

William Desmond and Contemporary Theology**Christopher Ben Simpson****Publication Date**

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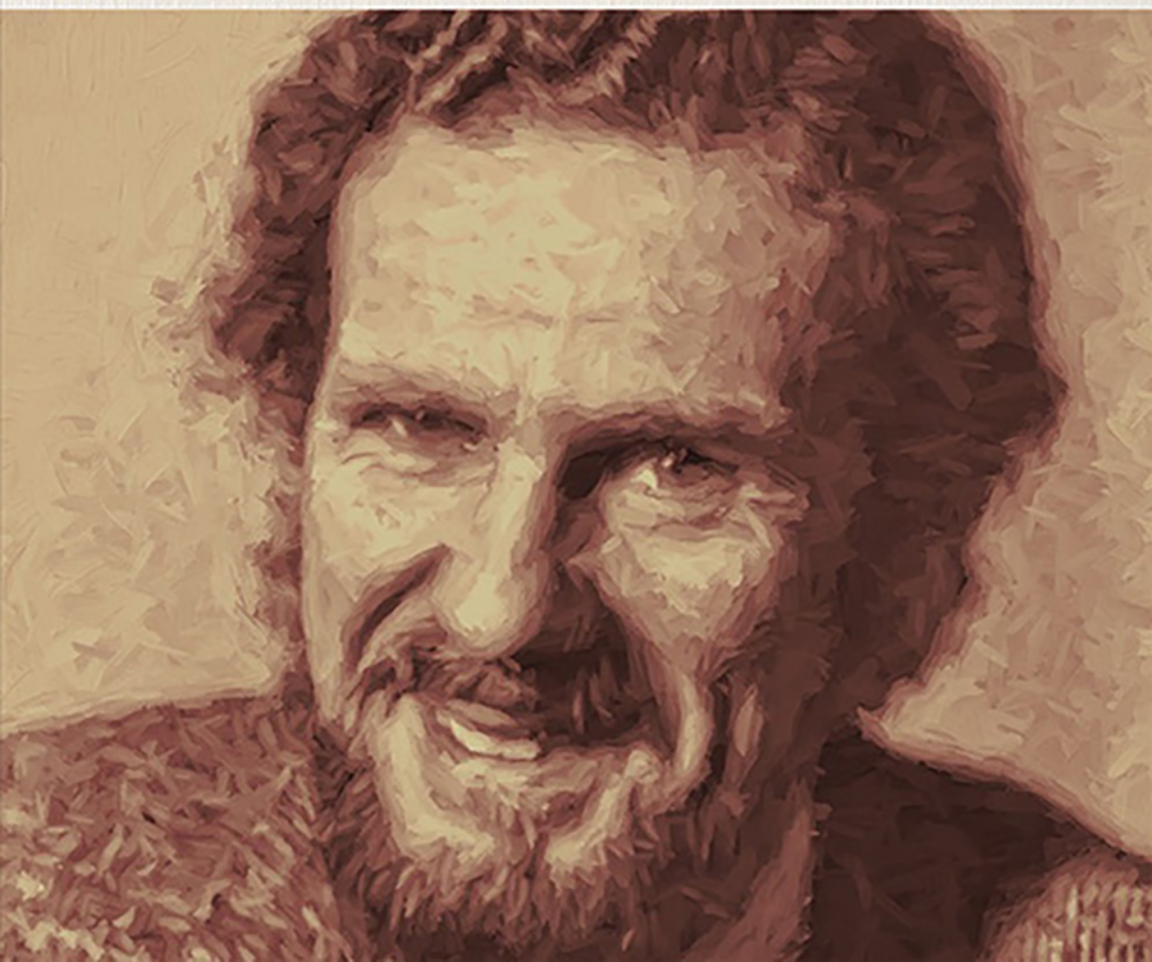
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WILLIAM DESMOND
AND
Contemporary Theology

Edited by
CHRISTOPHER BEN SIMPSON *and*
BRENDAN THOMAS SAMMON



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WILLIAM
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and
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THEOLOGY

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AA* *Art and the Absolute: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1986.
- AOO* *Art, Origins, Otherness*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003.
- BB* *Being and the Between*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1995.
- BHD* *Beyond Hegel and Dialectic*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992.
- DDO* *Desire, Dialectic and Otherness*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987.
- EB* *Ethics and the Between*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2001.
- GB* *God and the Between*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.
- HG* *Hegel's God*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.
- ISB* *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics after Dialectic*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012.
- IST* *Is There a Sabbath for Thought? Between Religion and Philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- PO* *Philosophy and Its Others*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990.
- PU* *Perplexity and Ultimacy*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1995.

Introduction

BRENDAN THOMAS SAMMON AND
CHRISTOPHER BEN SIMPSON

The task of appropriating William Desmond's original and constructive philosophical insights for the work of Christian theology is at its beginning. This volume represents possible contributions that the philosophy of William Desmond makes to various areas of contemporary theological discourse.

Modernity, in the wake of Kant, saw a retreat of metaphysical thinking. Desmond's work can be located within several post-Kantian streams of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy that arose to respond to this eclipse. The tradition of German Idealism in general and Hegel in particular saw a combination of a focus on the dialectical and unfolding nature of thought with a definite metaphysical ambitiousness—a drive to address ultimate questions. Desmond stands within this particularly continental post-Hegelian stream. In the twentieth century, phenomenology sought to uncover stable structures in the rich ground of given experience and consciousness (variously

reduced), and Desmond (longtime professor at the phenomenological nodal point of the Institute of Philosophy in Leuven) has been sympathetic to this mode of persistent philosophical attentiveness. Following in this vein is the tradition of existentialists such as Heidegger and Sartre (and Desmond takes up differently many of their emphases) who revive the question of “being,” yet as disclosed in the privileged locus of lived experience as especially disclosed in “moods”—in the previously often discounted domains of the otherwise than discursive emotions and passions. Finally, Desmond’s work has drawn from and developed in conversation with postmodern thought, with its principled reticence and resistance to claims to finality, permanence, identity, and universality, and instead seeks to hold out a fundamental place for difference and otherness—for irreducible ambiguity, uncertainty, and equivocity.

In this philosophical context, Desmond has done the work of retrieving and showing the necessity of metaphysics from within the languages, impulses, and concerns of these often anti-metaphysical philosophical traditions. In this way he contributes to the recovery of the potential for a common ground of intelligibility after the “postmodern” critiques and dissolutions of such and so contributes to the recent revival of metaphysics and realism in continental philosophy (with the likes of figures such as Alain Badiou and Quentin Meillassoux).

This volume assumes that there is an essential, and not merely accidental, bond between theology and metaphysics, a bond that is both discernible in and verified by historical analysis. From its earliest origins, theology has always had metaphysical blood running through its veins, animating, sustaining, and expressing its essential aspirations to think the relation between the finite and the infinite, the natural and the supernatural, creation and the Creator, the human and the divine. If God is the proper subject/object of theological inquiry and if at the same time this inquiry is expressed through finite categorical and linguistic forms, then it seems that theology cannot avoid implicating a metaphysics of some kind or another. The study of what comes after, or lies beyond (*meta*), the natural order (*physis*) always already gestures toward a “space” wherein an account (*logos*) of the divine (*theos*) may

take form. For like theology, which is always and intrinsically a discourse in between the human and the divine, Desmond's metaxological metaphysics, as he himself writes, is "a *logos* of the *metaxu*, the between"; it is a "discourse concerning the middle, of the middle, and in the middle." As a metaphysics that comingles in equal measure a systematic dimension and a poetic dimension, it renews the kind of *Denk-form* that was born when Christian theology first took shape as the human aspiration to think, speak, and live the Word spoken by God.

Desmond's metaphysics offers a unique mode of mindfulness to the Christian theologian tasked with communicating the excessive truth of Christian mystery. The history of this communication has resulted in a number of diverse theological kinds often identified with the figure who has been most influential over a given theological approach. Consequently, theologians will identify themselves as Platonists, Aristotelians, Thomists, Bonaventurians, Scotists, Rahnerian, Balthasarian, and so on, or, as is most often the case, a hybrid of one or more of these. It is the contention of this volume that the adoption of Desmond's thought not only allows one to remain a Platonist, Aristotelian, or Thomist, but to do so with greater clarity in an age when metaphysics has become suspect. There are other theological kinds that, conceding the contemporary suspicion of metaphysics, distance themselves from the aforementioned associations. For those who reject the metaphysical requirement, it is the contention of this volume that Desmond's thought may also provide tremendous benefit because it embraces and augments, without ever reducing, thought forms not normally associated with metaphysics. Consequently, Desmond's thinking grants these thought forms metaphysical status not by enlisting them into the metaphysical camp but by expanding the metaphysical reach to include thought forms other to itself, thought forms that as other come to constitute the very identity of a metaphysics that is between. Within both alternatives, Desmond provides to theological discourse a wealth of treasures that serve to enrich its essentially middle, or metaxological, nature as thought standing in between creation and Creator, finite and infinite, human and divine.

As theologians continue to struggle with the question of metaphysics, its place in and significance to the theological enterprise,

Desmond's donation to this struggle includes furnishing them with a number of benefits. These are a hermeneutic that can bring clarity to past thinkers; a powerful critique of certain ways of thinking that obscure important theological issues; principles for thought that provide a new way of understanding the mysteries of Christianity; a method that serves to continually keep theology's others as an indispensable dimension of theological discourse; a poetics that serves the speculative dimension of theology married to a systematics that serves the dogmatic dimension of theology; an experientially based mode of thinking that serves to prevent theological discourse from neglecting or even downplaying the importance of praxis and concrete realities; an emphasis on vocation that serves to prevent theological discourse from neglecting the indelible dimension of commitment; and, perhaps most important, a reminder to keep theological discourse from becoming too self-interested to the point of neglecting the wonder and awe of the mystery of God.

