

Theologia et Philosophia: Twin Sisters In Conversation¹

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*He that commends me to mine own content,
Commends me to the thing I cannot get.
I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop;
Who, failing there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself:
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.*

William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*
(Act I., Scene ii.)

On one reading, the papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio* is a sustained and passionate plea for the reestablishment of a true and mutually fruitful relationship between the disciplines of philosophy and theology.² In this long-meditated text – leading one along a tortuous path of the twists and turns perceived in the relationship between faith and reason over a period of two thousand years – the philosopher-pope struggles with the implications of the paradoxical insight that philosophy and theology are both autonomous and at once deeply interdependent. While he describes them as ‘dialogue partners’ in the common quest for truth, the Pope nevertheless ends on the note that there is something more at stake than just a simple exchange of views. The image chosen to illustrate this difficult point is illuminating and ambiguous at the same time; a faithful epitome of the actual situation. The parallel between the vocation of the Blessed Virgin and the vocation of philosophy suggests a two-way transformation.³

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² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998) translated as *Faith and Reason* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1998)

³ “For between the vocation of the Blessed Virgin and the vocation of true philosophy there is a deep harmony. Just as the Virgin was called to offer herself entirely as human being and as woman that God’s Word might take flesh and come among us, so too philosophy is called to offer its rational and critical resources that theology, as the understanding of faith, may be fruitful and creative. And just as in giving her assent to Gabriel’s word, Mary lost nothing of her true humanity and freedom, so too when philosophy heeds the summons of the Gospel’s truth its autonomy is in no way impaired. Indeed, it is then that philosophy sees all its enquiries rise to their highest expression.” *Faith and Reason*, n. 108.

On the one hand, true philosophy is asked to offer its rational and critical resources in order to fertilize theological reflection so that theology may be 'fruitful and creative' and, on the other, philosophy is itself seen as in need of fertilization by the productive reception of God's Word. In both cases philosophy is envisaged as undergoing transformation, and yet as preserving full autonomy not the least impaired by the change. Conversely, its potential is realized to the full, its reflection elevated to heights where new and unexpected perspectives are gained. According to this image, in the cross-fertilization of philosophical and theological reflections, autonomy is perfectly compatible with an ancillary willingness to give and receive, transform and be transformed.

Obviously, the image is meant to set up an inspiring and encouraging ideal in the midst of much confusion where the identities of the two disciplines are often feared to be ailing. For a mutually enriching exchange self-confident partners are needed and that is why the encyclical so ardently exhorts philosophers to be faithful to the traditional ambition that originally marked the identity and integrity of their enterprise: the sapiential dimension as search for the ultimate meaning of existing reality and human life. The course that philosophy currently takes is not without importance for the development of theological reflection, which could not advance without the contribution of its old ally. That is why theologians are reminded not to be forgetful of the metaphysical horizon reconnoitred by philosophical investigation which provides proper ground for the mediation of the Word of God. The image of a nearly bridal relationship between philosophy and theology (influenced by Scheeben) is fashioned to overcome the conceptual tension arising from the idea of simultaneous autonomy and interdependence. In so far as what we have here is but a high ideal, then we may wonder whether, on the one hand, the attainment of such an ideal is a viable option in our own day and, on the other, we also ask whether there are other ways to imagine the actual situation. Aware that the image we choose will determine the conceptual space where the discussion can take place, we look for a novel way to envisage this complex relationship.

1 Family Others?

One way of putting things is to trace the following curious historical genealogy. According to this, embryonic Christian theology is grafted into the womb of ancient philosophy with which it lives as much in symbiosis as in sharp contradistinction. Growing to full maturity, Christian theology bears Christian philosophy as its bright and willing child, who after adolescence comes of age herself and seeks independence. Separated from the parent, as a young and rebellious adult autonomous philosophy cannot live without quarrelling with

mother theology. As they grow older, they become more and more uncertain about the nature of their relationship: the mother still reclaims some of her parental rights while the child refuses to acknowledge filial duty. Eventually, the mother is not willing to dispense with her dependence upon the grown-up child, even though the child is ever more estranged from her and pursues a somewhat eccentric and frivolous life.

