

## Response to Robert Sokolowski's “The Theology of Disclosure”

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THIS FIRST COLLOQUIUM on “Philosophers and Theologians in Conversation” has good reason to begin with reflections by Robert Sokolowski, the author of a remarkable body of work in which this conversation has been fostered from both sides of the table, from the vantage point of philosophy and of theology and in the dialogue of the two disciplines with one another. It was a growing insight of the phenomenological movement, especially in conversation with the hermeneutical method that philosophy had garnered from theology, that complete statements of our interpretations or *a fortiori* complete interpretations of our understanding are not possible.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the periodic aspirations to philosophy to be at once a first and a rigorous science, it belongs to the accomplishment of philosophy and theology to acknowledge that there is no presuppositionless understanding and no completion to the search for wisdom, no defined beginning or end. That is true not only for what philosophy and theology can and should be on average, singularly or in conversation, but also and consciously for the work done by the most outstanding thinkers in these fields.

It was fifty years ago (1964) that Robert Sokolowski, after initial studies in both disciplines, published the first segment (on the consti-

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<sup>1</sup> See the 1927 epoch-making work by Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 19th ed. (Tuebingen: M. Niemeyer, 2006), nos. 31–33 and 142–60; in English, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row 1962), which preserves the paragraph numbers and (in the margins) the pagination of the German edition, here 182–203.

tution of temporality) of what soon became widely available as his philosophical dissertation, *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution*.<sup>2</sup> This work on the intellectual spontaneity needed from us for any access to reality was directed at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium by the Franciscan Herman Leo Van Breda, who had rescued Edmund Husserl's mostly unpublished manuscripts after the latter's death in April of 1938 and brought them to the Catholic University, where the first Husserl archive was founded in 1939. The philosophical side of Professor Sokolowski's conversation will consist largely in developments of Husserlian phenomenology, a reception, as Sokolowski tells us without exaggeration, that not only adopts, but also adapts and develops Husserl's varied investigations. It is impossible to understand Sokolowski's "theology of disclosure" without attending to his phenomenological work, just as it is impossible to follow his contribution to phenomenology without examining his attention to what could be of theological interest. Not every contributor to the potential conversation between philosophy and theology needs to be as conversant in both disciplines or as sure of the fruitfulness of their possible communication. One of Husserl's earliest and theologically most influential students, Martin Heidegger, would state that a "mortal enmity" exists between the two disciplines insofar as they express existential stances.<sup>3</sup> So, when Robert Sokolowski is conversant in each discipline and in their dialogue with one another, familiar with the travel routes connecting Athens and Jerusalem, we want to ask how this can be. Monsignor Sokolowski has been kind enough to recall for this colloquium the major themes that need to be addressed by this conversation. In this brief response to his reflections, I want to draw attention to a more minor, often overlooked theme that nevertheless makes this conversation possible. I want to point out where

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution*, *Phaenomenologica* 18 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964 and 1970).

<sup>3</sup> See the 1927 lecture by Martin Heidegger—slightly amended by the author as *Phänomenologie und Theologie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1970), 32—in which he also famously describes the notion of a Christian philosophy as a "hölzernes Eisen" (wooden iron), but also rejects relationships in the other direction for the same reasons: "neukantische, wertphilosophische, phänomenologische Theologie." Sokolowski points to the coexistence of religious and philosophical stances in Heidegger's own phenomenological work as a contrast to Husserl's less religiously motivated thought; see Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 214–217.

Sokolowski intentionally stops short of blending philosophy and theology into a single unified theory. My argument will be that Sokolowski's conversation succeeds because it is only partially synthetic.

In an early monograph on *Presence and Absence*, Sokolowski analyzed three interrelated pairs of opposites, "a triangle of couples," as he calls them, that structure the intelligibility or "presentability" that first philosophy requires to "permit the identifications and dissociations which stabilize experience and thought and allow them to be carried on."<sup>4</sup> They testify to the abidingly philosophical quality of a conversation that has not passed into a theological monologue. These three couples—rest and motion, presence and absence, sameness and otherness—can also testify to the dialogical non-identity (the discrete togetherness of the One and the Indeterminate Dyad, as the Platonic tradition put it) that characterizes Sokolowski's programmatic dialogue of phenomenology with disclosure theology, as he has described it for us in his reflections above. I would like to offer a word of reflection on each of these pairs of opposites within the scope of our present topic.