This volume begins with an essay by Brendan Thomas Sammon, who argues that Desmond's metaxological philosophy can be read as reawakening the intimacy between reason and being that was, prior to the modern period, secured by the phenomenon of beauty. The essay opens with an autobiographical account of Sammon's experience of developing as a student of Desmond. But more than extraneous praise, this opening account provides a glimpse into the link between Sammon's own experience of Desmond and the eventual reading of his thought that comes to light. As Sammon argues, Desmond's metaxology narrates an account of being that, corresponding to the theological tradition of beauty, configures it as an excess of intelligible content that precisely as an excess perpetually attracts the inquiring intellect into its mysterious content. Drawn in by the beauty of being, or in Desmond's terminology, the "between" of being, human reason begins in a state of wonder where it opens itself to the mysterious other that attracts it. Thus attracted, reason is brought more and more into this source that attracts it not in order to solve a metaphysical riddle but, as the human experience of beauty recapitulates, in order to celebrate the mystery through intimate union. This is much more than fanciful rhetoric for Sammon, whose experience of the figures

he brings together—Dionysius, Aquinas, and Desmond—reflects this very dynamic. Thus, Desmond's contribution to the theological tradition, as Sammon narrates it, is to bring back into theological discourse a metaphysics that remains true to the beauty of being.

Of course, such claims seem to neglect or ignore the fact that ours is an age that, as the story goes, has unmasked metaphysics as nothing but a kind of discursive hegemony that reduces otherness to sameness, diversity to identity, plurality to unity, and past and future to mere presence. It is this alleged unmasking that has led much of contemporary continental philosophy to declare the death of metaphysics. Theologians who rely on metaphysics, then, end up being little more than onto-theologians, hopelessly confusing God with being and, becoming metaphysical morticians, endlessly adorning a dead body. Unless, of course, the whole charge of the so-called death of metaphysics is greatly exaggerated, which is the argument fiercely advanced by John R. Betz. In an essay that critically examines the accusations leveled against metaphysics, especially from Heidegger and his posterity, Betz unmask the alleged unmasking as itself guilty of the very charges brought against metaphysics. Caught up in the enthusiasm of their postmetaphysical declarations, the heralds of the postmetaphysical, so Betz argues, have themselves forgotten or misremembered metaphysical modes of mindfulness that not only remain vital to philosophical inquiry but also simply remain, no matter how loudly one may proclaim otherwise. What is most forgotten is also that which is most basic to those philosophies that float to the surface in the wake of Heidegger's pretensions to the end of metaphysics: the real distinction between essence and existence. Heidegger's own interest in the question of being, as Betz demonstrates, is profoundly indebted to the very Christian metaphysics that he alleges is guilty of forgetting the question that grows out of this distinction. What all this means is that for contemporary philosophical and theological discourse it is not a question of either metaphysics or not; all thinking, as Betz contends, is of its very nature metaphysical precisely because, like being itself, thinking erupts in the space opened up by the real distinction between essence and existence. Instead, it is a question as to which metaphysics gets it right. Desmond, it turns out, is simply

a better Virgil to our Dante-like odysseys through existence than Heidegger and his posterity could ever be because Desmond understands that metaphysics is an endowment of our created nature and an indelible sign of our origin. There is no “getting beyond” metaphysics because both the “beyond” and the “getting” implicated in such an effort are themselves already deeply metaphysical.

If Betz’s essay demonstrates the paramount significance for all philosophical inquiry of the task to always bear in mind the real distinction between essence and existence, Corey Benjamin Tutewiler’s essay considers the equally significant task of bringing to conscious awareness the various presuppositions that inhabit all thinking about the indeterminate character of being, presuppositions concerning how mind relates to being and how being relates to mind. Bringing Desmond into conversation with the contemporary speculative materialist Quentin Meillassoux, Tutewiler argues that there is a complementarity between the two whose philosophical significance can be found in the way that each might contribute to bridging certain gaps—linguistic, conceptual, grammatical—between Christian theologians and speculative materialists. Both figures read metaphysical indeterminacy as the locus where reason is confronted by its hyperbolic other and consequently comes face to face with the limits of its self-sufficiency. Yet, despite this shared principle, Tutewiler recognizes a more significant difference in that Meillassoux, unlike Desmond, lacks the speculative courage to let go of the idea that reason is sovereign in its quest for knowledge. The true courage of thought, so Tutewiler argues with Desmond, comes from being en-couraged, from recognizing that although courage emerges from something immanent, its true source, as communicated from powers to which one must attend, can never finally be possessed as one’s own. It is a courage to recognize that reason is given to be prior to its taking form in the process of self-determination.

What does it mean to say more specifically that reason is given to be? What sort of configuration or account of being does such language suggest? D. C. Schindler’s essay proposes a response to questions such as these by offering an interpretation of Desmond’s philosophy with a view toward theological engagement. For Schindler, Desmond

approaches reason in a way that, reflecting much premodern thought, sees it aspiring after the ultimate, except that Desmond interprets such aspiration in light of reason's origination in being itself. Reason's original rootedness in the mystery of being means that not only is reason already open to being's otherness, but also that being's otherness implies a relation to divine transcendence not only at the end of reason's activity, but from the beginning and throughout the process. Being's presence throughout all of reason's operations and activities indicates a positivity to both being and reason, which for Schindler point to the positivity of religion. The positivity at the core of Schindler's essay identifies the givenness of being in the fullest sense, that is, the hyperbolic excess of being in the plurality of its giftedness, especially in the gift of reason. But because reason is rooted already in this hyperbolic excess of being, this positivity is also identifiable as the mystery that perpetually funds the desire that drives reason's activity. It is in fact in human desire, so Schindler argues with Desmond, where the positivity of being makes itself known and out of which springs the religious impulse. Within this positivity of being, then, reason merges with religious thought as a primordial love of being that is inherently open to the divine. Here, God communicates his presence, not as some foreign entity imposed upon the process of reason *ab extra*, but rather as the one who always already dwells intimately with reason.

As these first four essays all argue in one way or another, Desmond's metaxological metaphysics is a way of being and mind that reads reason's integrity, not as an atomized self-sufficiency, but always in relation to its ontological and divine other(s). Primordially rooted in the givenness of being itself, reason's attraction to being is already a way to God. As if drawing the lens into clearer focus on this particular issue, Joseph K. Gordon and D. Stephen Long examine in more specific detail what a theology of God would look like when constituted by metaxology. For Gordon and Long, the most appropriate articulation of such a metaxological theology is one that uses the language of "ways" to God modeled on more traditional theological accounts like Anselm's rather than modern approaches like Hegel's. Anselm, as Desmond himself has argued, represents a way to God where thought

and prayer are intimately bound up, both springing spontaneously and authentically from the original excess of the agapeic origin—a characterization of the origin as a ceaseless act of giving. As Gordon and Long argue, however, Desmond is not so much concerned with affirming traditional attributes of God as articulating why the way of speaking about God that these attributes entail matters. Desmond’s metaxological way to God, following in this way of speaking about God, matters because it enables us to see a God whose absolute power is revealed as enabling a letting be of being and beings; beings are given to be for themselves, for the good of their own being. Desmond’s way to God, therefore, gets us beyond the Hegelian counterfeit double of God, whose act of creation is an act of self-othering, wherein beings are given to be for the sake of God’s own act of self-determination.

One of the more compelling attributes of the Hegelian God, which perhaps accounts for its widespread acceptance throughout modernity, is that it secures the central place of God within the “whole show”; everything is ordered toward divine self-realization. But if beings are given to be for themselves, as Desmond contends, then where is there room for God to be with and in them? If God truly releases beings to be for themselves rather than for himself, then do we not arrive at an extreme that stands opposite Hegel? Are we not left with the deist God who simply does not interact with beings, having released them to be for themselves? Patrick X. Gardner’s essay demonstrates that, in the same way that the Christian theological tradition avoided such extremes when it approached God within a metaphysics of analogy, Desmond’s way to God flows from this same analogical wellspring. The analogical metaphysics that inhabited so much of premodern Christian theological thought (as well as contemporary theological thought even if not in a thematic, or explicit, way) in many significant ways is revived in the thought of Erich Przywara. As Gardner argues, there is a kinship if not direct identification between the role that analogy performs in Przywara’s thought and the role that the *metaxu* performs in Desmond’s thought. For in both central principles—analogy and the *metaxu*—being is conceived both as that which enters into composition with creaturely existence, and so guides it on the way, and as that which infinitely exceeds creaturely

existence, and so remains beyond it, ever drawing creatures higher and higher into its excess plenitude of intelligible content. Only a metaphysics that is attentive to the analogical or metaxological character of being as such can properly narrate the relationships that obtain among creatures, but also the relationship between creatures and the Creator. As Gardner demonstrates, only when the univocal sense of identities, the equivocal differences that erupt on account of them, and the self-mediating dialectics that emerge between all equivocities are properly located by a dynamic middle—whether such a middle is identified as analogy or metaxology—can the both/and mindfulness necessary to think the dynamics of relationship be most effectively approached. For this reason, Gardner proceeds to explain, to the extent that Przywara’s own reasoning is accurate, it gestures not only toward how Desmond’s metaphysics provides a natural theology derived from the purest sense of philosophy but also, by providing a Catholic metaphysics, how Desmond’s metaxology provides rich resources for a fundamental theology.