Put in this traditional manner and viewed from the perspective of Christian theology, the relationship between philosophy and theology remains in the grip of an idea of subordination, which results in an irresolvable tension between true autonomy and essential relatedness. Instead of such a genealogically helpful yet phenomenologically insufficient image, we need another – more egalitarian – one that helps imagine a complex relationship of differences and affinities between two deeply related and yet markedly distinct disciplines. Looking further among next-of-kin for ‘family others’⁴ whose relation embodies paradoxical sameness and otherness at the same time, we come upon the curious rapport between identical twins. In them, likeness and difference combine in an exemplary fashion. At times they look perplexingly alike, at other times their differences are striking. They have exceedingly much in common (all of their genes) and yet they are inimitably unique. They share common childhood memories, intellectual background and upbringing, yet as adults develop diverging interests and different ambitions. They speak a common idiom that is specifically theirs and tend to complete each other’s sentences as if on the same wavelength. They are, perhaps, dependent on one another more than anyone else, yet each nevertheless leads a life of its own. Although they are able to stand completely on their own, we understand them better if we meet them together as odd doubles engaged in intimate conversation. On the whole, characteristics of this complex relationship are not easy to spell out; the very essence of ‘twinness’ is extremely difficult to conceptualise. Knowing that an image is but a useful tool for recasting an old issue and aware that it must not be stretched too far, we briefly survey ‘twinly’ features of essential otherness and sameness in the philosophical and theological enterprises.

2 Distinctive Otherness

At first glance, the differences are apparent. As has conventionally been established, philosophy as a discourse governed by reason

⁴ I borrow the idea of intimate ‘family others’ from William Desmond, who applies it to the relationship between philosophy and what he terms as its ‘others’: the aesthetic, the religious and the ethical as distinctive ways of being and mind. William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1990), esp. pp. 1–61.

focuses on the nature of reality; it investigates the truths and principles of being by means of rational enquiry. Theology as a discourse governed by faith, however, deals with God and regards all things in reference to God; it seeks to give systematic expression to the mysteries of Christian faith. While the philosopher is an individual thinker who engages in a direct and daring encounter with all there is – looking on the immediate givenness of being and introspective about his own perplexity in the face of being's otherness – the theologian's thought is more mediated. Compared to the first-order thought of the philosopher, the theologian does second-order thinking with respect to texts which are themselves theological: Scripture and Tradition. If the philosopher is a virtuoso of human reason's highest performance, the theologian is more like a literary critic who does not aspire to reach unparalleled heights in the first place but seeks to be of service: he makes good use of his talent so that God's poetic utterance may be enjoyed and comprehended ever more by humans.⁵ Originating in such interpretative labour, the theologian's reflection appears as heuristic: it unfolds alongside the 'discoveries' made in a world of contingent particulars and random occurrences. Instead of rationally devised universal thought-patterns, the theologian presents the prolongation of the thinking that was started in the narrative mode; his work therefore enters into a direct conceptual relationship with the material he works with: his findings affect his own theological practice. The philosopher aspires to capture all that is in its entirety. In neatly spreading out his net so that it may cover far and wide the entire reality of being, he cannot but let random particulars slip through his net. Hence the distinctively 'Christian factor' – God's infinite love for the finite and unique person as heralded by revelation and the cross (the object of a lifetime's reflection for the theologian) – remains imperceptible in his catch.⁶

The philosopher is a solitary thinker who boldly thinks through issues for himself – hoping and yet never certain that his utterance will ultimately join in the ongoing conversation of mankind. While his dialogue partners can be other philosophers, in the end he can rely only on his own insight. His unique achievement is a discourse unmistakably his own: the soliloquy of a stern voice thinking aloud and intended to be overheard by others. The theologian, in turn, cannot ever dispense with the company of his sisters and brothers in faith; therefore, he speaks from a completely different stance. His audience is twofold: God and the Christian community of the Church

⁵ On the theologian as literary critic see Beáta Tóth, "'Critical' Theology? Notes on Theological Method", *Louvain Studies* 26 (2001), pp. 99–116.

