Book Reviews


Reviewed by James G. Hart, Indiana University

This volume points back to the author’s earlier theological works and points forward to the long-awaited major work on the human person with which we may hope he will soon present us. Of course, his numerous well-known other works in philosophy inform the discussions on almost every page. The range of the essays reaches from the most fundamental notions of theology, to details of the central Christian teachings on the Trinity and the Eucharist, to the foundations of a philosophy of the person, and finally to very practical matters, such as what precisely Roman Catholic bishops are supposed to do and what a Roman Catholic seminary’s curriculum should look like. Thus the essays may be thought of as, besides a foretaste of the new work on the person, amplifications of Sokolowski’s basic theses on foundational theology and rich *Quaestiones Disputatae* of special interest to both philosophers as well as Catholic Christians. In what follows we will confine our discussion to what in this volume presumably interests most the readers of this journal on phenomenological psychology, i.e., Robert Sokolowski’s thoughts on the soul, the person, and the profession and nature of therapy, namely Part III, “The Human Person,” pp. 151–236 and “The Art and Science of Medicine” and “Religion and Psychoanalysis” in Part IV, 237–249, 268–285. We will refrain from the rich theological discussions, Parts I and II, pp. 9–150, except in so far as they inform his theories of phenomenological psychology and therapy. Similarly we will omit discussion of Part IV, “Faith and Practical Reasoning,” 237–310, except for the discussion of psychotherapy.

Psychology with or without a Psyche

It is perhaps surprising for the reader to learn that in the bibliography of Robert Sokolowski’s writings one finds enough material for a volume on philosophical and phenomenological psychology. Today with the ascendancy of the reductionism of cognitive and neural science, the “psychology without a psyche (or soul)” has received perhaps its strongest statement. It is a great pleasure to read Sokolowski’s reflections on these developments, and the not-yet published work on the person will surely provide many other occasions for philosophical delights. An example is the question he poses: Given that we speak of “artificial flowers,” which most would agree are not flowers, and “artificial light,” which surely is light, is “artificial intelligence” to be thought of as more like artificial flowers or artificial light? What would it look like and how would it behave if it was as artificially intelligent as artificial light is light? Perhaps no less important for the substance of this book is the question whether there could be “artificial persons” and whether establishing that they were artificially intelligent was sufficient for establishing that they were “persons.”

Another point he makes is that a person whose brain is being studied is not aware of the data in the brain which the student of the brain is in a position to correlate with the subject’s experiences. Furthermore, when the student of the brain wishes to find out what the person is thinking, she cannot determine it by consulting the “brain-signs” or the “brain-language.” Whatever data she has do not say anything, nor are they likenesses of anything. They are neither language nor pictures and therefore their meaning is not embodied in them. Again, although they can be interpreted in the light of the subject’s reports of his experience, of themselves they do not say anything. The student of the brain must inquire of the person whose brain she is studying what he is experiencing; or she must infer from the behavior of the person what he is seeing, e.g., from the animation or direction of his gaze. The brain does not tell us this.

Sokolowski will not take this datum to serve a dualist position, yet it is an important one to consider in the face of proposals of facile reductionisms or identity theories.

Sokolowski has a long-standing critique of the tendency by philosophers to use terms like “picturing” and “representation” in epistemology and psychology as well as in neurology and brain science. The chief point he wishes to make is that in most

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2) See the one covering his work until 2003 compiled by John Drummond (2003) in the second Sokolowski Festschrift, Ethics and theological disclosures, pp. 181–188.