The analogy, or metaxology, of being shows itself to be the only valid way of thinking the relation between being and mind in a context that views being as an excess, or plenitude. For the Christian metaphysical tradition, the excess of being was rooted in the divine substance itself, which, as St. Paul articulated very early on, is the substance in which we “live and move and have our being.” For Desmond, this excess is identified as the “overdetermination” of being that establishes the conditions wherein beings come to be. This coming to be, then, happens in the midst of being’s overdetermined plenitude. Sharing in this overdetermination of being, beings are at once integral selves that are also other to themselves insofar as their act of selving happens in relation to other beings and to being as other. One of the ways that Desmond articulates metaxological selving is through the symbol of the mask, and it is the theme that is taken up by Renée Köhler-Ryan. As Köhler-Ryan explains, the mask, which vivifies an ancient intuition concerning mediation, is profoundly metaxological in that it allows one to represent herself as something other to herself all the while remaining herself. Masks both reveal and reserve an excess or more to what rides in tandem with the revealed; it is founded

upon a fundamental ontological porosity between self and being as other to the self. Masks, it might be said, are an essential dimension of human selving in the between. Exploring this theme for its theological significance, Köhler-Ryan sees its value especially for the way that the mask enables a mediation between the “always greater” of the divine substance (as recognized most famously by Augustine) and the nothingness that the divine substance precisely as “always more” can often seem to be to the finite mind (as Aquinas came to see at the end of his life). Examining both an Augustinian and a Thomist account of the God who is “always more” and for this reason “as nothing” to human finitude, Köhler Ryan considers the way that these two great thinkers of the “nothing more” of the divine are companions to Desmond’s own dwelling in between the more and the nothing. Both figures excel at using masks as a way to communicate their own nothingness before the more of the divine being, enabling them to become passages through which the divine transcendence speaks itself. Indeed, this capacity for a person to become a mediation of divine speaking by means of the masks is what is found at the core of metaxological selving.

The theme of the mask as double—as a display of self and of what is other to self—reveals the porosity between the natural world and that which transcends it. It is a porosity that opens to transcendence all the while preserving the integrity of the natural, indeed constituting this natural integrity. In this sense, Desmond’s metaxological metaphysics provides important if not indelible resources for every mode of natural theology, the theme explored in the next essay by Christopher R. Brewer. Bringing Desmond into conversation with Howard E. Root, Brewer argues that Desmond’s donation to theology, among other riches, involves both diagnosing and remedying many of the contemporary problems surrounding the possibility, conditions, and practice of a natural theology of the arts. If Root is correct to recognize that the new starting point of a natural theology is not discursive argumentation but a developed awareness of the relationship between theology and its object on the one hand and the various arts that erupt in the human confrontation with being on the other, then Desmond’s contribution to this concerns not only his account of

being (metaphysics) but also his metaxology of art. As Brewer argues, Desmond's account of relational intermediation so very vital to his metaxological metaphysics provides not only insight, but principles for understanding how theology might better relate to and intermedicate the various arts that constitute human creativity. Only by exploring the depths of this relational intermediation can theology, in a kind of rocking back, properly read the tradition of natural theology. And in the same way that a rocking back creates the conditions for a forward release, a metaxological reading of the tradition of natural theology releases possibilities for a faithful re-creation of that tradition.

One of the benefits, then, that metaxology offers to contemporary theology concerns the way it enables an authentic return of more traditional resources for thinking while attending patiently to the developments that constitute the present conditions in which any return can be enabled. But return always comes with risk, and Desmond's metaxological metaphysics also offers various ways to mitigate such risks. Cyril O'Regan's essay examines how Desmond's metaxology provides crucial insight into the contours of a possible return of Gnosticism in our late modern world especially insofar as it dwells in the shadow of Hegelian thought. It is an insight that O'Regan believes goes beyond what philology and what other modern thinkers interested in the topic have offered, as it is both arraignment and convicting. Foregrounding Desmond's notion of the counterfeit double—a notion that identifies how “doubling” (the concept Desmond prefers to “dualism,” since the latter implicates an unmediated difference that the former overcomes) can often lead to a counterfeit form of what is doubled—O'Regan identifies in Desmond's account of Gnosticism the way that such counterfeit doubling takes the form of both an epistemic-ontological mode and a hermeneutical mode, modes that although distinct ultimately work together. The epistemic-ontological mode of counterfeit doubling identifies the way in which, for Gnosticism, the material, social, cultural, and historical worlds (ontological) are not only impediments to authentic knowledge (epistemic), but are spheres where value is evacuated as a new absolute (dis)value. The hermeneutical mode of counterfeit doubling identifies the elevation of an interpretive framework that repeats though in distorted ways

prior forms of religious thought. O'Regan sees one of Desmond's more significant contributions to theological thought to be the way that he provides insight into the nature of Gnosticism: in one way by identifying the epistemic-ontological mode of doubling as a unique feature of Gnostic texts despite their variations and in another way by validating the claim that there are indeed modern forms of Gnosticism even if such modern forms are more world affirming than their ancient counterparts. In this light, as both Desmond and O'Regan have argued elsewhere as well, Hegel's God can be more carefully exposed as a Gnostic counterfeit doubling of the Christian God it supposes is at its center, thus opening significant vistas for contemporary theological thought in a world where Christianity is on trial if it has not already been condemned.

The final essay of the volume follows John Panteleimon Manoussakis as he explores one such vista that is opened by Desmond's thought but that Manoussakis claims is left unexplored by Desmond himself: the nature of sin. Asking whether Desmond's *logos*, which is a *logos* of the *metaxu*, might in fact be a philosophical identification of *the* Logos—Christ—Manoussakis recognizes metaxology's potential to inhabit a space where human and divine are intimately bound up. He thus reads metaxology as a mode of "daemonic" mind, first recognized by Plato, that dwells in between what is of God (or the gods) and what is "not," focusing on the way that metaxology enables us to see and even speak of the "not" in the light of the divine. What is revealed is the way in which this "not" all-too-easily deceives itself into thinking it is itself *the* light of the Logos, giving rise to the problem of sin. Manoussakis proceeds to explore the all-too-often unseen contours of the nature of sin, reading it in many senses: the denial of the origin; the denial of mediation and intermediation; a desire for immediacy such that one is averse to time and history and, unable to wait for the Other, is averse to human dependency; the refusal of continuity for the sake of the impulsive moment; and more. Yet, demonstrating the power of the metaxological, Manoussakis also exhibits how such a reading of sin necessarily involves a recognition of the ways in which the very conditions that allow sin to erupt in the world are the conditions that also put us on the path to sin's redemption: the mediation of time as a

movement toward perfection and the intermediation of the other; and the Other, against whom sin is always committed and through whom forgiveness must be given. When sin is associated with the sundered association with the origin and the disordered obsession with the end, Desmond's metaphysics of that which stands between origin and end, as Manoussakis suggests in the performance of his essay, offers a clarity to one's vision and practices precisely by repositioning the human person in a more proper relation to origin and end.

The essays in this volume all share the conviction that Desmond's metaphysics offers something vital for the theological enterprise today. As its rich history illustrates, theological discourse never charts its course alone. From its inception until today, it has always traveled in the company of others. Most often, its others have been philosophical companions. Augustine traveled with Plato, Cicero, Plotinus, and others; Aquinas traveled with Aristotle, Dionysius, Avicenna, Averroes, and others; Rahner traveled with Kant, Heidegger, and others, to cite but a few notable examples. Today theologians continue to seek the company of philosophers as they navigate the murky waters of encounter with the divine. Foucault, Wittgenstein, Derrida, Lacan, and others have shown themselves to be worthy companions offering valuable contributions to a variety of theological complexities. It is hoped that this volume not only illuminates the benefit of traveling with Desmond, but that in Desmond one finds a companion *par excellence*, whose presence on the journey not only guides one across the roughest of terrains and enables one to ascend the steepest of slopes but also enables one to see along the way the Beauty that, as Augustine so gloriously declared, is "so old and so new."

CHAPTER 1

The Reawakening of the Between

William Desmond and Reason's Intimacy with Beauty

BRENDAN THOMAS SAMMON

A PREFATORY REFLECTION

I was an undergraduate theology major when I first encountered the work of William Desmond. I remember gathering in the small common areas of the humanities building at what is now Loyola University in Maryland to hear conversations between members of the theology and philosophy faculty about a variety of topics. When Desmond would speak, his words were like immense waves of thought that drenched my unformed mind, satisfying a thirst I didn't even know I had while simultaneously increasing that thirst. I found myself being opened, wooed even, into a mysterious depth of something that could not be defined, something as attractive as it was harrowing.

I had the great fortune of spending my junior year abroad in Leuven, where Desmond had recently received a faculty post. His gifts as a teacher and mentor not only made him popular among students, but

alongside his philosophical work also generated a revered awe among them. There was a rotation of note takers and disseminators among those enrolled in his Philosophy of God course, a few of whom, playfully (though with no less respect for that) imitating the tradition of depicting the name “God” as “G_d,” would spell his name “D_smond.” This was emblematic of the awe that arose in that respectful distance that seemed to come with being a professor in Leuven. Unlike most professors, however, Desmond would “kenotically” cross that distance with an uncommon comfort and ease, often inviting students to continue the conversation over any one of Belgium’s finest beers.

As I sat in his class week after week, knowing very little about philosophy or the philosophical tradition, his lectures were for me more like poetry readings than philosophical instruction. Although I could barely comprehend the content of his thinking, there was something beautiful in it that drew me ever closer, something profoundly enticing that made the increasing awareness of my own ignorance tolerable, perhaps even delightful. Here was a voice, it seemed to me, that sang from a depth of being that I had never before encountered. And it was a voicing that brought me to a place of harmony and balance with the world precisely because it did not try to make sense of existence; that is to say, it did not try to force existence to conform to human ways of thinking but rather opened thinking to the gift of existence.

And so it was the beauty of Desmond’s thinking that continually sustained my struggle to see the breadth and depth that he saw. I was also fortunate to return to Leuven as a graduate student of theology, this time better prepared to continue to engage his thinking. The poetic sense of his thought did not withdraw, but as I became more familiar with and knowledgeable about the Western intellectual tradition, this poetic dimension of his thinking now opened itself to a more systematic side of philosophical thought, providing a balance between the two I had never before encountered. This unique balance of the poetic and the systematic became for me a mark—if not *the* mark—of thinking worthy of my attention.¹ Only this mark, rather than narrowing the field of my appreciation of thinkers, opened it to almost every thinker I encountered. Often it happens that a person beginning an advanced pursuit of the philosophical or theological tradition finds

a thinker in whom that tradition makes sense because he or she narrows one's vision, allowing that person to perhaps dismiss figures who for whatever reason don't fit with that vision. For me, Desmond's impact was the opposite, because he provided me with a mark, not for excluding the figures I found unfitting, but for finding in them both a poetic and a systematic sense, ever increasing my capacity to appreciate them despite certain disagreements.

