
TWO TYPES OF DIALOGICAL PHILOSOPHICAL
THEOLOGY: RICHARD SCHAEFFLER
AND JOLANA POLÁKOVÁ*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to present the two forms of dialogical philosophical theology developed by Richard Schaeffler and Jolana Poláková. Schaeffler was a German philosopher who developed a transcendental-philosophical way of thinking about God. Poláková is a Czech philosopher, a representative of dialogical personalism. Her thinking seeks to grasp the responsive relationship of the human being to God and thus to conceive a dialogical type of philosophical theology. In Schaeffler's case, I believe we can speak of an implicit dialogical philosophical theology based on transcendental thinking and dialogical *Erfahrungstheorie*, and in Poláková's case, of an explicit dialogical philosophical theology. The study demonstrates the methods and possibilities of philosophical theology outside the circle of analytic philosophy – transcendental and dialogical approaches.

Keywords

Richard Schaeffler; Jolana Poláková; Philosophical theology; Dialogical thinking; Christian philosophy; Philosophy of religion

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Richard Schaeffler (1926–2019) was a German Christian philosopher advocating transcendental philosophy. In 1983, he published *Religionsphilosophie*, which was evaluated as a landmark in the history of this discipline. According to *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, the publication provides the first typological summary of all the main problems concerning the philosophy of religion.

* Texts from German, Czech and French have been translated into English by the author of the study.

Schaeffler understood experience as a dialogue with reality, which is necessary because it reveals the ‘always greater truth of things’ (*veritas semper maior*). Through it, we allow ourselves to be transformed to a newness of thinking. This original religious appeal of the Apostle Paul is also applicable in the context of profane experiences; therefore, it is important to learn to dialogue with reality. On this basis Schaeffler creates his own project of philosophical theology with a transcendental approach (*Philosophische Theologie von transzendentelem Ansatz*).¹

Czech philosopher Jolana Poláková (born 1951) places her philosophical conception in the ‘post-Kantian’ tradition: she does not consider the speculative element of thought to be beneficial unless its conceptions are controlled and verified by an analysis of experience. Philosophically, she seeks to think through the stimuli that Christian and Jewish thought brings to philosophy – especially the biblical testimony of knowledge understood as a living relationship to reality. This relationship is conditioned by humility, openness and receptivity. For these reasons, the line of post-Kantian philosophising closest to her is that which in the 20th century resulted in the ‘philosophy of dialogue’. Poláková is classed with dialogical personalism and with those thinkers who ‘go with Levinas beyond Levinas’. In *God in Dialogue*, she speaks of a ‘dialogical philosophical theology’, which she understands as a certain way of contact with God.²

This study aims to present the two forms of dialogical philosophical theology as developed by Schaeffler and Poláková. I believe that in Schaeffler’s case, we can speak of an implicit dialogical philosophical theology (based on a transcendental approach) and in Poláková’s case of an explicit dialogical philosophical theology. I will strive to clarify and defend this claim and demonstrate the core of their understanding of the dialogical relation to reality, as well as the commonalities and differences between the two authors.

¹ Richard Schaeffler, ‘Religionsphilosophie und Philosophische Theologie von transzendentelem Ansatz,’ in *Gott und Vernunft. Neue Perspektiven zur Transzendentalphilosophie Richard Schaefflers*, ed. Bernd Irlenborn and Christian Tapp, (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2013), 26–35.

² Jolana Poláková, *Bůh v dialogu. K hledání živého základu filosofické teologie* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2001).

Schaeffler does not speak primarily and explicitly of a ‘dialogue with God’ within philosophical theology, nor of dialogical philosophical theology, as such. Nowhere does he use this term; he does not understand his own philosophical theology as dialogical. Nevertheless, I believe we can speak of his implicit dialogical philosophical theology. In other words: we can speak of an explicit dialogical theory of experience (*Erfahrungstheorie*) in Schaeffler but not of an explicit dialogical philosophical theology in the sense that Poláková understands it, and as I will explain below. However, the different starting points or approaches will undoubtedly influence the shape of philosophical theology.

I seek to emphasise two ideas and differences:

1. In philosophical theology, Schaeffler focuses primarily on a ‘dialogue with reality’ (from the world to God, ‘reading the book of the world’) and on the dialectic of reason.⁵ Poláková focuses primarily on grasping the dialogical relationship between human beings and God, and believes that we can properly understand (‘read’) the world only in relation to God. Outside of the relationship with God, everything is cloudy, obscured, a screen, an obstacle and a source of misunderstanding for human beings. Poláková believes that recognising God in the world or through the world is difficult, problematic or even impossible because reality presents itself to us in many ways. Individual facts may not serve as support, inspiration or symbols for a person seeking God.

2. Schaeffler’s philosophical theology is a natural theology separated from faith and religion. Poláková’s philosophical theology is connected with faith; therefore, God is not a postulate of reason received by rational faith. I consider these two differences and aspects crucial in identifying and differentiating Schaeffler’s and Poláková’s dialogical philosophical theology.

⁵ Kai G. Sander writes: ‘Schaeffler verweist also auf die unerlässliche Notwendigkeit auch eines transzendental-philosophischen Gottesbegriffs, indem er Erkenntnis (“Erfahrung”) als einen Dialog mit der Wirklichkeit begreift, der geprägt ist vom Verweis auf die verschattete Präsenz Gottes. Mehr als ein solcher “Verweis” kann am Ende dieses Diskurses nicht gefunden werden – aber für die Vernunft bedeutet es viel, wenn sich ihr hier ein gangbarer Weg auftut.’ Kai Sander, ‘Ist der transzendental-philosophisch verstandene Gott ein selbstgemachter Gott? Fundamentaltheologische Anmerkungen zur transzendentalphilosophischen Gottesrede bei Richard Schaeffler’ in Irlenborn and Tapp, *Gott und Vernunft*, 130–131.