⁶ On the relationship between the 'theological fact' and philosophy see Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Theology and Philosophy', in Medard Kehl, Werner Löser (eds.), *The Von Balthasar Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 362–367.

in whose name he reflects upon the mysteries of faith. As a member of the Church, his discourse is much like the allocution characteristic of prayer that constantly acknowledges creaturely createdness and an essential dependence on the mystery of God.⁷ Such allocutory reflection is tentative and inquisitive; it is aware that the initiative lies with God's eternal Word that precedes and makes possible all human expression. In this sense, the theologian's logic is deductive; it leads him ceaselessly back towards the origins of the divine utterance. He produces a new theology inasmuch as he leads 'certain words from the Scriptures back to the Word' – where all is already 'given' – in a novel way.⁸ The philosopher, by contrast, in desiring to advance human reflection looks forward constantly, deducing ever-new theories from a freshly perceived encounter with being. While his personal convictions and faith commitment are not indifferent to the shape of the philosophy he formulates, they are nevertheless not intrinsic to his system, or at least, they can be methodologically kept apart. The theologian, on the contrary, cannot ever take a neutral stance with regard to the subject matter. His discourse is typically self-involving, and his personal faith – as a prerequisite for speaking about all things in reference to God – shapes the very structure of his theology. Such self-involving theological reflection is also rooted in actual Christian practice and discipleship; it resonates to the spiritual needs of the believing community. And it is also 'liturgical' in origin.⁹ The theologian speaks about God's mystery as a member of the Church that celebrates and lives from such mystery experienced as presence and event. Thus, the theologian's words will inevitably be rooted in the primary liturgical perception of the eternal Word. It is not surprising, then, that while the philosopher's reflection is said to arise from an overwhelming wonder concerning the paradoxical existence of being, in preparation for writing, the theologian is expected to draw inspiration from the inexhaustible fountainhead of prayer whence his vision of all things must spring.

What emerges even from such roughly-drawn twin portraits is the fact that in comparing philosophy and theology one does not simply compare two neutral fields of study or two 'scholarly' disciplines. Apart from a contrast between their distinctive objects, methods and goals (conventional items in the comparison of disciplines), one has to take account of other factors too which, however, do not concern the disciplines themselves but reflect on the practitioners and the

⁷ See Nicolas Lash, 'Anselm Seeking' and 'The Beginning and End of 'Religion'', both in Nicolas Lash, *The Beginning and End of 'Religion'* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 150–163; pp. 3–25.

⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 156–158.

⁹ See Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'Theologie', in Jean-Yves Lacoste (ed.), *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2002), p. 1144–1145.

background of their practice. Here, different responsibilities, person-bound values and faith commitment or identity, closely linked to the theoretical reflection and actual practice of a specific community are all deeply involved. Consequently, as has been much argued, neither philosophy nor theology is a 'science' in terms of being the rational, objective and disinterested study of a well-defined domain, but both acknowledge a grounding subjective element as an integral part of their enquiry which alone safeguards true reliability.

And here we tread upon the ground of affinities almost imperceptibly: the philosopher as 'lover' of wisdom (walking along the 'large way' of seeking *sapientia* as it shines forth from being) and the theologian as 'lover' of God's wisdom (following the 'little way' of the foolishness of the Cross) do not differ radically. I would say that what we have here are but 'twinly differences': differences on the same scale and more of degree than of kind. As with twins, there is at once much likeness in their difference, as they resemble each other even in their diversity. For example, we may observe such 'likeness in difference' with respect to the characteristics of theological and philosophical language. Both philosophers and theologians have words to the effect that they must deal with irreducible surplus either with regard to being which is in excess of all our articulations, or with regard to the excess of God who transcends metaphysical reason. On grappling with the fortunate consequences of such surplus, they are bound to speak beyond their means; they must ceaselessly stretch human language to its very limits and can never tire of the tantalizing effort to bridge the gap between what they want to say and what they are able to say. In this, they share a common care for language. Aware that they are at once masters and also servants of language, they know that in speaking about the perplexing otherness of being or the inexhaustible mystery of the Triune God, one is forced to use language resourcefully and yet one's talk must be humbly careful, sparing and precise. And here the transition from 'likeness in difference' to disturbing sameness is nearly complete.

3 Perplexing Affinities

For there is not only an outward resemblance between the twins philosophy and theology, but also something we could call 'genetic sameness': a similarity resulting from a deep-seated structural identity in their ultimate resources and means. As 'ultimate attitudes' or 'grounding sciences', both are children of the prime-union of myth and *logos* whence their perplexing affinities arise. On first glance, everything seems clear: philosophy inherits the stature of *logos*, while traits of myth determine the theological vision. However, on second thoughts, we discover a far more complicated distribution of identical 'genes', making it impossible for either theology or

philosophy to deny essential resemblance to this originating unity. Myth and *logos* intricately intertwine in both as they strive to grasp the ultimate truth of human existence.