Nevertheless, choices had to be made. As I pursued my own studies, I found myself drawn to figures who I believed balanced better between the poetic and systematic dimensions than others. I was drawn to the work of Thomas Aquinas much in the same way I was drawn to Desmond. Desmond's own description of Aquinas expresses my experience with Aquinas and with Desmond himself. "Reading Aquinas," he writes, "one can have the feeling of standing in a cathedral and of not being able to make out the sense of strange sensuous language of signs and symbols. There is something enigmatic to the many different figures and yet also a kind of intimacy. In the strangeness there is the suggestion of immense significance, though what this is exactly is hard to say."² There is a sense of beauty in Thomas's simplicity and clarity, which like Desmond's thought sustained my every effort to see what he saw. I also found myself drawn to the work of Dionysius the Areopagite, a figure whose impact on Aquinas has all too often been eclipsed by Aristotle. This enigmatic figure, who has been receiving increasing attention in recent decades,³ shares with both Desmond and Aquinas a beauty and simplicity in his thinking that is often camouflaged by the difficult nature of his language and style. But as Aquinas himself noted, for those who diligently read him, there is a great profundity of opinion despite the difficult nature of his language and style.⁴ As I studied these figures more and more, I found a genuine kinship among them, and it is this kinship that provides the context for what follows.

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I want to argue that Desmond's *metaxology* offers something of paramount importance to contemporary theology—namely,

a metaphysical foundation that reawakens reason's intimacy with beauty. His is not the only project to concern itself with reason's intimacy with beauty in recent decades. Von Balthasar is, of course, a companion in this, and it is possible to read Von Balthasar as harboring a nascent metaxology in his thought.⁵ But I want to suggest that, although others like Von Balthasar have contributed to the reawakening of reason's intimacy with beauty, Desmond offers crucial insight into the metaphysical foundations common to any such reawakening. This commonality is not reductive of the plurality of possible forms such a reawakening may take. Instead, it is a commonality more akin to how Desmond understands the commonality of the original power of being: "it is common precisely because it constitutes the metaxological community of being and may indeed be said to necessitate a plurality of possible articulations in order to do justice to its own power."⁶ The reawakening of reason's intimacy with beauty is a reawakening to a communal voicing, or "communivocity," to borrow Desmond's term, more primordial than any singular articulation.

Desmond's service to theology is in providing a means whereby a plurality of theological forms and practices can enter into community with each other by affirming an underlying shared unity in and through their differences and otherness. In this respect, metaxology moves in the space between a certain impulse in modern thought that implies unity requires a mitigating of difference and otherness, as well as a certain impulse in postmodern thinking that implies any effort toward unity is already a violence toward otherness and difference.

There are two key features to the wording of my thesis, which are significant to the working out of its content. The first concerns the notion of a "reawakening," which has a twofold sense. First, in terms of methodology, reawakening indicates a deepening of the sort of skeptical waking made most famous perhaps by Kant's declaration in the *Prolegomena* that Hume had awoken him from his dogmatic slumber. In Desmond's reading of this slumber, the dogmatist is said to fall asleep in determinate forms, resting comfortable in the univocal fixity apparent to the dogmatist. The skeptic, however, discomforted by his knowledge that such determinate forms fix something that is impossible to fix given the plurality, diversity, and difference of all that

is, is alone capable of waking up from such a univocal dream.⁷ Within such a state of waking, univocity, and thus unity and identity, dissolves in the morning light of plurality, diversity, and difference, existing only as the memory of dream. Yet, as Desmond proceeds to explain, such a waking is really a withdrawal from any affirmation, fearing as it does the univocity, unity, and identity that every affirmation entails, and thus even the skeptic's affirmation of plurality, diversity, and difference. As I attempt to show, beauty was once conceived as a unity-in-plurality, an identity-in-difference, and so, allied to reason, guarded against the equivocal tension between the dogmatist and the skeptic. Thus, in this first sense, the reawakening pointed to in this essay indicates the way in which Desmond's metaxology enables an awakening from skeptical waking. This is especially relevant to the sort of metaphysical skepticism that took hold of Heidegger, prompting him to misconstrue something called "the metaphysical" as a way to simplify a far more complicated tradition of thought, as Ricoeur incisively saw.⁸

Second, in terms of the object of inquiry, reawakening also indicates that to which one is being awakened. Further on in his analysis of skeptical deconstruction, Desmond remarks, "Can one just be woken up to the fact that one was asleep, or perhaps always must be asleep or half asleep? If we don't wake up to *something*, our being woken up is just another sleep—we wake from one 'dream' to another, and hence the entire point of waking up has no point."⁹ In this sense, Desmond's metaxology, so this essay contends, reawakens us to the presence of beauty that has remained despite the slumber that took hold of the mind amidst many of modernity's more soporific skepticisms.

The second feature of the thesis's wording concerns the notion of *reason's* intimacy with beauty. As it is used in this essay, *reason* identifies the rich diverse modes of mindfulness that constitute human thought. This is an intentionally general if not indefinite way of describing it. There is a tendency today, especially in the West, to identify reason, in the wake of the "Enlightenment," as almost exclusively a universal *a priori* fait accompli that is the same for all people everywhere. Reason in this sense tends to be synonymous with first principles: the principle of identity, the principle of the suspended middle, and the principle of noncontradiction. It is, in the wake of Kant, the transcendental reservoir

of all possible concepts and principles that the mind uses in its engagement with objects it must ever strive to represent to itself. Reason, in this sense, is the instrument that provides clarity through a calculated measure of what is empirically encountered.

All of this certainly identifies important dimensions of how human beings reason. But when these dimensions were almost exclusively prioritized in the modern period, conditions arose in which *an emphasis* of certain dimensions of reason were confused with the whole of reason itself. As Alasdair MacIntyre has argued, reason is culturally rooted because it is tradition-constituted.¹⁰ How a person reasons in one cultural tradition differs from how a person reasons in another precisely because culture embodies the first stirrings of the valuation system that engenders a particular emphasis on aspects of rationality. This is not to dismiss that dimension of reason emphasized in the Western world—what might be identified as “dimensions of the head”—but rather to remind ourselves that it is in fact an emphasis of a particular dimension of reason; that is to say, it is a way of identifying human thought per se that derives from a more primordial value judgment, which judgment is not itself verifiable by the very mode of reason it advances. Consequently, as an emphasis it does not exhaust the whole of human reason since nobody thinks only in his or her head. What might be called “dimensions of the heart”—passions, emotions, sensuality, memory, love—unavoidably enter into the mix of human thought whether we want them to or not (as modern romanticism and existentialism, for example, helpfully remind us). If we are to grasp reason’s intimacy with beauty, a more complete picture of reason that includes the heart must be allowed to present itself. As we will see, reason’s intimacy with beauty at one point in time allowed the balance between the matters of the heart and the matters of the head that is vital to every theological enterprise.

This essay proceeds as follows. First, I exposit both thematically and historically the way in which beauty once gifted reason with certain principles, and therefore powers or capacities, to think the mysteries of existence and God. It did this in large part by serving as the excess of intelligibility that stands in between that which is perpetually desired (the good) and that which is contracted into the categorical and

conceptual structures of thought (the true). Many of the scholastics, including Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas following the Dionysian tradition, maintained that beauty is in part the good in its becoming received as truth. Broadly speaking, this meant that beauty served as a unifying force between desire and knowledge, establishing the analogical relationship (rather than a univocal, or equivocal) between the human and the divine. I suggest that this gift performed an indelible role in shaping the theological tradition well up until that tradition, for whatever reason, severed its focus into a putative unmediated difference between determinate cognition (the true as given over to science) and value (the good as given over to ethics). I focus on beauty as it is found within the Dionysian-Thomistic tradition both for the reason that, as noted above, Desmond shares a particular kinship with these two thinkers and for the reason that it has been one of the most influential for shaping the theological tradition of beauty. Second, I examine those areas of Desmond's thought that resonate with this tradition. I attempt to demonstrate how the most significant aspects of Desmond's metaphysics reawaken this tradition for contemporary theological discourse at a metaphysical level. Here I assume rather than argue that all theology is in some way tied to certain forms of metaphysics when metaphysics is taken broadly to identify a discourse between the physical world and what is beyond the physical world. But this assumption is measured by the argument that Desmond's metaphysics reawakens the tradition of beauty. Consequently, I close by gesturing toward the ways in which this tradition, as mediated through Desmond's metaphysics, is indelible to the practice of theology today.

BEAUTY IN THE DIONYSIAN-THOMISTIC TRADITION

The foundation for the reawakening of reason's intimacy with beauty concerns what in Desmond's project is called the *metaxu*, or the between. Those familiar with the works of Plato might recognize this as a shared principle. Toward the end of the *Symposium*, for example, Socrates relays his encounter with Diotima, who had introduced Socrates to a mode of thinking or discourse (*logos*) that recognizes a mode

of being “between” (*metaxu*) the terms of various dyads: beautiful and ugly, learned and ignorant, and so on.¹¹ It is this kind of thinking that enables the recognition of the importance of both sameness and difference simultaneously. For Socrates, this becomes important because, having just argued that love is always oriented toward beauty, he now faces the difficulty that beauty poses to anyone who approaches it—a difficulty he declared at the end of the *Hippias major* when, after failing to define beauty, he confesses, “I now know the meaning of that ancient proverb, ‘all that is beautiful is difficult.’”¹² Beauty’s difficulty concerns the fact that, among other complexities, more than any other phenomenon it inhabits both the spiritual and the material, the universal and the particular, the abstract and the concrete. It is, one might say, a both/and phenomenon, inherently analogical and recalcitrant to exclusive either/or equivocation. Hence it requires a mode of mind that, without compromising these differences, can move about in the unifying “space” between them.