In other words, we can argue that there is a fundamental difference between 1. a cognitive relationship and a postulatory relationship and 2. an understanding of God (*Gottesverständnis*) and a relationship to God (*Gottesverhältnis*), as B. Irlenborn claims. Irlenborn notes that Schaeffler's model of the transcendental-philosophical concept of God does not posit (express) a cognitive, but only a postulatory relationship to God; thus, within his natural theology, it is not a cognition (understanding) of God, but only a postulatory relationship to Him.⁴

Poláková's approach is different; within dialogical philosophical theology she offers not a postulatory relationship to God but a 'lively relationship with a transcendent God' and a cognitive relationship to Him. A cognitive relationship and understanding of God in Poláková means – knowing within the relationship to God, not in the sense of objectification (God as object of natural theology) or a postulate of reason. Hence, Poláková argues that the central question of dialogical philosophical theology is the question 'Who are you, God?'

Philosophical theology has had a strong presence in analytic philosophy in recent decades. The intention of this study is also to recall other approaches and backgrounds – both transcendental-philosophical and dialogical.

1. Definition and understanding of philosophical theology

Undoubtedly the first question, yet one that I cannot further address here, is the question of the understanding and definition of philosophical theology. Are we to understand philosophical theology as being based on the natural cognitive faculty (capacity) of human beings, independent of faith, where the emphasis is on human reason proving the existence of God? Can we speak of philosophical theology even in the case of philosophers who are believers? What is the particularity of this type of philosophical theology? In this case, is faith 'bracketed' and does the philosopher proceed as if he were not a believer? Or does he reflect philosophically on his faith, its contents and his living relationship with God? The answers to these questions vary.

⁴ Bernd Irlenborn, 'Religiöse Erfahrung und postulatorischer Vernunftglaube. Zum Konzept und zur Tragfähigkeit von Schaefflers Erfahrungstheorie,' in *Religiöse Erfahrung. Richard Schaefflers Beitrag zu Religionsphilosophie und Theologie*, ed. Thomas M. Schmidt and Siegfried Wiedenhofer (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2010), 123–141.

For example, C. Taliaferro does not exclude Christian philosophical theology.

Examining a religious tradition philosophically from within is not necessarily partial or biased, but it does involve practising philosophy from the standpoint of some given theological tradition. Christian philosophical theology, for example, might take some key Christian teaching (about the Trinity, the incarnation, miracles, prayer, teachings about forgiveness) and consider whether such teaching can make philosophical sense.⁵

Other authors identify philosophical theology with natural theology (*theologia naturalis*).

‘Other philosophers of religion hold that reason can provide at least some insight into the nature of God. This approach is known as “natural theology”—“natural” because it appeals to our natural capacities for reasoning.’⁶ On the other hand, M. J. Adler, for example, rejects such a division and distinguishes between sacred, natural and philosophical (pagan) theology. He considers Aristotle’s theology to be an example of pure philosophical theology.⁷

The *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* editors state in their introduction:

Since philosophical theology (as we understand it) is aimed primarily at a theoretical understanding of the nature and attributes of God and God’s relationship to the world and things in the world, the prevailing scepticism about our ability to learn about God through philosophical reasoning left philosophical theology on the wane.⁸

Poláková neither proves nor postulates God (like Schaeffler) within her philosophical theology, and she understands dialogical philosophical theology as a ‘universally thinking part of a broad monotheistic

⁵ Charles Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (New York: Routledge-Taylor & Francis, 2016).

⁶ Tim Bayne, *Philosophy of Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁷ Mortimer J. Adler, ‘A Philosopher’s Religious Faith,’ in *Philosophers Who Believe. The Spiritual Journeys Of 11 Leading Thinkers*, ed. Kelly J. Clark (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 205–221.

⁸ Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

tradition'.⁹ This Czech philosopher sees the synthesis of philosophical theology and Christian faith ambivalently. On the one hand, she evaluates it as a certain trap for both sides, as has been shown in the past. The Christian, originally existential-dialogical approach to God has been crippled at its very foundation by monological philosophical thinking. For the independence of philosophical thought, this connection with the Christian faith in turn meant decline and limitation. On the other hand, a deeper look reveals that the union of philosophy with faith brought philosophical theology to a fundamental awareness of the inadequacy of the monological variant (approach).

For Poláková, therefore, the main dividing line is between monological and dialogical philosophical theology. She sees the latter approach as the completion of philosophical theology which came about through the influence of religious thought on philosophy and the philosophical grasp (expression) of the person's lived responsive relationship to God. In other words: 'Philosophy becomes the philosophy of relation, in relation and from relation. It becomes a relational metaphysics.'¹⁰

According to Poláková, philosophical theology has not only talked about God, but has also remained silent and considered him 'dead'. In the modern silencing of monological talk about God, she argues, there is an element of both resignation and new hope. A consequence of resignation is the widespread replacement of philosophical theology with a philosophy of religion, a phenomenology of religious experience or an analysis of religious language, whereby philosophy abdicates the question (thematization) of God. On the other hand, as an example of the new hope, she cites Heidegger's well-known idea that godless thought which must renounce the God of the philosophers is perhaps closer to the real, divine God.¹¹

Poláková asks three specific, important and relevant questions. What is characteristic of dialogical philosophical theology, or how does a dialogical way of thinking operate in the field of philosophical reflections on God? What impact does dialogical philosophical theology have on other philosophical disciplines, if we understand it as a 'first philosophy'? What does dialogically-based philosophical theology bring to Christian theology?