### **Rest and Motion: Sokolowski on the History of Philosophy**

Sokolowski was keen from the beginning of his work to augment "Husserl's Interpretation of the History of Philosophy."<sup>5</sup> In this early study, Sokolowski was able to show how Husserl's works after the conclusion of World War I opened themselves to the continuous historical development of phenomenology in the future, but also that, both before and after that shift, around 1918, the self-understanding of phenomenology as a new starting point for philosophy minimized any interest in the pre-Cartesian history of philosophy. Unlike that of Franz Brentano, Husserl's vision of philosophy as "a rigorous and first philosophy" had understood the directive, "to the things themselves," from the vantage-point of a first-person singular distant from the diachronic history of philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Even with the increasing openness

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Presence and Absence: A Philosophical Investigation of Language and Being* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), 174; see also 160–181.

<sup>5</sup> The title of Sokolowski's article in *Franciscan Studies* 24 (1964): 261–280.

<sup>6</sup> The influential essay written in the year prior to Dilthey's death and published in the first volume of the periodical *Logos* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1910/1911) is available in a second edition as Edmund Husserl, *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1965 and 1971). It has been translated into English as "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, ed. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper, 1965). Heidegger's

to the opaque beginnings in the lived world, the living body, and inter-subjectivity,<sup>7</sup> even with the growing sense that phenomenology could never attain the conclusiveness of Husserl's early geometric ideals and that the dream of philosophy as a first and rigorous science had indeed been "dreamed out," the novelty of the turn to the transcendental subject meant, for Husserl, a turn away from pre-Cartesian thought.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to Husserl, Sokolowski will seek an alternative phenomenological reading of ancient and medieval philosophy. True, despite his own stress on quotation as "one of the extraordinary resources of human language and speech, the ability that defines the rational animal,"<sup>9</sup> Sokolowski too sees philosophy culminating in "disquoting," in its move beyond and behind the authority of others to the evidence of individual experience.<sup>10</sup> Historical and systematic thought, though no doubt intertwined, initially seem to favor quotation and disquotation respectively. And yet, Sokolowski's expectation for a relatively synchronic dialogue with ancient Greek and medieval Latin philosophies is clearly more reminiscent of Brentano than of Husserl and touches Sokolowski's chief criticism of Husserl's (admittedly moderated) "modernity."

What distinguishes Sokolowski from both Husserl and Brentano is the way his theology interrupts this dialogue. The Christian distinction that is founded in the insight into a transcendent God who chooses

*Being and Time* attempted a reconciliation of Husserl's phenomenology with Dilthey's hermeneutics.

<sup>7</sup> Although the second volume of Husserl's *Ideas* would appear only posthumously, as Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie: Zweites Buch*, ed. Marly Biemel, Husserliana 4 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), Heidegger thanked Husserl in *Sein und Zeit* for providing him access to the unpublished work and for the light it added to Husserl's reflections on Dilthey and the themes of personality and world (*Sein und Zeit* 38, no. 3 and 47, no. 1).

<sup>8</sup> See Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, 2nd edition, ed. Walter Biemel, Husserliana 6 (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1953 and 1976).

<sup>9</sup> See Robert Sokolowski's "The Theology of Disclosure," in this present issue (14.2) of *Nova et Vetera* (English), 409–423. See also Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 68–79.

<sup>10</sup> Sokolowski makes clear that he does not intend to restrict his "'disquotational' theory of truth" to diachronic conversations with the history of philosophy (*Introduction to Phenomenology*, 101).

freely to create and perfect the world without being simply one more being in or alongside or added to it was an insight that antiquity could not attain. It is the formal light under which the “disclosure” of Sokolowski’s theology proceeds in all of its manifold considerations. His is a fundamental theology of method, a methodological foundation that has only become possible over time, a study of how theological truths can appear. “The theology of disclosure deals with the way Christian realities come forward, but it also deals with the way they are distinguished. It deals with the Christian distinction itself. Distinction and manifestation are treated here together, and indeed they belong together, because for something to become manifest is for it to be distinguished.”<sup>11</sup> The emphasis on the manner of appearance and the linguistic articulation of distinction also distinguishes Sokolowski’s thought from Greek philosophy, evident even more in his subsequent distinction of infused from acquired virtue or his affirmation, against Aristotle, of “friendship” with the divine.<sup>12</sup> Here are human possibilities that could not be elicited from human faculties alone.

This source of non-contemporaneity with ancient philosophy is likewise the locus of non-contemporaneity with medieval philosophy, which knew that formal objects required formal methods, a formal light under which the object could first be adequately considered, but did not move as programmatically as phenomenology from attention to the *how* to the identification of the *what*. (Admittedly, discussions like the one by Thomas Aquinas in his commentary on Boethius’s *De Trinitate* concerning the methods of abstraction and separation as distinguishing the sciences and their formal objects are moving already somewhat in this direction.)<sup>13</sup> In his stress on the development, cultivation, and historical vicissitudes of disclosure by language, articulation, and distinction, Sokolowski sets a starting point that is relatively different from those of both ancient and medieval thought. As Allen Vigneron once elaborated on a citation of Sokolowski: “Sokolowski’s

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Sokolowski, “The Theology of Disclosure,” in *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 88–103, at 92.