Desmond’s own configuration of the *metaxu*, although perhaps sharing a kinship with Platonic thinking, goes well beyond Plato. It is a *metaxu* that is constituted by a number of philosophical principles and ideas that come to light within the philosophical tradition, and more important, invested with the riches of Desmond’s own originality. I have more to say about Desmond’s *metaxu* below. For now, I want to suggest that Desmond’s *metaxu* reawakens the place that beauty once occupied for the theological tradition, especially as that tradition is communicated in the Dionysian-Thomistic reading of it.¹³

Beauty as the *Metaxu* I: Dionysius

For Dionysius, beauty was more than a spiritual principle and more than an attribute of concrete beings: it was a name for God. What exactly Dionysius means by a divine name is not clear in the texts that bear his name.¹⁴ However, close examination of his works makes it possible to discern some attributes. A divine name is not identifiable with the divine essence itself, since nothing is. The divine essence remains forever hidden from all communication, as Dionysius had apparently explained in his lost treatise *Theological Outlines*. Nor,

however, is a divine name an attribute derived from creatures that is then applied to God. Rather, as he explained in another lost treatise, *Symbolic Theology*, names derived from creatures are symbols we use to talk about the divine.

In between these two dimensions is where we can locate a divine name: it is a perfection of God that proceeds from his superessential plenitude and comes to constitute the formal attributes of creatures. Or to put it more concisely, a divine name is God's very presence in the constitution of a created entity.¹⁵ As Aquinas would later clarify, it is a procession not of essence (like the procession of persons in the Trinity) but of similitude.¹⁶ A divine name, then, is its own kind of *metaxu* between the incomprehensible and unknowable divine essence and the creatures through whom God communicates a similitude of himself.

Beauty as a divine name means both that God is himself beauty and that God gives his beauty to creatures. Dionysius's understanding of the finer details surrounding this double sense of beauty derives from both the biblical and Neoplatonic traditions. His bringing these two traditions together is one of the profound achievements of his work. Part of this synthesis involved the merging of the two Parmenidean hypotheses into the one God of Jesus Christ¹⁷—a move thought by some to have been original to Dionysius.¹⁸ The first hypothesis, "the One is not," intends to establish the complete removal of the One from any other, while the second hypothesis, "the One is," establishes the inevitable relation to being that is implicated in any consideration of the One. The distinction between these two hypotheses leads to the distinction within Neoplatonism between the One in itself, derived from the first hypothesis, and the first emanated principle, *nous*, derived from the second hypothesis. Rather than identify these as two distinct principles, as Neoplatonism had done, Dionysius interprets these as two aspects of the one God. The first hypothesis identifies God as he is in himself, hidden from all comprehension, while the second identifies God's creative act of self-communication.

Beauty as a divine name identifies both aspects of God, providing a bond between God and creation as well as a bond between creatures. The order in which Dionysius presents the divine names has long been a subject of inquiry, though no decisive conclusions have

arisen.¹⁹ It is possible, though, to discern from this order the way in which beauty marks the most concrete point of encounter between God and creation.

In chapter 4 of *On the Divine Names*, Dionysius begins his account with the name *good*, which for Dionysius (unlike for Aquinas) is the most proper name for God. As that which all things desire, the good identifies God as the original principle of attraction for being and non-being alike. This means that the name “good” identifies the plenitude that funds the seemingly infinite restlessness of desire, as well as the ethos in which ontological emergence takes shape.²⁰ Admittedly this is somewhat abstract, but the interesting thing about Dionysius’s account of the good is that it remains rather abstract.

As the sequence of names proceeds, one can detect a momentum toward more concrete articulations. The name that follows the good is “light,” which identifies the good as the good gives itself over as the conditions of “visibility,” both spiritual and material, intellectual and physical.²¹ Light is in this sense not only illumination, but luminous content itself or light as the emergence of substance. As Robert Grosseteste would later explain, light is conceived as both the first of corporeal forms, and so the most noble and exalted of all essences, and corporeity itself.²² As the emergence of substance, light identifies the primal energy of every being as it emerges into existence, which means that it is also the substance of all that can be made intelligible. Hence it is the excess of all intelligibility as a unified plenitude.²³ Light also provides a more concrete instance of how the good is endlessly self-diffusive; one simple flame could in theory spark an endless number of other flames, which is to say, the material form of light (fire) can, to paraphrase the Areopagite’s observations concerning the divine light, “multiply itself and go forth, as becomes its goodness, while remaining firmly and solitarily centered within itself in its unmoved sameness.”²⁴ The divine name “light,” then, is the good as the good creates conditions wherein the good may begin to give itself to be perceived, known, and loved.

Dionysius follows light with the name “beauty,” and his account of it is far more metaphysical than certain dominant theories of beauty in modernity, which is perhaps why it has received harsh judgment among historians of aesthetics.²⁵ Nevertheless, the Dionysian account

of beauty furnished theological posterity with important principles and ideas for thinking the mysteries of the Christian faith. Above all, beauty identifies a transcendent plenitude of all substance. In this sense, beauty adds diversity to the unified content of the transcendent plenitude of light. That is to say, where light is an excess of intelligible content as a unified plenitude (without formal plurality), beauty now names this excess of intelligible content as a unity-in-plurality. Dionysius derived this in large part from Plotinus, who had identified beauty with *nous*. *Nous*, for Plotinus, is the first emanation of the One, and as such is being itself. But as it turns back to gaze on the One, it is also intellect. Hence, *nous* identified a unity-in-plurality, the fullness of all that is, was, and will be. Beauty, it might be said, identifies the good and the light as they begin to take form in more concrete ways by giving birth to color, shape, size, magnitude, and so on. This might seem to make beauty the same as being, rendering being as a divine name rather redundant. For Dionysius, however (and for Aquinas later), beauty adds the dimension of attraction both physical and intellectual, making it in some sense more primordial than being. The Greeks had many words for what we today call “beauty,” but primary among them was the word *kallos*, meaning “call.” So where being identifies what is, beauty identifies the power in all things that are to attract, or call, others toward themselves.

Since beauty identifies both God in himself and God in his creative self-communication, it is bound up with the transition between these two dimensions. Dionysius borrowed the Neoplatonic scheme of emanation to identify this transition, though he amends it to fit with Christian teaching. Where emanation had meant for Neoplatonism the necessary self-diffusion of the good out of itself, for Dionysius (as for other Christian Neoplatonists) God’s act of emanation is not necessary but a freely willed act of love that gives birth to the otherness of creatures for their own sake.

It is not at all clear at what point in Western history the triadic structure of (Greek) emanation—*monos*, *prodos*, and *epistrophe*—becomes reconfigured as the (Latin) binary *exitus-reditus*, but the difference is significant.²⁶ As Proclus had explained in his *Elements of Theology*, the product of emanation (*prodos-epistrophe*) is neither a

parceling out nor a transformation of the producer (*monos*), because the producer remains steadfast in its own ontological constitution while emanating derivative entities.²⁷ Moreover, because “all procession is accomplished through a likeness of the secondary to the primary,” there is a sharing of the *monos* in all proceeding entities.²⁸ This means that not only does every proceeding entity harbor its own *monos*, by which it remains united to the absolute *monos*, but also that it is precisely on account of this plurality of *monoi* of all emanations held in the unity of the absolute *monos* that a true community of entities is enabled. Remaining always in the producer (*monos*), each procession shares an identity with it, while its procession establishes its difference, two relations—identity and difference—that are inseparable.²⁹ Procession for Dionysius (and Proclus), then, is the contraction of a fullness rather than a projection into a space of ontological indeterminacy. And it is the continued relation to the absolute *monos*, along with the unity between identity and difference, that allows the epistrophic return.

One primary point to bear in mind in all this is that the *monos*, the remaining plenitude, is a vital component of emanation that cannot be neglected, as the Latin binary *exitus-reditus* in some way seems to do. The *monos* identifies the good-light-beauty component of the divine identity as it gives itself to be in and as the otherness of creatures. And it is by virtue of emanation as a model of this procession that the beauty of creatures may be better understood. In sharing in the beauty of God, creatures recapitulate their own unique *monos-prodos-epistrophe*. And nowhere was this more clearly articulated than in Aquinas’s account of beauty.

Beauty as the *Metaxu* II: Aquinas

Although in recent decades more attention has been given to Thomas’s account of beauty,³⁰ much work remains to be done especially in terms of how the theological tradition of beauty as a divine name had an impact on other dimensions of his thought. Space does not allow me here to offer any extensive treatment of this impact, but I do want to suggest that in light of the preceding, beauty as a divine name in

Aquinas was, as it was for Dionysius, a metaphysical phenomenon that is best conceived as a *metaxu*.

We first find this *metaxu* sense of beauty in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*.³¹ Here Thomas explains how beauty and the good—like all the so-called transcendental properties of being—are the same in substance while they differ in *ratio* for this reason: “beyond the good, the beautiful adds an order to the cognitive powers that the good (*illud*) is of such a kind.”³² In other words, beauty identifies the good, which in itself is in excess of all determinate form, as the good assumes a particular kind of form. Only when the good becomes “this” particular good can it become an object for the cognitive powers. In Thomas’s view, beauty is that perfection of being that makes this transition possible. Later in the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas will reiterate this, elaborating a bit further:

The beautiful is the same as the good only differing in *ratio*. For since the good is that which all things desire, concerning its ratio it is that in which the appetite comes to rest; but with respect to the ratio of the beautiful pertains that in which the appetite comes to rest in its cognitive aspect. Wherefore those senses especially provide for the beautiful, which are the most cognitive, viz. sight and hearing, *as ministering to reason*; for we speak of beautiful sights and beautiful sounds. But in reference to other objects of the other senses, we do not use the name “beauty,” for we do not speak of beautiful tastes, and beautiful odors. And thus it appears that the beautiful adds up on the good a certain order to the cognitive powers, so that good is called that which is pleasing to the appetite; however, that, the apprehension of which itself gives pleasure, is called the beautiful.³³

A couple of important points must be stressed in the above passage. First, Aquinas uses the language of “ministering” (*deservientes*) to describe the relationship between beauty and reason. Beauty serves reason by ordering the good to those senses that are closer to intellectual activity, namely, hearing and seeing. The good may come to rest in the lower senses by assuming forms that can be tasted, touched, and

smelled, powers that all sentient beings share. It is *not* that these tasteable, touchable, and smellable forms are without beauty; should these forms also become objects of cognition, then their beauty as goods ordered toward the cognitive faculties will be foregrounded. However, insofar as they come to rest in these lower senses, their beauty, although present insofar as these forms can be perceived and known at all, remains present in less definitive ways. These lower senses do not require the deliberation of the intellect since their evaluation—their “judgment” over the goodness of a given form—is immediate. The senses of seeing and hearing, however, have a more mediated evaluation over the good of the forms they receive. For the good to be taken in by those senses closer to reason, it becomes necessary for the good to assume the *ratio* of beauty.