⁹ Poláková, *Bůh v dialogu*, 15.

¹⁰ Jolana Poláková, *Perspektiva naděje. Hledání transcendence v postmoderní době* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1995), 8.

¹¹ Jolana Poláková, *Dialog s Bohem a filosofie* (Praha: Ježek, 1999).

Schaeffler considered the concepts of the Christian philosophers – Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas – to be philosophical theology. He took up and preserved the two fundamental questions of philosophical theology – whether and what God is, *De Deo an sit et quid sit*. Philosophically, he resigned neither to the question of God nor to the possibility of conceiving a philosophical theology. The question of whether there is a God, however, cannot be fully answered within his transcendental philosophy without religious experience. As noted above, the existence of God is not proven in philosophy, only postulated and accepted by rational belief. In this approach, the German philosopher differs from the Czech author.

As Irlenborn noted, Schaeffler held that philosophical theology is possible in today's philosophical-historical conditions only as transcendental theology. His thesis is thus clearly directed against the possibility of other philosophical approaches that speak about God – in particular, against the analytic philosophy of religion. Irlenborn attempts to clarify where Schaeffler thinks the prerogative of transcendental God-speaking lies *vis-à-vis* other models of philosophical *Gottesrede*.¹²

Irlenborn writes that Schaeffler's overall philosophical *oeuvre* on the concept of a dialogical theory of experience must be understood as a standalone elaboration of the transcendental philosophy of Kant. This development culminates in the philosophical concept of God – as the 'highest point of transcendental philosophy'.¹⁵

Developed transcendental philosophy describes experience as a 'dialogue with reality', and in this dialogue, thinking can let itself be transformed through the claim of the real (*Anspruch des Wirklichen*) into a newness of thinking. At the same time, as Schaeffler states, this philosophy also gains access to philosophical talk about God, or rather the question is raised as to how God becomes the subject of a developed transcendental philosophy. In his view, God is anticipatorily present in our experience, calling us to respond to the claim of reality, and is the basis of our hope to surrender to the claim of reality and persevere in this task.¹⁴

¹² Bernd Irlenborn, 'Transzendentalphilosophische und analytische Rede von Gott,' in *Gott und Vernunft*, 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴ Richard Schaeffler, 'Die Transzendente Theologie ist der höchste Punkt der Transzendentalphilosophie. (Kant, opus postumum),' in *Religiöse Erfahrung. Richard*

2. Schaeffler's implicit dialogical philosophical theology or philosophical theology based on a transcendental approach

I will give three reasons why Schaeffler's transcendental-philosophical theology can be characterised as an implicit dialogical philosophical theology and will do so despite three (seemingly opposite) reasons: 1. Schaeffler does not start from a philosophy of dialogue; 2. the concept of God is not based on religious experience; and 3. God is a postulate of reason accepted by rational faith.

(1) Schaeffler mentioned how he observed painters and interviewed artists on Reichenau Island on Lake Constance in 1991. His attention was aroused by the painters' concentration as they observed their surroundings and also by the creative freedom with which they created images on canvases: the resulting paintings were not mere copies of the landscape, but rather expressions of the artists' power of creation (*Gestaltungskraft*). They were depicting what was in front of them – trying to capture it appropriately and relevantly. Schaeffler sought to express the relationship between the precision of their gaze and the freedom of artistic creation with the term *responsorisches Gestalten* (responsive shaping). This expression seemed to him to be just right to describe a specific dialogue with reality, which concerns not only artists but every perception.

In 1995, Schaeffler published *Erfahrung als Dialog mit der Wirklichkeit* and in 2014 *Erkennen als antwortendes Gestalten*. He emphasises, on the one hand, the passivity, the retreat of the subject in his encounter with objects; on the other hand, the subject nevertheless must fulfil his role, for only he 'brings things to speech'. Although Schaeffler does not explicitly articulate it, I hope that passivity and activity are both the dialectic of the subject and a condition of its openness – in this stance, the human being is receptive, thinking and listening.

Schaeffler holds a dialogical conception of subjectivity and truth, resulting in an understanding of experience as a dialogue with reality – and because his philosophical theology is based on these foundations, I take it to be an implicitly dialogical philosophical theology. 'The truth of things comes to speak only in our response. And the truth of

Schaefflers Beitrag zu Religionsphilosophie und Theologie, Thomas M. Schmidt and Siegfried Wiedenhofer, (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2010), 23.

sentences is the way our response “corresponds” to that claim. Thus, the concept of truth emerges as a dialogical concept.”¹⁵

Schaeffler also writes:

Experience requires a change of our perception and thinking. This change is not imposed on us, but is brought about by ourselves in an act of responsive shaping. Of new significance, especially in the specific context of human knowledge and divine salvific intention, is a moment that is otherwise easily forgotten, namely that the way in which salvific intention reveals itself to us is also the result of responsive self-shaping. Responsive shaping here means a special kind of dialogue between the creature and its Creator, and one might add: every other form of dialogue between human beings and their world of experience is only the image, the experienceable present form of the dialogue between the Creator and his creatures.¹⁶

M. Dumas aptly remarks:

Experience is, therefore, more than an interpretation received intersubjectively; it is a process where a frame of reference is broken and possibly reconstructed, therefore, a frame stable enough not to sink into chaos and not so stable as to lose its capacity for surprise and experience. Experience is a dialogical process with the reality that operates a critical work of the subjectively lived experience. It lets me discover what I alone would not have imagined; it also calls me to respond to this discovery, which I am the only one who can give/do. For Schaeffler, the mainspring of experience is what we called the event above. The *Ereignis* is a moment internal to the experience which provokes progress in the search for a new answer.¹⁷

When something shows itself to us, it is a contingent and not infrequently surprising event (*Ereignis*). The ideas of ‘world’ and ‘I’ suggest (outline) for us the task of vacating the space in which these contingent events can take place, and this means that we must ultimately

¹⁵ Richard Schaeffler, *Ontologie im nachmetaphysischen Zeitalter: Geschichte und neue Gestalt einer Frage* (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2008), 136.