<sup>12</sup> See Guy Mansini, “Charity and the Form of Friendship,” in *Ethics and Theological Disclosures: The Thought of Robert Sokolowski*, ed. Guy Mansini and James G. Hart (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 31–43.

<sup>13</sup> See the selection, introduction, and translation by Armand Maurer in St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Method of the Sciences: Questions V and VI of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1963).

claim is that his theology of disclosure ‘provides us with a way of theologically appropriating modernity,’ instead of evading it or being ensnared by it.”<sup>14</sup> For such a theology to embrace key aspects of the subjective orientation of modern philosophy while avoiding much of its rejection of other epochs is to point both to the “rest” or continuity of philosophy from age to age and to its “motion” in discontinuity with pre-modern formulations that could simply be treated as perennially evident and thus, being taken as directly experiential, be “disquoted” with little adjustment today. If modernity suggested not the overcoming, but a wrestling and coming-to-terms-with the metaphysical tradition (in a German word game, *Verwindung*, rather than *Überwindung*, “coming to terms with” rather than “overcoming”),<sup>15</sup> then the merely partial accord with the history of philosophy proposed by Sokolowski also suggests a continued wrestling and a partial coming-to-terms even with this qualified “*Verwindung*.” Phenomenology searches for the renewal of a first philosophy that could provide an alternative to the simple rejection or the simple reassertion of classical metaphysics.

### **Presence and Absence: Sokolowski on the Limits of Evidence**

The relationship of philosophy and theology can be inscribed into a second coupled structure, that of presence and absence. Sokolowski indicates in many texts his predilection for presence over absence. Presence has priority by definition as naming a process of the growing “truth of actuality or self-givenness.” To understand is to make present. Here it is that things “emerge and define themselves out of vagueness and absence, out of confusion and hearsay.”<sup>16</sup> Disclosure means *in recto* an increasing presence. But Sokolowski makes clear in his larger work that this also involves the coupling of absence and presence, making absence present, not just as the “where from,” say of the natural attitude or *Lebenswelt*, but as the abiding limit of the present that is possible for us, as a sense of what or even who is unreached or missing. Since that essay on Husserl’s history of philosophy fifty years ago, Sokolowski

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<sup>14</sup> Allen Vigneron, “The Christian Mystery and the Presence and Absence of God,” in *The Truthful and the Good: Essays in Honor of Robert Sokolowski*, ed. John J. Drummond and James G. Hart, Contributions to Phenomenology 23 (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 181–189, at 184 (citing Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*, 179–180).

<sup>15</sup> See Martin Heidegger, “Die Überwindung der Metaphysik,” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954), 71–99, e.g., 78.

<sup>16</sup> See Sokolowski’s “The Theology of Disclosure” in this present volume.

has sympathized with the later Husserl after 1918, who would make present the future absence of a completed system of phenomenology. “To make present” demands of us a kind of “*ignorantia docta*” about the limits of evidence, a sense of the experiential antinomies at least about a gracious God of infused virtue, and so also for the God of that “Christian distinction” that first provides, by its faith, the light of theological disclosure. The inability of not just ancient philosophy to make self-evident the God of grace becomes an inner moment of the theology of disclosure, which needs a form of philosophy accomplished in itself and yet aware of the limits of what it can ever make manifest with “the evidence of self-possession.” If with Hegel (but less optimistically than in the *Philosophy of Right*) philosophy can be described as “its epoch captured in thoughts,” then even faltering philosophies must be understood and respected as expressions of the perceived human needs of their day. Both the “*gaudium et spes*” and the “*luctus et angor*” of an epoch, both the “rose” of reason in the “cross” borne by an era (but also the “cross” of unreason hidden beneath what merely seems rosy about an age) may be traced in their philosophical expressions and in neighboring disciplines.<sup>17</sup> Sokolowski’s sense of rest and motion in the history of philosophy and in its potential appropriation today leads to a more fundamental coupling of the near and the far, of the mutually qualifying dynamics of increasing presence and abiding absence.<sup>18</sup> In his monograph designed to illuminate mutually the theology of disclosure and Eucharistic presence, Sokolowski emphasizes absence as “a particularly important theme in the understanding of human existence and in thinking about being.”<sup>19</sup> Pointing to the “new context of past, present, and eternity” into which the Eucharist draws us, he expands the threefold signification with which Thomas Aquinas had opened his first book on the sacraments (the *signum rememorativum, demonstrativum et prognosticum* of genuine sacramentality)<sup>20</sup> to disclosure in general. It is

<sup>17</sup> See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Werke 7 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 26.