Second, based on the preceding we can say there is a twofold sense in which beauty is a *metaxu*: transcendentally, beauty is in between the good and the true, ordering the good toward more determinate form where, in becoming intelligible and knowable, it can assume the *ratio* of truth; and predicamentally (i.e., on the horizontal level of categorical, predicamental, relations), beauty is in between the lower senses that respond to the good as such (taste, smell, touch) and the proper object of the intellect, namely, truth. Beauty orders the good toward cognition, which is to say that beauty is the good as the good is becoming contracted so as to fit into the categorical and conceptual requirements of the intellect whereby it is received as truth. To be sure, beauty is not identifiable with these categories or concepts but rather is the excess of intelligible content that allows these to emerge.

Third, beauty for Aquinas, then, has an integral place in the intellectual process, both in terms of how the intellect encounters intelligible objects and in terms of how objects-to-be-known give themselves to the intellectual process. In one of his more frequently quoted statements on beauty, Aquinas declared, “The beautiful, however, bears upon a knowing power: for things are called beautiful which please when they are seen.”³⁴ In light of the preceding and in light of the first part of Aquinas’s statement, it should be clear that seeing indicates the physical act of perceiving but also the intellectual act of cognition. And even though Aquinas does not specify exactly what pleases when

seen, we might look to book 2, chapter 1 of his *Summa contra Gentiles*. Written around the same time as the *Prima Pars*, and around the completion of his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, there would have been a thematic continuity within these texts, making it instructive for our concerns.³⁵ Citing Psalm 142:5, Aquinas opens this book with the words, “I meditated upon all your works; I meditated upon the works of your hands.” As Aquinas’s own explanation clarifies, this excerpt distinguishes between God in himself (“all your works”) and God in his act of creative self-communication (“the works of your hands”). It is a distinction that fit well with how Aquinas had read Dionysius’s account of beauty in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, having recognized both beauty as God’s very self and beauty as God’s creative causality. In short, it serves to suggest that every created thing at least has the potential to please when seen, that is, to serve as doorways through which the invisible things of God can become visible (Rom. 1:20). Dionysius had himself said that all things can become a help to contemplation,³⁶ and it would not at all be surprising if this idea had impressed itself upon Aquinas. So all things possess beauty insofar as they can become centers of contemplative thought. This does not mean a thing’s beauty obligates a percipient to recognize it. Certainly two people can perceive the same object with two differing visions of its beauty. As Aquinas states, though, since the beautiful “bears upon a knowing power” (*pulchrum autem respicit vim cognoscitivam*), to perceive a thing’s beauty requires one to perceive things rightly, requires a growth in intellectual capacity (though “rightly” should not be taken in a determinate, or univocal, sense). Too often, Thomas is read as if he were saying in his *placent* statement that there are beautiful things in the world and there are ugly things in the world, and the way we know the difference is because beautiful things please us when seen. But this reading of Thomas not only wrongly makes him a modern objectivist—as if for him beauty is purely in the object with no relation to the percipient—but more significantly it neglects his account of beauty in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. For Thomas, beauty is neither something objective in the things of the world nor something deriving from subjective perception of things. Rather, it is a metaphysical middle by which the

infinite good that is desired by all creatures is ordered to the cognitive faculties where it may enter the mind as the *ratio* of truth.

When we look to Aquinas's more theological account of beauty, we see the way in which, derived from the Son, it is a theo-metaphysical phenomenon that establishes beings in their own unique being by establishing them in the community of beings. This most well-known passage on beauty in Thomas's thought is found in his treatise on the Trinity, *Prima Pars*, question 39, article 8. In a part of his response, Thomas provides the necessary conditions (*tria requiruntur*) for beauty, which is to say, the conditions necessary for beauty both to manifest itself and to become perceivable. The "necessary conditions" formula was common among the schoolmen to designate conditions that, rather than being merely sufficient, establish the *sine qua non* for the particular phenomenon in question. Adopted primarily from Hilary of Poitiers, beauty in Thomas's explanation is most fundamentally a theo-metaphysical dynamic drawn from the second person of the Trinity, the Son. That is to say, Thomas does not apply beauty to the Son *ab extra*, as if the Son were simply the most beautiful of all in creation and therefore merits the highest position in the genus "beauty." Rather, *beauty is revealed in the Son* insofar as the Son's relationship as image of the Paternal Archetype gives to the world the three necessary conditions for beauty. The metaphysics of the image is here crucial, and Aquinas sees in the Son the origin of all image-archetype relationships. The Son is the perfect image of the Father, and hence the perfect image qua image. There is no outside notion of image that can then be used to measure the Son as image, just as there is no outside notion of beauty that can then be used to measure the Son's beauty.

Question 39 of Thomas's *Prima Pars* concerns the persons of the Trinity in reference to the divine essence. Thomas's final article of the question inquires whether or not the Holy Doctors—by whom Thomas means Augustine, Hilary, and the authors of scripture—fittingly appropriate the essential attributes to each of the persons of the Trinity. Commenting on Hilary's appropriation of the name "species" to the Son, Thomas writes the following: "For with regard to beauty, there are three necessary conditions. First, certainly, wholeness or completeness (*integritas*), for some things which are impaired

are ugly because of this; second, due proportion or harmony (*proportio*); and third, clarity (*claritas*), from which some things have a bright color, and thus are said to be beautiful.”³⁷ Many commentators have wrongly abstracted this statement from its place in Thomas’s text and then proceeded to use it as if it were a formula for identifying instances of beauty. But when examined in the context of question 39, we can see this is a statement about beauty as a theo-metaphysical bond, which can then be translated as beauty as a *metaxu*.

First it is important to point out that this particular article begins with Aquinas foregrounding his guiding principle: “Now in considering any creature four things occur to us by a particular order. First, the thing itself is considered absolutely insofar as it is a certain being. Second, consideration of the thing insofar as it is one. Third, consideration of the thing according to what is in it by its power of operating and causing. Fourth, consideration according to its habitude toward what it causes.”³⁸ This fourfold schematic echoes the fourfold causality of beauty that Aquinas had outlined in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*.³⁹ There he had described the causality of the beautiful as (1) concerns being (*esse*); (2) oneness or unity; (3) order, that is, action, or the act of existing in itself (power) and with others (causality); and (4) rest/motion. There is an obvious alteration of terminology in his *Summa*, especially with the fourth consideration. But, as he explains in the cited passage from his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, rest/motion concerns the relation that God has to what is caused by the beautiful, which means that the terminological alteration does not reflect an alteration of content. The point to be made here is that Aquinas’s account of beauty in this question is deeply entrenched in the metaphysical structure of his thought, especially concerning the way creatures relate to God. It is, we might say, in between theology and metaphysics.

And so it is in this context of the preceding fourfold metaphysical scheme, alongside his trinitarian theology and the image/archetype relation, that Thomas’s three necessary conditions for beauty ought to be read. *Integritas*, he explains, has a likeness to the property of the Son insofar as the Son has in himself truly and perfectly the nature of the Father. When we read this alongside other dimensions of perfection

or completeness in his work, we can see how *integritas* identifies the completeness of a given thing's being at any moment it is considered. Thomas believed that what was unique to the person of the Son was his being sent.⁴⁰ Insofar as this sending was an immersion in time and space, it could be considered at any of those moments or places. *Integritas*, then, identifies the concrete particularity of a being that, in process of becoming more complete, represents that completeness at any given moment. But it is a completeness that, always in excess of this representation, is present at all times and made visible insofar as the concrete particular being images it. The image is a sending, or emanation, of the archetype communicating the archetype without merely reduplicating it. What does it mean, after all, for the Son to be sent from the Father? In proceeding from the Father, the Son stands as a complete communication from the Father without either being identical with the Father or exhausting everything of the Father. The Son precisely is the *integritas* of the Father because his concrete manifestation is a perfect showing of the Father. The perfection of its showing consists in its single, concrete communicated form but only as this form derives from the Fatherly plenitude to which it anagogically refers and upon which it ontologically depends.

So beauty requires *integritas*, which is to say, in order for beauty to appear and be perceived, it must do so through something whole at a given time and place. In other words, beauty requires the particularity of a concrete being, its unique ontological parameters that this particular being alone occupies. Beauty follows upon the particularity of form, which alone is able to "please when seen." This could even include abstract beings, like a universal category, but only insofar as that universal category is considered a being in its own right. For any given thing to be perceivable at all, it must be given in such a way to allow one's perceptive faculties to engage it as a whole. Otherwise, its beauty would be incapable of being perceived.