¹⁶ Richard Schaeffler, *Phänomenologie der Religion. Grundzüge ihrer Fragestellung* (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2017), 205.

¹⁷ Marc Dumas, ‘Une réponse à Richard Schaeffler,’ in *Religious Experience and Contemporary Theological Epistemology*, ed. Lieven Boeve, Yves De Maeseneer and Stijn Van den Bossche, (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2005), 58.

self-critically retreat before the new givenness of the object. Only this retreat allows us to discover and to see the objectivity of the real; that is, the retreat allows the real to become an object for us, and thus the measure of our critical self-assessment.

I believe that we can understand religious experience and the response to this experience as *Ereignis* par excellence. Richard Schaeffler writes about religious experience:

Experiences of this special kind can be called ‘religious experiences’. The appropriate response to them can be described with a word coined by Martin Heidegger: *andenkendes Sich-Verdanken*. By ‘remembering’ the unforeseeable event (*Ereignis*) of such experiences, human beings feel ‘gratitude’ for what has been revealed to them in these experiences: the empowering power, liberating freedom and redeeming goodness of God.¹⁸

(2) Poláková claims that Kant’s description of the world of free ethical reciprocity of rational beings (ethical community) whose ‘head’ or supreme lawgiver is God is meant in its core personally and dialogically. The supreme Being cannot be proven, only postulated, and Poláková understands the certainty of this postulate as an implicitly (inherently) relational certainty, as opposed to a purely theoretical construct. From her point of view, the potential dialogicity of the Kantian line of philosophical theology was preserved in the next tradition of transcendental philosophising, and she explicitly refers to the work of Richard Schaeffler.¹⁹

Schaeffler emphasised the transition from idea to postulate and spoke of the personality of the postulated God. The concept of God is not a *bloße Idee* describing and expressing the role of reason; the concept of God speaks of an existent essence that makes the fulfilment of these tasks possible. We can certainly agree with Poláková – the postulate of God is a postulate of hope, and hope implies desire, expectation and trust, which are only possible in a relational attitude. According to Schaeffler, postulates are justifications of hope, while being neither expressions of knowledge nor of opinion. Hope cannot be understood merely as a sheer presupposition (a theoretical construct) that we

¹⁸ Richard Schaeffler, *Philosophische Anthropologie. Das Bild vom Menschen und die Ordnung der Gesellschaft* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019), 22.

¹⁹ Jolana Poláková, *Smysl dialogu. O směřování k plnosti lidské komunikace* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2008), 46.

construct to be sure that we can overcome the dialectic of reason.²⁰ The postulates formulated are thus in the nature of a confident hope; they are neither a personification of the idea of God nor a rational construct. To speak about God means that God's affection, His invitation and promise, which constitute the content of religious experience, are also the fulfilment of a postulatory hope, without which reason cannot free itself from its self-cancellation.²¹

The postulate of God (*Gottespostulat*) is an expression of hope, which is necessary if reason is not to succumb to sceptical doubt. The postulate expresses confidence in the truthfulness of God, which guarantees that the provisional character of our knowledge does not lead us into confusion and does not end in absurdity. Thus, we encounter a specific understanding of God, or rather of His attribute – *veracitas Dei*. I must rely on it if I am to be able, in the shocks of reason, through the experience of paradoxes, to assume the claim or demand of reality that is addressed to me in these shocks. Already in Descartes, the *veracitas Dei* is placed at the centre of all predicates of God, because only trust in *Gottes Wahrhaftigkeit* can restore the shaken self-confidence of reason.²²

The postulate of God has a specific status, transcending the three regulative ideas (the idea of unity of the subject, the idea of unity of the world, and the idea of unity of universal history). As B. Irlenborn states, in the case of the postulate of God, it is not a demonstration of the existence of God, but only a legitimated acceptance – made legitimate by rational reasons and religious experience. Schaeffler did not conceive of the idea of God as one of the three ideas, as Kant did; for him, God as the author of the claim of reality is always already included in all three ideas as the *focus imaginarius*.²³

Schaeffler emphasises trust in God, a trust full of hope. Hope as the core of religion is also the principle through which reason is liberated from dialectics. Hope is the source of the ability to respond to the claim of the real and, above all, to discover in moral action the

²⁰ Schaeffler, *Ontologie*, 115.

²¹ Richard Schaeffler, *Unbedingte Wahrheit und endliche Vernunft. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen menschlicher Erkenntnis* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2017), 74.

²² Richard Schaeffler, *Unbedingte Wahrheit und endliche Vernunft*, 90–91.

²³ Bernd Irlenborn, 'Religiöse Erfahrung und postulatorischer Vernunftglaube. Richard Schaefflers Beitrag zu Religionsphilosophie und Theologie,' 128–129.

chance not only to become the image of God, but to be an instrument of God's redemptive action, to carry out His will.

Since the rational postulate of God claims to speak of the same God that religions speak of, it must be hermeneutically and critically affirmed in religious experience, for only here is the reality of God originally given. This does not mean, of course, that there is no difference between postulated rational belief and religious belief. For the religious person, the reliability of hope is based on the promise of God, whereas the postulate is based on an assumption, a requirement. What the postulate demands as a necessary precondition for the recovery of the faculty of experience has become certain in faith by virtue of the *sensus spei*.