As Hans Urs von Balthasar has argued, just as theology cannot do without the reflective and critical reason of *logos*, philosophy likewise degenerates into rationalistic flatness without any contact with myth that alone witnesses to the mystery of all there is.¹⁰ In this sense, the unity of myth and *logos* cannot be transcended by either philosophy or theology: both are tied to this common soil where the philosophical self-revelation of being and positive revelation coming from the divine are planted. If philosophy oppresses the mythical by turning it into mere illustrative material and does not allow being as such a true revelatory function, then philosophical enquiry ceases to be a powerful articulation of the depths of reality and can be debased to an arsenal of concepts for theological reflection as has often been the case in the course of Christian thought. Balthasar here seems to be grappling with the complex insight that while the discourse governed by *logos* is in itself orientated towards the 'theological' in that it strives for the unconditionally Ultimate, the True, the Good and the Beautiful, the discourse governed by revelation whose site is to be found in myth is at the same time 'philosophical' in that it forms its own distinctive vision of being. Here, philosophy and theology at once look alike and are different; likeness and difference result from the fact that their formal objects partly overlap: "the formal object of theology (and, therefore, also of the act of faith) lies at the very heart of the formal object of philosophy (along with the mythology which belongs to it)".¹¹ Philosophical understanding of the mystery of being occurs in the same formal *locus* which opens to the depths of divine self-revelation.

Our main tool for inhabiting this shared *locus* is the imagination that is equally at work in philosophical reflection and theological enquiry just at the point where an essential openness to otherness is at stake. As William Desmond has shown, imagination not only endows us with an ability of self-transcendence and gives us freedom to perceive the world and our condition from a distance and as other to us, but it also provides us with access to the site of an ultimate 'porosity': a 'middle' space that represents an essential openness to real divine transcendence and not just an illusorily projected opening to our own self-transcendence.¹² It is through the imagination in the

¹⁰ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, vol. I: Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press; New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 142–147.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹² See William Desmond's complex analysis of imagination in general and religious imagination in particular as a threshold endowment. William Desmond, 'Religious Imagination and the Counterfeit Doubles of God', in *Louvain Studies* 27 (2002), pp. 280–305.

intermediary locus of such ‘creative porosity’ that the divine origin offers plurivocal communication with human creativity. Pure philosophical *logos* proves to be unable in itself to account for certain ultimate equivocalities related to the human being and our place in the world. What Desmond calls the Pascalian ‘*esprit de géométrie*’ – ratio that aims to cover everything in its desire for univocity – cannot reach those recesses of the human condition that can be approached only with an ‘*esprit de finesse*’, that is ‘imaginative *delicatesse*’ that alone is able to deal with the double nature of all our imaginings (which are either empty figments or meaningful pointers to a real otherness).

This has inevitable consequences for the relationship between philosophy and the religious image. Philosophy – itself strongly reliant on the imagination’s ‘*esprit de finesse*’ – will never do the job of ‘midwifery’ so often assigned to it: it is unable to deliver the religious image (and thus religious imagination) from its own inherent equivocity. Ideally, philosophy is expected to bring to full lucidity the meaning that is equivocally encapsulated in the religious image; discursive *logos* is said to complete the process of understanding that faith had grasped in an incomplete manner. Transposed to the rational mode of freedom, the image is claimed to have been freed from its potentially falsifying form. Obviously, no philosophical recontextualisation can do justice to the irreducible core of the image that resists transposition into the conceptual mode. As Desmond contends, it is exactly such resistance and ultimate undeliverability – in his words, the ‘powerful’ poverty of the religious image – that holds the promise of real transcendence both for religion and philosophy. If philosophy were able to reincorporate into its own conceptual discourse the ‘truth’ of the religious image without remainder, then the passageway to the transcendence of God would be obstructed by reason’s own construction: a rationalistic ‘counterfeit double’ of God. For the ‘powerful’ poverty of the image – as something that in its immanent otherness witnesses to a transcending divine otherness – represents the ‘opening’ or ‘porosity’ between human and divine that reason itself presupposes but cannot create on its own. Therefore, a major concern for the philosopher (especially if he is religious) must be the accomplishment of maintenance work with respect to the middle zone of porosity; as part of such work the philosopher should identify thought-idols – counterfeit doubles of the truly transcendent God – that close the human sphere upon itself and clog porosities where divine communication is believed to be offered to us. What comes to the fore in this account is the intriguing fact that both philosophy as well as theology, rooted in the common ground where myth and *logos*

indissolubly grow, appear as open to the same horizon that alone gives trustworthy 'existence' to concept and image alike.¹³