The second necessary condition, *proportio*, concerns the way in which a given thing's *integritas* is capable of being recognized at all. *Proportio*, Thomas explains, "agrees with the Son's property, inasmuch as he is the express image of the Father."⁴¹ An image, Thomas implies, must convey both unity and difference at the same time in order for it

to be a perfect representation. In other words, an image must be neither univocally identical with the archetype nor equivocally other to it but rather an analogical communication of the archetype's content in the uniqueness of the image's form (which is why a representation of even an ugly thing can be beautiful). The Son perfectly represents the Father by proceeding in distinction from the Father (indeed on the cross becoming the most distinct being from the Father) but with the complete nature of the Father. The Son, one might say, is image-ness itself, or subsistent image, by which any image can be known as such. As the image than which no greater image can be thought, the Son also perfectly communicates *proportio* as a perfect representation. The Son in his *integritas* is a perfect image of the Father by virtue of the perfect *proportio* between them. So to say that *proportio* is a necessary condition of beauty is to say that the image given as an *integritas* must be in a maximal relation to that which it images, must have a (relatively) perfect *proportio* to the archetype that sends it.

This archetype is what Aquinas identifies as the *claritas* of a given being. *Claritas* agrees with the Son insofar as the Son is the Word of the Father. Even here Aquinas is careful to follow the Dionysian distinction between God in himself, who remains forever hidden, and God in his act of self-communication, though the line does become more blurred. *Claritas* is, we might say, the fullness of a thing's intelligible content that is *proportionally* communicated in its *integritas*. It is the *monos* in Dionysius's Christianized emanational schematic, the fullness of content that is contracted by a proceeding and returning image. Following John of Damascus, Aquinas explains that a word is "the light and splendor of the intellect."⁴² Elsewhere Aquinas explains that a word is both that which is conceived in the mind and that which communicates what is thus conceived. As it is in the mind, a word is "representative of everything that is understood."⁴³ And although in the human mind many words are necessary to express all that is understood, in God's mind, according to Aquinas, "His one and only Word is expressive not only of the Father but of all creatures."⁴⁴ Although the Word's expressivity in God does not have a corresponding causal operation (the Word does not cause the Father to be), insofar as the Word is expressive of creatures it also causes creatures to be.

If, then, *claritas* agrees with the property of the Son insofar as the Son is the Word, and if as the Word the Son is expressive of the Father and causally expressive of all creatures, it follows that as a necessary condition for beauty *claritas* refers to that same dynamic in an analogous way: beauty identifies a given thing's communication of its intelligible content that generates creative causality. Perceiving a thing's beauty, then, is an encounter that stimulates an intellectual union between knower and thing known—or perhaps lover and thing loved—allowing the intellect to engage in causal activity of some sort. The intellect encounters a given thing's *integritas*, which is the concrete, particular communication that is “sent” from its greater fullness of substance (*claritas*). As a communication of a fuller intelligibility, a given thing's *integritas* is a perfect *proportio* with that given thing's *claritas*, which shines beyond it as its fullness of substance.

METAXOLOGY AS A METAPHYSICS OF CHRISTIAN BEAUTY: DESMOND'S REAWAKENING OF THE BETWEEN AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

As noted above, the language of reawakening implies a slumber, and indeed the claim in this essay is that the tradition of reason's intimacy with beauty falls into slumber during the modern period. It is not necessary here to consider the various reasons why this happened, especially since this has been done already in great detail.⁴⁵ Suffice it to say that our current condition, especially in the academic world, dwells within an overarching dichotomy between the good and the true, with ethics serving the discourse that examines the good and science the discourse that examines the true. Aesthetics continues to thrive but only as an independent field whose object is, for most, forbidden from crossing over into either ethics or science. Even within theology departments and faculties, the work of theology is being more and more displaced by the work of ethics and religious studies, the latter of which considers itself to be the only viably scientific approach to religious discourse.⁴⁶ What I want to suggest is that, insofar as these (and other) discourses harbor a nascent or unconsciously present mode of metaphysics—which all

discourses in some way must, since discourses as such constitute the encounter between intellect and extra-mental existence, or mind and being—this tradition of beauty remains present although in a dormant, or slumbering, condition. Awakening this tradition from its slumber, and developing it in a number of significant ways, not only serves the internal work of theology, but provides immense benefit to its relation to its others, as well as the relations among these other discourses themselves. In what follows, I want to briefly and broadly examine some of the ways in which Desmond's metaxology reawakens some of the primary features of beauty noted above.

Beauty and the Metaphysical Milieu

One of the symptoms of beauty's slumber in the modern period involves the way in which many dominant figures presupposed the indeterminacy to what might be called the "metaphysical milieu": the conditions of being that, because they provide the context for thought, are themselves not subject to the thought they allow and so are assumed rather than demonstrably proffered. In the Christian theological tradition, this milieu was for the most part considered to be the very divine substance itself, in which, as Paul explained, we live and move and have our being. Beauty, as we saw, identified the good as the plenitude of intelligible content as that good gives itself to be known. All thought functioned within a metaphysical milieu that was believed to be an excess, or surplus, of substance available to the intellect as the intellect ascends more and more into this substance itself—what John Damascene, and later Aquinas echoing him, called an "infinite ocean of substance" (*pelagus substantiae infinitum*). But in the modern period, the metaphysical milieu is no longer seen as a fullness, excess, or plenitude of intelligible content but instead is conceived as an indeterminate emptiness into which the mind must project its own categories of determinacy.⁴⁷ Kant called it the "empty space of pure understanding," while Hegel referred to it as the "indeterminate immediate."⁴⁸ But such a conception was never something that was philosophically demonstrated. Rather, it was assumed, or held by a philosophic faith.⁴⁹

Desmond's metaxology reawakens the premodern sense that the metaphysical milieu is a fullness, an excess of something that gives itself to be in and as the community of beings. There are two primary ways Desmond identifies this fullness or excess: as the agapeic origin and the overdetermination of being, which although identifying the same excess or fullness nevertheless are distinct in important ways.

The phrase "agapeic origin" identifies the source of all being not only as the primal giver of all that is, but as creative power whose giving is ceaseless and in excess of all finite determination.⁵⁰ "Creation is prodigal," writes Desmond, "a lavish spendthrift, nothing miserly; it gives and gives; it renews even when it takes into death; it is fire that burns and is rekindled in its burning."⁵¹ The characterization of the origin as agapeic not only signifies an excess or fullness of substance—something akin to Damascene's *pelagus substantiae infinitum*—but also that this excess is willingly given to be as other in the form of all otherness. This metaphor signifies "origin as excess plenitude, transcendence itself as other; creation as finite concreteness, but not for the return of the origin to itself; the 'exitus,' if we call it such at all, is for what is given as other in the middle."⁵² Not only is this otherness given to be from this excess, but it is given to be for itself as other; that is to say, the otherness of beings that arises from the agapeic origin is given, not for the sake of the origin (e.g., as its completion, or its own self-determination), but for the sake of that otherness itself. The origin is agapeic both in the sense of being a super-fullness and in the sense of being super-generous, where *super* indicates, in Dionysian-Thomist fashion, that which exceeds all genus or categories.⁵³ Understood in this way, the agapeic origin reawakens the (Neoplatonic) notion of the self-diffusive good but whose absolute generosity ushers in the (Christian) idea that the milieu is a freely willed gift.⁵⁴ Desmond does not give it a theological configuration, which makes his work as philosophy more valuable insofar as it has the capacity to inform various ways of theologically configuring this milieu.

As an excess, or plenitude, of intelligible content, the agapeic origin cannot itself be exhaustively determined by human reason. Reason emerges in the midst of the beings that erupt from the agape of the origin, which is to say, it emerges in between the excess of the origin

and the eventual acts of determinate cognition that engage this excess to fit the limitations of reason-coming-to-itself. Thus the agapeic origin gives rise to, or makes possible, any and every act of determination wherein reason becomes more and more conscious of itself in its relation to its other(s). And, in making determination possible, the agapeic origin can be spoken of—with respect to the determination it makes possible—only in the language of fullness or excess: as an *overdetermined* origin. By “overdetermined,” Desmond does not mean that the origin and its subsequent metaphysical milieu are the recipients of too much determination on the part of reason, or that it has been so determined as to have lost any remainder of mystery or ambiguity. Rather, it means that as the origin of all that is to be determined, it is itself a surplus, excess, or plenitude of determinable content; it is overdetermined in that it harbors the content of all that was, is, and will come to be determined by the act of reason. “As overdetermined plenitude,” Desmond explains, “it is more than any definite whole. ‘Mystery’ is constitutive of its excessive being. No determinate intelligible structure could capture its ‘essence.’ Its ‘essence’ as plenitude is beyond every determinate why.”⁵⁵ Similar to certain modern thinkers, Desmond sees the metaphysical milieu as indeterminate insofar as mystery is constitutive of its “essence.” Unlike many of the moderns, however, he does not configure this indeterminacy as an emptiness or lack. Rather, “it is indeterminate but indeterminate in a positive and affirmative sense. This is why I prefer to speak of an overdetermination: such a sense of the indeterminate is not antithetical to determination. Rather it exceeds every determination we will later attempt, exceeds complete encapsulation in a definite and exhaustive definition.”⁵⁶

There are a few significant theological consequences in reawakening the beauty of the metaphysical milieu as an agapeic origin in the way that Desmond does. First, in reconfiguring the metaphysical milieu as a fullness, or plenitude, Desmond’s metaxology accounts for the attraction that generates reason’s efforts to know the world around it, that is to say, reason’s act of determination. Why must this attraction be accounted for in the first place? Given the contrast between the original attraction to an overdetermined origin that characterizes both the premodern and the metaxological account of being, on the

one hand, and the “pro-jection” onto an indeterminacy that marks a great deal of modern (and postmodern) thought, on the other, what justifies the contention that the former is a more valid condition? In one sense, there is no justification if such entails a univocally rational account of one option over the other. Reason is itself bound up with every account of the origin and so cannot get outside of the dynamic in order to somehow apprehend some higher mode of rational verifiability. Indeed, any attempt to approach the question of the origin in exclusively univocal terms is doomed to failure, though, as Desmond acknowledges, there is a place for univocal thought.⁵⁷ But such univocal thinking must be ordered metaxologically; that is to say, it must be thought in relation to the unmediated difference (or equivocity) that necessarily arises with every univocal claim, as well as the dialectic, or mediated difference, that every equivocity births.