(3) I believe that we can also speak of Schaeffler's dialogical philosophical theology in another sense (in a different meaning), and I find inspiration for this interpretation in Czech philosopher Karel Skalický. Schaeffler states:

Philosophy of religion on the basis of philosophical theology (and in a particular way on the foundation of a speech upon God in terms of transcendental philosophy) has the double task, then, of criticism of religion, and at the same time an exposition of religion in its self-presentation. It contains a hermeneutic proffer to religious consciousness to understand itself better in its meaning-logic and intentionality and to become critically attentive to the danger of its possible faulty composition.²⁴

Here, the conversation between religious and philosophical consciousness that Skalický writes about in the preface to the Czech translation of Schaeffler's *Religionsphilosophie* is visible. Schaeffler combines three methods in his philosophy of religion: transcendental, phenomenological and linguistic.²⁵ This combination allows him

²⁴ Richard Schaeffler, *Reason and the Question of God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1999), 120.

²⁵ Schaeffler writes: 'This means, for the interrelationship of the three methods here described that, owing to its special manner, act-structure, and object-relationship, by way of the "basic phenomenological law", the phenomenological method wins a pre-eminence with regard to a choice of themes. As for method, the doctrine of God in transcendental philosophy is to be ascribed a pre-eminence, since without the transcendental method neither can phenomenology and linguistic analysis reach their appointed goal. But the analysis of religious speech, especially the speech of prayer, wins a pre-eminence when it is a matter of obtaining criteria on which the religious act and its meaning-logic clearly distinguish themselves.' *Ibid.*, 117.

to approach religion not as an immutable, passive object, but rather as a dialogue partner. Schaeffler thus creates a new type of philosophy of religion which fully corresponds to a paradigm that understands the relationship between religion and philosophy as a relationship between two subjects.²⁶

Philosophy and religion are dialogue partners, aware of differences, specificities and tensions, as well as the contribution and enrichment from the other side.²⁷ We can add that, according to Schaeffler, if reason or secular thought receives stimuli from religion, this does not mean that reason accepts religion's schemes and thus itself becomes religious. Reason does not lose its uniqueness, its secularity, but takes it to a higher qualitative level, discovering and realising a more responsible secularity. Only self-critical (not sceptical) reason and self-critical (not relativistic) religion are possible partners in the dialogue. The role of philosophy is to encourage this self-criticism and thus to mediate the mutual dialogue.

3. Explicit dialogical philosophical theology of Jolana Poláková

Jolana Poláková understands dialogue as a relational process, and its meaning does not consist only in the transmission of information or in the building of consensus. In the case of a dialogue between two human beings, the aim of the dialogue is mutual understanding. Dialogue is also obviously linked to cognitive relation to the object and is therefore not only a practice but also knowledge – to apply dialogue in the field of knowledge is to subordinate the closedness of the subject to openness and relations. Dialogically constituted knowledge does not impose unilateral conditions on reality; it considers its extra-categorical, non-apparent or ineffable aspects as relevant, as well. Alterity, as an

Schaeffler also writes: 'Without an analysis of religious language, the programme of a phenomenology of religion cannot be realised. So, if theology "needs" transcendental phenomenology in order to fulfil its task, then it also "needs" its "linguistic turn". And it needs a linguistic turn of such a kind that the transcendental character of phenomenology is not lost in the process. For if phenomenology were to lose this transcendental character, it would at the same time cease to be "useful" for theology.' Richard Schaeffler, *Transzendente Theologie. Gott als Möglichkeitsgrund der Erfahrung* (Baden-Baden: Verlag Karl Alber, 2022), 114.

²⁶ Karel Skalický, 'Předmluva k českému vydání,' in *Filosofie náboženství*, Richard Schaeffler (Praha: Academia, 2003), 13–15.

²⁷ Because of the prescribed length of the article, I cannot here elaborate on the enrichment of philosophy by religion.

unknowable part of reality, encourages us to encounter it, and we can accept reality as a source of potential innovations of open thinking.²⁸

Like Schaeffler, Poláková argues that the basis and a prerequisite of dialogical knowledge is openness – the degree of dialogicality depends precisely on the degree of openness to reality. Epistemic dialogue is the most open theoretical activity in which we approach reality in its living totality, while reality also influences the manner and extent of our knowledge. Poláková even speaks of a ‘creative openness of thought’ to reality.²⁹

According to Poláková, dialogue enables and brings about reciprocity, but it does not imply mechanical symmetry. Every dialogue is asymmetrical in different ways and to different degrees, thus enabling giving and receiving. At the same time, dialogue is conditioned by mutual freedom, and the asymmetry and freedom of dialogue are the source of creation. Poláková, like Schaeffler, continues:

Human creation can therefore not be regarded as a sovereign performance, but as a happening that takes place only dialogically: one allows oneself to be addressed and inspired by created and uncreated reality (...) and allows what is good to speak into being through oneself. This creative struggle for the good in the field of being produces history – a mysterious and living process that can never be systematised and closed, because it is carried by human and divine freedom.³⁰

Poláková believes that at the origin of all metaphysics is the effort to have a living relationship to reality. If this dialogical contact with reality is forgotten, metaphysics eventually becomes the opposite of what it was at its inception. It becomes a system of rigid assertions closed to reality, when it was originally something else – an effort to dialogue with reality. That it is possible to fulfil again the original mission of metaphysics is shown by dialogical philosophy, and metaphysics has within itself the possibility of subordinating its attitude of objectification and immanence to a dialogical attitude.³¹

²⁸ Poláková, *Smysl dialogu*, 42–47.