Keeping all this in view, it may not strike one as surprising that in the *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie* (1998; 2002) on surveying the history of philosophy in the light of its relationship with theology, Jean-Yves Lacoste has diagnosed a curious convergence, a strange transmutation.¹⁴ In the first (1998) edition of the dictionary he distinguishes five consecutive stages in the history of the rapport between philosophy and theology: 1/ The logos and the cross; 2/ Christianity as philosophy; 3/ Philosophy in the service of theology; 4/ Philosophy as separate from theology; 5/ The theological within philosophy. What these subtitles point to is a gradual shift away from the profile of the conventionally philosophical towards a more theological outlook. With this change, philosophy – which has traditionally been careful to guard its own autonomy and, by staking out a neatly defined domain for rational investigation, has cautiously distinguished itself from theological enquiry – having taken a safe distance from its counterpart, started to harbour strikingly 'theological' ambitions. Lacoste reminds us of the fact that in the modern era clearly recognisable *theologoumena* (e.g. traits of Christology and trinitarian theology), detached from ecclesial context and traditional Church teaching, have appeared within philosophical discourse itself (cf. Hegel, Schelling, Kierkegaard). The appearance of such *theologoumena* indicates more than a simple borrowing of themes from theology. Lacoste goes as far as to claim that as a result of such a perplexing shift, a major part of significant theological reflection is to be found, partly or entirely, in recent philosophical texts rather than in theology itself. In the second (2002) edition of the same theological dictionary, Lacoste refines and further develops the picture, arguing that although, admittedly, Hegel's, Schelling's and Kierkegaard's incorporation of *theologoumena* into their philosophies resulted in gnostic, mythological or semi-heretical views rather than truly Christian theological reflection, nonetheless their works have had a lasting impact on official theology precisely as theologies (though outside traditional church teaching), and were much less influential in terms of providing a new conceptual framework for theologians. Moreover, philosophy is indebted to theology in another significant

¹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar has words to the effect that it would be a mistaken effort to try to deliver the 'mute fullness of meaning' encapsulated in myth by conceptualising it because what it lacks (in Kierkegaard's term) is 'existence.' In this sense, "[b]oth things, myth as well as concept, await the God-Man in order to come into their own." See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, vol. I: Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press; New York: Crossroad, 1982), p. 508.

¹⁴ Lacoste, 'Philosophie', in Jean-Yves Lacoste (ed.), *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie* (Paris: PUF, 1998), pp. 901–906. See also the same entry in the second revised edition: Lacoste, 'Philosophie', in *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie*, (2002), pp. 907–913.

manner. Besides pursuing distinct theological reflection, philosophy owes some of its pivotal *philosophema* (e.g. the concept of person, or the idea of creation) to theological reflection.¹⁵

What we have here then is a strange metamorphosis in progress: philosophy is gradually leaving behind the old chrysalis of immanent rational enquiry that had been claimed to be unaffected by theological reflection and is increasingly assuming a new form, perplexingly akin to theology. Ultimately, we find that these two disciplines at times become so similar to one another that we are almost unable to tell them apart. What do we actually see? A recent merging of originally distinct identities or the recognition of inherent sameness that alone testifies to the existence of distinct otherness as in the case of twins?

4 Towards Freshly Perceived Identities

Lacoste seems to have opted for the former vision when he speaks about the appearance of a new ‘modality of rationality’ that comes about when philosophy refuses to accept its original status as a discourse independent of theological reflection.¹⁶ Such a new form of rationality develops within what he calls a ‘border region’ between philosophy and theology where the originally well-defined demarcation line disappears and a transition zone unfolds whose existence one knows without actually seeing where it begins or ends. This transition zone shelters purely philosophical questions (e.g. the ontological status of mathematical entities) or distinctly theological ones (e.g. the internal coherence of the seven sacraments), or even realities that can be approached from the perspectives of both the philosopher as well as the theologian. Despite the fact that philosophy and theology share a common territory of enquiry where their objects seem to be identical, they do not share a common discourse but remain manifestations of two separate ‘life-forms’ (in a Wittgensteinian fashion).

