the religious dimension of the principled, rational morality of a reasonable person.

Since these feelings of awe are intimately connected to this rational morality, they can also profoundly influence it. The deeper, religious dimension has a positively *transforming* impact on the fundamental principles and ultimate values of a rational morality as well as on the other facets of the moral life. The religious awareness of a reasonable man is derived from his background awareness of the predicament of human beings in the universe that triggers his feelings of awe. Such a background awareness has transforming power in that it opens up ‘a different level of experience made possible by concepts which enable us to understand the facts of a more mundane level of experience in a new light’ (ibid., p. 111). Given that “all seeing is seeing *as*” (ibid., p. 111), religious seeing is seeing the world as a new place different from its ordinary or mundane contours.

3.2. Peters’ Stoic attitude

In what way does the deeper, religious dimension of the rational form of a reasonable man transform the principles of a rational morality and the other facets of the moral life? Apart from the moral principles, I limit myself to the religious transformation of the worthwhile activities in life.⁵

Before elucidating the transforming impact of the religious dimension on moral principles, Peters’ basic philosophical attitude towards life should be made clear. Ray Elliott (1986, p. 46) writes that Peters’ “philosophy of life is founded on the Stoic precept that one should remedy such ills as can be remedied and accept without complaint those which cannot. ... his work is pervaded by Stoic moods, attitudes and values”. I agree with Elliott that Peters is deep down not so much a Kantian as a Stoic on the content level, as a remarked above. Peters’ *Stoic attitude* as the most reasonable and appropriate attitude towards life comprises two major tendencies which should keep each other in balance: the *alterability* as well as the *acceptance* of the human condition. The tendency to alter the human condition when it is bad is connected to the belief in perfectibility and progress, whereas the tendency to accept the human condition when it is irreparable to the belief in truth and reason. The former tendency is activated by compassion or love, while the latter by the concern for truth. On these two ultimate values

the principles of a rational morality are based. We articulate these values when we alter for the best in the name of justice and respect, and when we accept the givenness of the human condition in the name of truth and honesty.

According to Peters, the religious background awareness of a reasonable man transforms, then, a rational morality by making its underpinning values and operative principles *more objective* and *prominent*: “Religious experience, ... by widening the context in which human life is viewed, has the function of enhancing our conviction of their objectivity and of providing emphasis for some of these values [and moral principles]” (Peters, 1973, p. 114). By placing the operation of moral principles and values in a setting which awakens awe, these principles and values are endorsed and emphasized. By concentrating religious attention on certain features of the human predicament—specifically, on human pain, suffering and death—and thereby investing them with universal significance, the moral principles and values are more strongly and objectively related to the existential contingency of human beings. In this way the religious dimension also exhorts or invigorates our moral response to the human predicament, and especially to human suffering. It does so for Peters on the basis of a principled, rational morality.

As for our appropriate moral response to this predicament, Peters recommends the Stoic attitude as the attitude that keeps a balance between utopianism and fatalism. On the one hand, he warns both progressives and romantics against the perils of human pride and vanity in their attempt to realize heaven on earth:

There is, after all, the givenness of the human condition and of certain facts of human nature. In the light of this any form of human perfectibilism is a dangerous delusion. ... To dream of utopias on earth is vain; for they are not possible. And it is dangerous; for men will do dreadful things to other men in order to make their dreams come true. (ibid., pp. 117-18)

On the other hand, Peters, of course, shows like every other civilized man indignation at the plight of the poor and the oppressed, and acknowledges that many evils are alterable by human effort: “The elimination of misery is incumbent on anyone who cares about the human condition; the promotion of happiness is, in moderation, a harmless hope” (ibid., p. 118).

Also with regard to the culmination point of moral development and education, Peters takes the same Stoic attitude. The rational autonomous person acting on a principled morality is not an individual striving for perfection and self-sufficiency in isolation from the social context into which he is born. Peters holds

the view that “the autonomy of the individual ... can be endorsed in a way which is compatible both with a shared background of experience and with openness to love” (ibid., p. 122). Certainly, the religious dimension of a rational morality transforms the principle of respect for persons into that of the sacredness of personhood: “And respect passes into reverence and a belief in the sacredness of human personality when the perspective and purpose of a particular man are viewed in the broader context of human life on earth” (ibid., p. 122). Yet, although the belief in personal autonomy is thereby endorsed and emphasized, the belief in the social nature of persons should, precisely out of respect for the givenness of the human condition, equally be endorsed and emphasized. Mature human beings are in essence not only rational animals but also social animals. So, as to the Stoic aspect of alterability, autonomy involves the potentiality for determining one’s own destiny by individual choices, while, as to the aspect of acceptance, autonomy equally requires the potentiality for grasping a public predicament in terms of shared concepts.

The religious background awareness of a person capable of a reasonable level of life positively transforms not only the form of morality but also *its content*, specifically the ethical domain of the worthwhile activities. Engagement in these ‘desirable’ activities is the primary means by which individuals can make something of their temporary lives on earth. Worthwhile activities are thus of special importance to the existential contingency of human beings. At the reasonable level of life, these activities are already singled out by reason because they permit plenty of scope for understanding and sensitivity, as well as for enhancing the quality of life. If taking up a rational attitude towards human activities transforms them into something worthwhile, how then does taking up a religious attitude, in Peters’ sense, towards these worthwhile activities transform them further?