²⁹ Jolana Poláková, *Myšlenkové tvoření. Nárys obecné teorie* (Praha: Filosofický ústav AVČR, 1995), 10.

³⁰ Poláková, *Bůh v dialogu*, 71.

³¹ Jolana Poláková, ‘Z rozhovoru pro diplomovou práci,’ in *Dialog s Bohem ve filozofii Jolany Polákové*, Žaneta Žurková (Ostrava: Pedagogická fakulta, 2017), 58–60.

The true principle of relation to reality is thus non-intentional metaphysical reverence, not intentional metaphysical grasping. The transcendent character of dialogue abolishes the idolatry of any constructed meaning and makes it possible to embrace a meaning that, in turn, constitutes and transforms us. The source of this sense is the infinite, which we glimpse in the ‘cracks’ of our order. As Tatranský points out, in *God in Dialogue* Poláková works, in addition to the pair immanence-transcendence, with the monologue-dialogue dichotomy, which in the context of her philosophy has a similar key meaning as *le dire-le dit* in Levinas and *idol-icon* in Marion.³²

The philosophy of dialogue unquestionably provides the methodological presuppositions for philosophical theology. It is about searching and questioning – whether and how we can talk about the God who speaks to us. Can philosophy capture, reflect and express this reality, this relation and this type of experience? In the monological type of philosophical theology, God is a silent object, and idolatry and nihilism are the two basic variants of the monological spiritual orientation, whereas, in the dialogical type, God is an active subject and a person I can listen to.

³² Tomáš Tatranský, *Lévinas a metafyzika* (Svitavy: Trinitas, 2004), 104.

Adriana Cavarero writes: ‘Elsewhere, as he continues his critique of metaphysical logocentrism, Levinas explicitly invites us to distinguish between Saying (*le Dire*) and the Said (*le Dit*). This move is paradoxical. Saying is in fact understood by Levinas as “anterior to verbal signs, anterior to linguistic systems and to semantic reflections – preface to languages.” Again, this is not the phonetic aspect of speech, not a voice that reverberates. Rather, Saying is here – at least, in its simplest meaning – the act of speaking, the event by which human beings speak to each other one by one, without regard for what they say. This Saying is distinguished by Levinas from a Said that is, at the same time, that which they say to one another and that which the entire knowledge of the west says. But the Said is above all the system that organizes speech. The Said is therefore the logos of the Greeks, or rather the principle on which the metaphysical tradition that “subordinates the human to the anonymous games of being” is founded.’ Adriana Cavarero, *For more than one voice. Toward a philosophy of vocal expression* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 28.

On the difference between idol and icon, Stephanie Rumpza states: ‘This, then, is the problem, framed concisely: the idol marks our greatest capacity of encountering God. Whether we carve statues to try to represent that experience or forge concepts, the problem is that it is exclusively framed from our aim, bound to our capacities. And our capacities are finite. However lovely this idol may be, it will not in the end be God. The icon, on the other hand, does not attempt to collapse God into visibility, but tries to preserve the invisibility that would be a necessary result for something which surpasses my comprehension or control. While the idol attracts the gaze to fixate on it, the icon is not a resting place for the gaze, but constantly urges us to move beyond it.’ Stephanie Rumpza, *Phenomenology of the icon. Mediating God through the image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 95–96.

I would characterise Poláková's philosophical theology as an explicit dialogical philosophical theology, because – based on the philosophy of dialogue – it grasps (captures) the dialogical relationship between God and man and understands man's relationship to reality as carried, formed and determined by the relationship to God.

In relation to God – and only in relation to God – everything that is not God retrospectively receives the function of a transitive, transparent image. Nothing is a fixed end in itself; everything becomes a medium of holistic communication between God and man, an expression of their being-in-dialogue. The world as God's work and man's life in this world are, to the last breath of their being, a kind of total communication between God and man.⁵⁵

Poláková refers several times to the work of Ferdinand Ebner, continuing the line of his thought and agreeing with him in the understanding of philosophical theology. Dialogically based philosophical theology arrives at the only possible philosophical and human certainty we can have about God – the certainty given to human beings by God Himself. She writes:

Ebner's dialogical personalism opens for philosophy a daring possibility of not stopping at the threshold of the Christian revelation, but of entering with adequate subtlety directly into the heart of the Christian message. What in the monological version of philosophical theology necessarily appeared to be completely inaccessible to reason, in the personalistic approach appeared to be inaccessible only to the reason which remains non-dialogically limited. Ebner's work thus shows that philosophical theology is in principle able to work even at the level of personal relation: to thematise God philosophically as a partner about whom it is impossible to speak meaningfully without Him.⁵⁴

For the philosopher, dialogue is the way to a God about whom he can speak but cannot appropriate, and who theo-morphises philosophical

⁵⁵ Poláková, *Dialog s Bohem*, 37.

⁵⁴ Jolana Poláková, 'Filozofická teologie F. Ebnera,' *Teologické texty* 8, no. 1 (1997): 15.

theology. ‘The essential basis of dialogical philosophical theology is the living consciousness of a personal relationship.’⁵⁵

Recall Ebner’s thoughts: ‘The fact that the assertion of God’s existence in the third person through the thesis “God is” or “there is a God” is nonsensical and signifies no more than the sentence “the I is” or “the Thou is” – in other words, that it literally says nothing; and the fact that this assertion in no way concerns the real existence of God and above all not the personality of this existence must actually bring all theology and theologically speculative metaphysics to nought. God either has a personal existence, or He does not exist at all. Yet man cannot apprehend God’s personality speculatively, but only through personally relating to Him (which is the demand of man’s spiritual life and the summons of God) – that is, by making Him the Thou of his I; and then all speculating and every theological and metaphysical profundity has ceased *eo ipso*.’⁵⁶

The relation to God is determinative for our knowledge of reality; therefore, we can claim that from Poláková’s perspective it is not primarily reality that addresses us and lays claim to us, but the relation to God is a prerequisite and a condition for a correct perception of reality.