However, Lacoste here is up against the difficulty of having to reconcile two conflicting ideas: one of having two disciplines with shared objects of study and without a clearly defined borderline between them; and another of having two non-interchangeable discourses which come about as a result of different life projects. In his explanation, these existentially distinct ‘life-forms’ cannot be pursued simultaneously by the same person: the *vita philosophica* of the philosopher with its roots in classical Greek culture enters into conflict with the faith experience of the theologian that is said to reorganise

¹⁵ The encyclical too makes mention of these notions of theological origin. See *Faith and Reason*, n. 76.

¹⁶ Lacoste, ‘Philosophie’, in *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie* (1998), p. 904; and Lacoste, ‘Philosophie’, in *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie* (2002), pp. 912–913.

the believer's relation to all that is. For the same reason, one cannot do theological and philosophical activity successively either, as one does, for example, in the case of the natural sciences which can be employed in successive steps. Since even if the theologian speaks in philosophical terms at some stage, he does not live according to the standards of the *vita philosophica* but follows the logic of the cross instead. The theologian's personal faith and the ultimate grounds for his hope cannot be articulated in the language of philosophy.

As we see, Lacoste's vision of the two disciplines that merge into indistinguishable sameness in a common transition zone is unable to do justice to the idea of a simultaneous and distinctive otherness with respect to the two discourses in question. While one can readily accept the claim that philosophy and theology represent two different life-forms which cannot be pursued alternately by the same person, it is more doubtful whether the idea of an imaginary border region that is meant to encompass disturbing likenesses between the two discourses is a useful tool to imagine paradoxical distinctness and a simultaneous strong affinity. Is it not the case that in the indeterminate area of a no man's land distinct identities are ultimately hard to maintain? Is philosophy's recent theological ambition the sign of a hazardous rapprochement that can ultimately threaten the self-understanding of both disciplines, or is it something else, maybe a natural outcome of the inherited disposition of the philosophical project itself? Are we witnessing a current search for new identities or should we look upon the change as an indication that philosophy has lately been recognising its true self as the identical twin-sister of theology?

According to our twin-model, the acknowledgment of essential sameness paradoxically frees the way for the affirmation of important differences. The more clearly a striking resemblance is recognised, the more obviously it affirms the distinct identities of each twin. Within this new scheme – contrary to the spatial analogy of a common border region – the idea of sameness is free of space restrictions and so allows one to think identical objects and yet separate discourses without a spatial merger. In this manner, philosophy is permitted to be 'theological' (in attending to the mythic-imaginative openings to being's self-revelation) and theology can be 'philosophical' (in working out its own distinctive metaphysical vision) without actually trampling on alien territory or risking the loss of identity. Instead, the theological activity within philosophy will be seen as governed by a distinct identity linked to the philosophical life-form, while the philosophical reflection within theological discourse will be regarded as determined by a different life-form: the logic of the cross. On this analogy, instead of a static spatial divide between the two disciplines, a more dynamic interplay can be imagined in terms of a conversation between two closely related and yet free partners.

Such ‘con-versation’ is first of all a joint willingness to associate in a mutually enriching social intercourse; it is a turn towards the other with amicable attention, a fruitful interchange of thoughts and the productive appropriation of ideas offered for consideration. It is in such dynamic interaction alone that identities are shaped by and distinguished from the familiar otherness of the other. Without a stimulating two-way communication, identities are likely to fade: a discourse closed upon itself eventually risks becoming devoid of any meaningful ambitions – and it holds doubly true for the special case of ‘twin discourses.’ Between the conversing partners a special field of sharing, a common site for encounter is established, less akin to a border region of fusion but much like a communication channel of mediation, something that William Desmond has called ‘metaxological intermediation.’¹⁷ Such mediation is at once ‘mediation of the self and mediation of the other’ in the ‘between’ where being articulates itself in a plurality of ways; hence it cannot be reduced to either of these two sides. In Desmond’s vision, philosophy – as essentially ‘metaxological’ reflection – does not close upon itself in a conceptual monologue, but truthfully stays open to the otherness of other ‘ways of mind’ (such as the aesthetic, the religious and the ethical). Beyond reformulating in philosophical terms what these distinct ways of mind have to voice, it also respectfully listens to these other voices in their actual otherness – and this even to the point where philosophy’s own voice gets reformulated under the impact of their otherness. Philosophy in this sense is ‘thought thinking doubly’: thought thinking itself and also its others in the plurivocal community of related ‘familial discourses’ where the philosophical voice becomes itself plurivocal in a complex interplay of distinct voices.