<sup>18</sup> See also Richard Schenk, “The Place of Mimesis and the Apocalyptic: Toward a Typology of the ‘Far and Near,’” *Contagion* 20 (Spring 2013): 1–24.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press 1993), 194.

<sup>20</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *In IV sent.* d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 1, obj. 4: “Praeterea, triplex est signum; scilicet demonstrativum, quod est de praesenti; rememorativum, quod est de praeterito; prognosticum, quod est de futuro” (<http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/snp4001.html>). See also *Summa theologiae* III, q. 60, a. 3, resp. (Rome: Editiones Paulinae, 1962) and the “O sacrum convivium” from the second vespers of the liturgy of Corpus Christi.

only by reference to these two forms of absence, to the initial Cross of Christ and to the *eschaton* that it anticipates, and thus also by reference to the community's vis-à-vis—that is, to Christ himself as the primary subject of the Eucharistic sacrifice—that there is a manifestation of growing grace in the celebrating community (the “*signum demonstrativum*”).<sup>21</sup> The theology of those theological virtues that are at the core of a theology of disclosure presupposes a similar sense of the absence of self-justifying acquired virtue. This sense of the absence of what could be acquired solely by human invention and practice, with its attention to the “epoch captured in thoughts,” is the condition of the possibility of a new dimension of disclosure and presence. It demands of theologians an understanding even for the more skeptical forms of philosophical thought and the sense of absence that they express.

If we can bring out necessities in the way things must appear, we thereby say something about the being of such things. If things must be presented or absented in certain ways, if they demand to be distinguished from certain other things, it is because they exist in a certain way. It is not happenstance that Christian realities emerge by differentiation from natural things. The theology of disclosure and the theology of Christian things must therefore be developed in tandem.<sup>22</sup>

### **Sameness and Otherness: Sokolowski and the Conversation between Philosophy and Theology**

Even from this short response, it should be clear that the relationship between philosophy and theology can also be inscribed into the third coupled structure, that of sameness and otherness. Sokolowski frequently uses the metaphor of a “foil,” originally a *folium* or page of color used as a contrasting background to bring out the details of an otherwise overlooked dimension of an illustration or a gem. Philosophy is, however, not just the “other” than theology. As articulating many of the same and still other similar dynamics of presentation and absenting, there are moments of identity as well. Despite what might, at first, be suspected about a philosophically articulated theology, the

<sup>21</sup> Immanuel Kant's reference to this tripartite division of signs missed the sense of contemporary efficacy that Thomas had associated with the *signum demonstrativum*; see Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Zweiter Abschnitt, 5 (A 142), found in *Werkausgabe*, vol. 11, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 357.

<sup>22</sup> Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*, 93.

sameness and otherness of these partners in conversation profit from each other. Dialogues of all kinds are threatened from two sides: when the potential dialogue partners think they have nothing to say to one another and when one partner dictates the entire conversation. By contrast, what we might call a bilingual approach to the conversation of philosophy and theology can save us from one misunderstanding and fruitless controversy from the start, the question of which discipline is the mere *ancilla* or servant of the other. Fluency in both disciplines offers an alternative to monolingualism, to understanding just one language, but also to the search for some new form of Esperanto, some new common language that could replace the diversity of the two disciplines. A rationalism of the adventurous type (say, the Hegelian system of an Anton Günther, d.1863), or even a rationalism of the more cautious type (as the intentionally Kantian program of Georg Hermes, d. 1831), leaves little room for theological discourse. No less monological are claims by fideistic theologies to generate even basic philosophical insights and the very terms of God-talk of which fallen nature would otherwise be incapable. There is an alternative to these monologues, a sort of bilingualism, a fluency in theological and philosophical discourse that makes possible the best kind of translation, the chance to find in one's mother tongue as yet unrealized possibilities already evident, or at least implicit, in a second language. The translation of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts into the vernacular by, say, Aelfric or Luther, helped to shape and develop their own native languages, eliciting from them new possibilities thanks to the need to express what had been foreign to them. So too, the success of the conversation of philosophy and theology can be measured by the degree of their mutual service to each other. In the end, friendship is a more fitting metaphor than service, since it suggests that, at least at its most successful, the conversation of philosophy and theology will be motivated by the hope of sustaining and promoting each as a distinct and flourishing discipline. Professor Sokolowski has given us an example of how this interdisciplinary friendship can work to weather the relationship's periodic storms.