Knowing reality taking place in dialogical contact with its Creator has a greater chance of being true. It is also open to that which transcends all forms of human cognition, which actively changes its very structure and meaning from the outside and affects its deepest starting points. In dialogue with the fullness of created and uncreated reality, the whole human being is transformed – especially in the dialogical way of knowing God, man is in a sense re-created – and with it, human cognitive approaches and conceptions of truthfulness are also transformed.⁵⁷

Thus, dialogue with God is for our knowledge a universally opening access to reality in general, as well as a determining way to any partial reality. A dialogical relationship with God is epistemologically crucial and significant since it is constitutive of the dialogicity of all our knowing. For this reason, God is the most vivid possible dialogue partner for human beings and dialogical philosophical theology. Poláková – like

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁶ Ferdinand Ebner, *The Word & the Spiritual Realities (the I and the Thou) Pneumatological Fragments* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 211.

⁵⁷ Poláková, *Bůh v dialogu*, 64.

Marion – claims that the beginning of a dialogical relationship with God is not the moment when we ‘see God’, but the situation when we capture His gaze turned to us. His gaze is specific and can ‘shine through’ a multifaceted reality. But, according to Poláková, without a primary relationship with God, it is difficult to reliably discern what is a manifestation of God in the world – how can I recognise God in the world if I have not known Him separately before?

By relating to God, reason becomes freer and more complex as it is not forced to limit its questioning and critical reflection. It is open to all potential contexts that transcend it. ‘The positive dynamics of the cooperative interdependence of reason and faith and their common openness outside and above oneself is demonstrably maximised in relation to God.’⁵⁸

This is where I see the difference between Schaeffler and Poláková. For Poláková’s philosophical theology, the relationship to God is determinative for a true knowledge of reality. Schaeffler primarily emphasises dialogue with reality, whereas knowledge of the world, of our finitude and the dialectic of reason, results ultimately in the rational postulate of God.

Schaeffler writes:

It is not the top of the pyramid of being or the scale of values, the *sum-mum ens* and *summum bonum*, that is the primary place where God can be sought, but rather every object of experience and its claim on our perception and thinking can become the form in which God encounters human beings. Because the capacity for experience, which is threatened in the dialectics of reason and proven to be contingent, is restored by understanding the demands of reality, to which we respond, as manifestations of divine attention.⁵⁹

I think the problem with Schaeffler’s concept lies in the fact that people do not perceive (‘read’) the world in the same way; there are differentiated interpretive frameworks, and a dialogue with reality does

⁵⁸ Jolana Poláková, ‘Rozum a víra. Rekapitulace jednoho přístupu,’ in *Čeští svědkové promyšlené víry. Filosofie a teologie v interakci u současných českých myslitelů*. K. Skalický, R. Svoboda & F. Štěch (Eds.), (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2005), 78.

⁵⁹ Richard Schaeffler, *Transzendente Theologie. Gott als Möglichkeitsgrund der Erfahrung* (Baden-Baden: Verlag Karl Alber, 2022), 75.

not guarantee a path to God; the path from the world to God is not straightforward. Rather, the reverse is often true: the relationship with God influences the worldview, opens new perspectives and makes it possible to see the depth of reality with new eyes. Respectively, dialogue with reality frequently will confirm and strengthen the atheistic experience, the experience of the absence of God.

Moreover, reason does not have to point to the postulates of God to overcome its own dialectic; the question of God need not be in play at all for contemporary people. Even dialectics need not appear problematic, and/or reason need not perceive (be aware of) its self-endangerment. As S. Zabala described:

Postmodern man, who has lived out the end of the great unifying syntheses produced by traditional metaphysical thought, manages to live without neurosis in a world where God is no longer present; therefore, in a world where there are no longer stable and guaranteed structures capable of supplying a unique, ultimate and normative foundation for our knowledge and for our ethics. In other words, postmodern man, no longer needful of the extreme, magical reassurance supplied by the idea of God, accepts the probability that history is not on his side at all and that there is no power capable of guaranteeing him the happiness he seeks. Postmodern man has thus learned to live without anxiety in the relative world of half-truths.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Czech thinker Poláková's starting point is not the transcendental-philosophical approach and, unlike Schaeffler, she does not favour this approach in philosophical theology. Poláková does not philosophically ask the question of whether there is a God, because this question is irrelevant in the context of dialogical philosophical theology. The potential proof or postulation of God is here transformed into a living encounter with Him. Philosophy, from her perspective, can do more than arrive at the postulates of reason – it can reflect philosophically on the relationship of the living God to a person and think in and from

⁴⁰ Santiago Zabala, 'A Religion Without Theists or Atheists,' in *The Future of Religion*, Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 11–12.

that relationship. ‘Dialogical philosophical theology is itself a way of contact with God.’⁴¹

Bernhard Casper has very aptly characterised the thought of Jolana Poláková, arguing that the Czech philosopher puts forward her own ideas about the human relationship to God and the relationship of God to human beings. These reflections are based on her thinking experience, which can also be called a spiritual experience. It is not a reflection ‘about something’ but a ‘description’ from within – expressing and articulating a relationship to the unconditional God’s calling. It is hermeneutic of the facticity of the relation to God, a thinking (and thinker’s) approach to the reality of that relation, and this facticity is made accessible to ‘experiencing philosophy’ (Rosenzweig’s term).⁴²

Within the framework of Christian thinking, it is undoubtedly possible to take different positions – and therefore, also to conceive different forms of philosophical theology. I believe that both authors inspire and invite us to rethink not only the possibilities of philosophical theology in the present, but also the possibilities of its transcendental-philosophical and dialogic versions.