5 A Renewed Relationship

So where does that leave us? Ultimately, what relationship can theology forge with its twin philosophy? The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* considers three different models for the relationship between philosophy and theology all at the same time and without wanting to dispense with any of them. In particular, the last two chapters on the interaction between philosophy and theology show obvious signs of a complex effort to reconcile otherwise conflicting elements of three disparate visions. The first of these underlying models is what we could call the traditional ‘two-step’ model where philosophy is

¹⁷ See: William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1990) For a definition of philosophy as ‘metaxological’ see esp. pp. 1–61.

seen as helping to prepare the ground for the theologian's work by offering a natural and conceptually systematic knowledge of created realities which in turn is able to hold the 'supernatural' knowledge gained from Revelation and reflected upon by theology. The second model is the related vision of philosophy's 'noble and indispensable' contribution to the theological work that needs the help of disciplined thought and a useful conceptual apparatus in order to be able to articulate its own thinking as part of the *intellectus fidei*. Here, philosophy is also expected to assist in completing and judging the understanding of faith that is first grasped in an incomplete manner. This is a modernised version of the traditional idea of *philosophia ancilla theologiae*. Third, and it is the model that the encyclical clearly privileges, is the idea of a circular relationship where theology and philosophy help one another in successive and yet intertwined steps towards the fruitful accomplishment of their respective aims: theology starts a reflection from the primary grasp of the word of God and receives encouragement and confirmation along the way from a parallel philosophical search for truth; philosophy, on the other hand, in its human enquiry into the nature of ultimate reality receives inspiration and guidance from the theological understanding of God's word. In this third vision, both theology and 'Christian' philosophy are seen as moving between the same 'twin poles' that provide impetus for both projects: God's word and a better understanding of it. No wonder then that just as the text veers between these three models, not being able to settle on any of them, it also oscillates between the idea of philosophy as autonomous dialogue partner and as indispensable helper to theology. The former scheme of 'mother and child' relationship and a more emancipatory vision of a relation between equals seem to unite here in ambiguous terms. Is there a way out of such a maze of dubious bonds?

And, more important, does theology really need 'help' from philosophy? Is it not able to think primarily on its own? Jean-Yves Lacoste has asked these questions in pondering the prospects of the future relationship between philosophy and theology: if current philosophy, in Heidegger's wake, is engaged in contemplating the end of metaphysics, then should not theology reconsider its present relation to a 'dying language'?¹⁸ If philosophy has no more to say, should wisdom not incite theology to speak and think on its own, without asking for the 'assistance' of a discourse that perhaps does not exist any longer? Lacoste concluded that – whatever the eventual fate of metaphysics – a healthy theology cannot in any age leave its fate entirely in the hands of a specific philosophy or culture, but especially at a time

¹⁸ Lacoste, 'Philosophie', in *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie*, p. 912.

when the philosophical care of being is being eclipsed, it must learn to watch over a global sense of being in a Balthasarian fashion.¹⁹

If the encyclical envisions a too tight interrelation, Lacoste's vision in turn threatens a final break between all the bonds connecting philosophy and theology. Can we find a middle course, one truer to the image of the twin wings of reason and faith that in a collective and concerted effort lift the human spirit to the contemplation of truth?²⁰ In our new model, philosophy and theology as twin discourses cannot part company as conversing sisters who both set out on a quest for the ultimate meaning of reality. On such a tiring journey, they have innumerable opportunities for mutual aid and sharing – an unending exchange of small acts of reciprocal service – yet they both must follow their individual course, going the full distance on their own. Should the conversation stop between them, an awareness of their respective presence would still have an impact on their distinct and yet related visions. Their perplexing sameness and distinctive otherness is a constant ray of hope for a possibly fruitful cooperation between them.

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¹⁹ See Lacoste, 'Être', in *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie*, p. 418.

²⁰ See the introductory paragraph of the encyclical *Faith and Reason*.