This question can, given the connection between worthwhile activities and the existential contingency of humans, be put otherwise: How does ‘religion’ in Peters’ sense affect a reasonable person’s view of what he is going to do with his one and only life? Both questions about the transforming power of religion come down to Peters’ version of the classical question of *the meaning of life*:

Religion affects the individual’s choice of activities and the manner in which he conducts them by enlarging the context in which these activities are placed, by pressing the question whether this is all that a man can do with the brief flicker of consciousness that is his life. (ibid., p. 128)

To this question, Peters offers the suggestive answer that taking up the religious attitude makes a rational person aware of the *immanence* of life's meaning and the *heteronomy* of value:

First, ... [a rational person] must grasp the ultimate pointlessness of life, that it cannot, as a whole, be given meaning in the way in which meaning is given to events and actions *within life*; but he must also strive to discern point within it. For life, like works of art, can exhibit values that are self-contained, that define a quality of life. Second, he will not feel that, in facing this issue, he is 'choosing' his values ... Rather, he will feel drawn towards them and, in so far as he lets them work through him, he will feel a sense of humility and of awe. (ibid., p. 125)

From the religious standpoint, the worthwhile activities which constitute the life of reason derive their worthwhileness not from a transcendent source, traditionally identified as 'God' in monotheistic religions. The meaning of life is immanent to life itself. Worthwhile activities contain their worthwhileness in themselves. Yet, although the values realized in these activities are internal, they are not autonomously chosen by the people who are engaged in them. Since values are not of our own making, we have to acknowledge their givenness. Furthermore, since values as such are exercising an appeal, we have to respond to their appeal. We should let them work through us.

Against the backdrop of his Stoic attitude, Peters especially draws our attention to *truth*, *love* and *the relief of suffering* as the central values to which we must respond in the context of the human predicament. In trying to make something of our lives, we can respond to the demands of truth, love and pain-relief directly or indirectly. We can straight away devote our lives, for instance, to the pursuit of truth or the cause of justice in taking up an academic job or becoming a social worker. Alternatively, and more commonly, activities and professional occupations can be transformed and enriched by the manner in which they are conceived and carried out in the light of these central values. Either way of responding to their call gives focus to the attempt to make something of one's own finite life. In so responding and realizing these values in worthwhile activities, a reasonable person who is also 'religious' in Peters' sense gives a definite direction to what he is going to do with his temporary life. Consequently, by taking up a religious attitude towards his life, he relates himself at the same time to his own mortality, to the fact that his life on earth covers only a brief span of time. In this perspective of the existential contingency of human beings, Peters aptly reminds us of

the Platonic wisdom that “to learn how to live [in philosophizing] is also to learn how to die” (ibid, p. 128).

3.3. ‘Religious’ education

What is the consequence of Peters’ synthetic view for his conception of education? Although demonstrably his integrative view on reason and passion widens into a metaphysical world-view and philosophy of life, he himself never makes explicitly the connection between this synthetic view and the concept(ion) of education. Nevertheless, it is possible to bring to light the way in which his ‘religious’ view *implicitly* determines how he conceives of education in his later writings. I already made the points that, for Peters, moral, liberal and education as such are, in the sense explained, identical to one another and that reason is the formal aim of education. This extended conception of education gets a new expression in the last paper Peters wrote on educational aims:

Education surely develops a person’s *awareness* by enlarging, deepening and extending it. Its impact is cognitive, but it also transforms and regulates a person’s attitudes, emotions, wants and actions because all of these presuppose awareness and are impregnated with beliefs. ... the purpose of education is ... to prepare people ... for life. ... a worthwhile life, not just keeping alive; ... Towards what situations, then, is the development of awareness [education] to be directed ...? The answer can only be ‘the human condition’. (Peters, 1979, pp. 33-34)

Here a still more broad conception of education, inspired by Peters’ synthetic view, is implicitly at work. Education is teaching children how to live by initiating them into not only a cognitive framework of knowledge and understanding but also into moral, emotional and existential perspectives on the human condition. Education for life is education for the life of reason in Peters’ highly complex sense of ‘reason’, including the reasonableness of appreciating the limits of reason. As for the form of reason’s life, educating involves developing a principled morality and a rational affective sensibility in children, while, as for the content of reason’s life, educating involves bringing them to engage with worthwhile activities. Since the deeper, religious awareness has a positively transforming impact on the form as well as the content of the life of reason, ‘religion’ in Peters’ sense has a distinct influence on education and its aims as well. In the best of all possible worlds, an education for leading a humane and civilized life implies, therefore, a religious education *of sorts*:

... they will be scarcely human if they have not reflected on the place of man in the natural and historical orders. In many the contingency, creation and continuance of the world, which are beyond the power of man to comprehend, give rise to awe and wonder. The human condition is viewed in a wider perspective, under 'a certain aspect of eternity', and ways of life are generated that transcend and transform what is demanded by morality and truth. (ibid, p. 41)

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NOTES

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² For further reflections on the rational passions congenial to Peters view, see Scheffler 1977. See also Harvey Siegel's (1988, pp. 34-42) distinction between the 'reason assessment component' and the 'critical spirit' component of critical thinking.

³ For Peters' supplementation of Kohlberg, see Cuypers 2014.

⁴ Peters already defends the thought that education does not have a concrete aim, but only a formal one, i.e. a *principle of procedure*, in his *Must an educator have an aim?* (1959).

⁵ For the relation between the religious dimension and the three other moral facets – motives and emotions, qualities of the will and role-responsibilities – see Peters 1973, pp. 118-20.

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