The ideas of Richard Schaeffler have been discussed in Germany by many authors, and their valuable contributions have dealt with almost all his philosophical topics. Nevertheless, I believe that Jolana Poláková’s contribution offers and opens another possible perspective on Schaeffler’s thought – especially on the question of the possibility of a dialogical philosophical theology, its different shapes, and their comparison. I will give two reasons, or rather two short notes.

1. I believe that one of the open and problematic questions is whether it is possible today to restore, reconstruct or update the concept of rational faith and the postulate of God and whether a transcendental version of dialogical philosophical theology is acceptable and sustainable in our time.

On the one hand, it is possible to understand Schaeffler’s intention and approach – his emphasis on a dialogical relationship with reality, on human openness in the cognitive process, on awareness of one’s own finitude and the dialectic of reason – all of which culminates in rational faith and the postulate of God. However, is such a path

⁴¹ Poláková, *Bůh v dialogu*, 62.

⁴² Bernhard Casper, ‘Úvod,’ in *Bůh v dialogu*, Jolana Poláková (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2001), 13.

feasible today within Christian philosophy and philosophical theology? Or would we rather expect that non-religious thinking should arrive at the postulate of God and thus reach the boundary between philosophy and religion? Or is it possible to arrive at postulates and rational faith only if the philosopher already has religious faith? Or should we agree with Ebner's criticism of postulates?

Ebner stated:

But speculative reason seeks God in vain and finally is destroyed in the conflict with itself, in which it gets ever more deeply involved. Moreover, in that practical reason, which according to Kant's doctrine necessarily postulates the existence of God for ethical reasons, man has not yet emerged from his I-aloneness, and the God postulated by it is nothing but the idea of the divine—not God himself, who is a reality of the spiritual life.⁴⁵

Certainly, from Schaeffler's point of view, it is not only ethical reasons that lead reason to the postulate of God and rational faith. Furthermore, I am convinced that Schaeffler's developed transcendental-dialogical concept is more complex than Kant's, and therefore, Ebner's criticism does not apply to him. Schaeffler repeatedly emphasised that the postulate itself is insufficient, or rather that postulates without religious experience are empty, and religious experience without postulates is blind.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, Jolana Poláková did not deal with Richard Schaeffler's thinking in detail, mentioning him only in a few passages. However, I assume that she would accept and welcome Schaeffler's version of transcendental-dialogical philosophy because Schaeffler not only maintained but also updated and developed the potential dialogicity of Kant's line of philosophical theology. Poláková argues that in Kant, philosophical theology rises above the anthropocentric horizon of theoretical monologue – to the threshold of the possibility of a dialogical relationship between practical reason and the reality of God. She adds that Kant's description of the 'intelligible world' as a world of free ethical interaction between rational beings, whose 'head' is God, is essentially personalistic and dialogical. At the same time, the existence of God can only be assumed, not demonstrated, and the certainty of this

⁴⁵ Ebner, *The Word & the Spiritual Realities*, 117–118.

⁴⁴ Schaeffler, *Phänomenologie*, 210.

ethical assumption is – unlike a theoretical construct – an implicit relational certainty.⁴⁵

2. The second note concerns types of philosophy of religion. In his 1983 work *Religionsphilosophie*,⁴⁶ Schaeffler distinguished five types of philosophy of religion: 1. philosophy of religion as a critique of pre-rational consciousness, 2. philosophy of religion as the transformation of religion into philosophy, 3. philosophy of religion based on philosophical theology, 4. phenomenology of religion, and 5. philosophy of religion as an analysis of religious language. In his later work *Phänomenologie der Religion* (2017), he expanded the original division to six types or methodological approaches – the additional one being a philosophy of religion based on transcendental theology. In 1983, he did not yet define this approach as a separate type but subsumed it under the philosophy of religion based on philosophical theology.

I believe that, based on Jolana Poláková's thinking and inspired by her, we can ask whether it would be possible to supplement the philosophy of religion based on philosophical theology with a subtype of 'dialogical philosophical theology', which is absent in Schaeffler's work. Or can we even consider expanding the typology with another/new type – 'philosophy of religion based on the philosophy of dialogue' or simply 'dialogical philosophy of religion'? Should we separate it from philosophical theology, just as Schaeffler separated the transcendental-philosophical approach? I believe that Poláková's thinking inspires and encourages us to single out the dialogical philosophy of religion as a separate type.

⁴⁵ <https://www.jolana-polakova.cz/Knihy/Dialog-s-Bohem-a-filosofie/Filosofie-o-Bohu>
The Czech philosopher Ondřej Sikora also talks about the dialogical understanding of reason in Kant's philosophy. 'I believe that if Kant speaks of the "need of pure reason", he is pointing to a broader understanding of the elementary of the receptivity/spontaneity duality. This broader understanding would allow the argument that pure reason is not a spontaneity sufficient for itself, but that it is characterized by a certain insufficiency that makes it an inherently dialogical openness to which it is incapable of from itself, which it has no choice but to accept.' Ondřej Sikora, *Kantova praktická metafyzika* (Praha: Karolinum, 2017), 28.

⁴⁶ Richard Schaeffler, *Religionsphilosophie* (Freiburg und München: Karl Alber Verlag, 1983). English: Schaeffler, *Reason and the Question of God*.

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