And so the justification for “attraction” over “projection”—which is to say, justification for thinking within an original plenitude rather than an original emptiness—involves a mode of mind that is in between, that is to say, simultaneously rooted in determinate rationality while being porous to the plenitude that attracts it. In this sense, Desmond’s metaxology also reawakens the need for theology and theological language to always walk a fine line in between negative (*apophatic*) and positive (*cataphatic*) thought. It is this line that alone prevents slipping into one of the two sides where lie the traps of idolatry (positive, *cataphatic*) and nihilism (negative, *apophatic*). Thought, it seems, engages its objects with greater clarity when it is not too “puffed up,” as St. Paul says.

A reawakening of reason’s intimacy with beauty in Desmond’s metaphysical milieu not only provides reason with a necessary modesty before its interests, but it also serves to realign reason with love. Aquinas believed that “loving draws us into a thing more than knowing does,”⁵⁸ because knowledge of necessity reduces the thing to a thought of the thing. Knowledge abstracts the form in order to bring it into the mind, which is perhaps why St. Paul understood that knowledge “puffs up” the mind. However, when a person desires to know something she does not desire to have it as a thought but as a thing, as Aquinas maintained.⁵⁹ The antidote to reasoning that relies

too much on its own power—puffed up as it is with abstractions, constructs, categories, and concepts—is love, because, as Aquinas again asserted, “love begins immediately where knowledge ends.”⁶⁰

The point to be stressed here is that love, among other things, gives reason a patience and a kindness before its object of interest. It enables reason to resist the urge to reduce the whole of a given object of inquiry so as to fit reason’s already constructed categories where it may then more easily handle, and often manipulate, its object. Reasoning without love is only ever able to puff up its own categories and is destined to remain confined within itself. Putting the matter in poetic tones, Desmond offers an insightful reflection that captures well the loss of love in our late modern rationality and the sense of self-love it engenders:

I sang to my love, when I was in love. Now I am not in love, and so I analyze the song. And now I love my analysis, perhaps my clever self, and no longer my love. I no longer sing. Alas, my old song cannot be voiced by my new transcendental language. My new . . . language speaks about itself and not the adored other that once turned my head.”⁶¹

As this passage implies, reason without love closes itself off to seeing its object in new and perhaps vital ways, content instead to simply love itself. Desmond’s metaxology is a continual reminder of this need to think with love, that is, with patience, with openness to the otherness of any object of inquiry, but also with a conscious giving of oneself to objects of inquiry. His is a call to think the other in love, and so to “sing the other” as a melody in one’s own symphonic existence.⁶² Contrary to much of so-called postmodern thought, which privileges the other to the neglect of the role that every self plays in the being of the other, Desmond’s metaxology recognizes the role of the self. It reminds us that every object of inquiry has more to its intelligibility, which ought to chasten every rational effort to know it but also any laissez-faire approach to otherness. In a word, it unites knowledge with love, providing a mode of mindfulness that is vital to theological inquiry.

Between *Conatus* and *Passio*

In the Dionysian-Thomist tradition, beauty as the fullness of all intelligibility compels a more contemplative receptivity to what is being given in and as this beauty than models that presume an indeterminate metaphysical milieu. For Desmond, the metaphysical milieu that derives from the agapeic origin as overdetermined also compels a more contemplative receptivity in the form of what Desmond calls the *passio essendi*. Emergent in the midst of an embracing fullness or excessively generous wellspring of being, human reason is rocked back on itself into a state of what Desmond calls “agapeic astonishment.”⁶³ This is the primordial state of illumination, or porosity to the origin, prior to any activity of reason wherein the otherness of being as agapeic begins to reveal itself. Standing in relation to this newly revealed agapeic overdetermined source, reason is opened, made passive (*passio*) or porous to the act of being (*essendi*). Of course, reason participates in the coming to be of all beings, and Desmond recognizes a form of the (Spinozan) *conatus essendi*, or the co-birthing of being. But, as Desmond explains, “we are *passio essendi* before we are *conatus essendi*, passion of being before striving to be.”⁶⁴ Human activity, that is to say, the participation in the “birthing” of being in and through beings, is always derivative from the origin as agapeic and overdetermined. We are “in between” precisely because our being, and the being of all beings, emerges out of a plenitude that attracts and uplifts our emergent being. We are neither the nothingness out of which we are called by this plenitude, or agapeic overdetermined origin, nor are we this origin itself.

Reawakening reason’s intimacy with beauty helps theological discourse to better navigate the murky waters between the *conatus essendi* and the *passio essendi*. More than any other discourse, theology has both a *conatus* and a *passio* dimension. Like any discourse as such, its *conatus* dimension derives from its active inquiry into its object: inquiry into any given object requires the constructs of thought like concepts or categories. But unlike any other discourses theology concerns itself directly with the act of revelation, which means its *passio* side is more fundamental than its *conatus* side. Again,

speaking in general terms, Desmond's metaxology brings both dimensions to greater consciousness by going between them. Being between demands a conscious vigilance to never finally privilege either the *conatus* or the *passio* against the other, even though it does recognize the primordially of the *passio*. But even then, the very fact of thinking the *passio* is itself a kind of *conatus*, insofar as every use of language, concepts, and categories is. In turn, the thinking of the *conatus* itself requires a kind of *passio* insofar as *conatus*, as a construct, requires something given to enable construction in the first place. Here is where the between begins to open itself, revealing depths that can only be properly engaged by means of a metaxology. The many indelible and vital couplings within theological discourse—grace and nature, spirit and matter, God and creation, Heaven and Hell, nature and will, substance and relation—require a similar kind of reasoning if they are to be properly thought.

Beauty, the Between, and Consciousness

Desmond's metaxology is a *logos* of the *metaxu*, an account, discourse, or thinking of "the between." Like beauty, the between cannot be reduced to one definition as if it were an object alongside other objects with limits to its scope. Rather, the between identifies the emergence of the original energy of existence that gives itself to be in the plurality of beings. As noted, there is both a transcendental and a predicamental (although Desmond does not use this latter term) level where the between may be recognized. We only encounter "being as such" (*ens inquantum est ens*, to borrow Thomist terminology) in the concrete beings before us. But, as both Aquinas and Desmond recognize, this does not mean that we are not at all in touch with being itself. It only means that we cannot abstract a positive concept of being from beings. Were we to do this, we would not be thinking about being as such but merely our "present" abstraction, laden as it is with the limitations of our experience, as a popular critique of metaphysics contends. Desmond and Aquinas (and perhaps Dionysius) are not unaware of this problem, and consequently are able to avoid its trap-pings. Where abstraction fails to provide a positive concept of being,

one is still able to recognize that “that whereby something enjoys this particular kind of being” is not the same as “that whereby it enjoys being as such.” Aquinas referred to this as *separatio*, which identifies a fundamentally negative kind of thinking that allows one to become porous to being as such beyond any of its contracted modes.⁶⁵ For Desmond, “that whereby a thing enjoys being as such” is the between as it identifies the fullness of being that, although contracting itself into diverse modes, remains in excess of all such modes. And insofar as it is in excess of all contracted modes or particular beings, it remains “in between”: both predicamentally in between particular being, and transcendently between the Origin and all other beings.

If for Dionysius and Thomas beauty identified that *ratio* of being where the good gives itself to be known as particular form such that it orders the good to the cognitive faculties, then beauty is the common condition in which we live and move and have our being. Beauty identifies the happening that takes place as human persons pursue the good in an effort to order that good more toward their cognitive faculties. No one lives directly and fully in the good, and no one fully cognizes all there is. But all persons live in the midst of pursued goods and assimilated truths. One might even say that life is a constant struggle to assimilate desire into knowledge, or the good into truth. Desmond’s metaxology continually reveals that being is an event happening in this middle space where a confrontation with the good in and through goods provokes a desire for cognitive capture of the good, or “truth.”

As history more than makes clear, staying in this between of beauty is difficult. Ordering the good to the cognitive faculties carries with it the risk of either tending toward the side of complete cognitive mastery or the side of complete abandonment of cognition. Such tendencies have taken many forms throughout history: rationalism and fideism; essentialism and romanticism; naturalism and nihilism; determinism and skepticism, to name a few. Desmond’s metaxology serves to diagnose one of the primary problems that throws mindfulness off balance in the between. Describing what he sees as a perennial metaphysical prejudice, he explains how for a great many in the Western intellectual tradition “to be is to be intelligible, and to be intelligible is

to be determinate. Hence, being is identified with determinate intelligibility.”⁶⁶ In this way, Desmond also identifies an important distinction generating the triad of “being, intelligibility, and determinate intelligibility.” This reawakens the Dionysian-Thomist notion that there is being that is beyond intelligibility (God in himself), there is intelligibility beyond current determinations (e.g., beauty, goodness, faith, love), and every act of determination moves within these. In other words, the assumption that whatever *is* must conform to our cognition completely collapses the rich space of ambiguity—which admittedly is often also beguiling—in between being as such (*ens inquantum est ens*) and human cognition. That is to say, it is a metaphysical prejudice that evacuates being of beauty, and no longer can being’s excess intelligibility call to us or invite us to know it more deeply. With such a loss, so too does human knowledge lose its potential perspicacity over being, and we are left having to project ourselves onto the screen of being as absence or nothing. We are left reconstructing our past constructs.

Desmond’s metaxology reawakens us not only to the dangers of such a loss but also to the perspicacious sense of being that comes from a *logos* of the *metaxu*. His is a metaphysics, then, also of consciousness that goes well beyond Hegelian self-consciousness. It is much closer to the type of consciousness that could be derived from the Dionysian-Thomist account of beauty, not only because this account of beauty identifies an excess of intelligible content, but because, in ordering the good to the cognitive faculties, it simultaneously elevates the cognitive faculties more and more into the inexhaustible plenitude of the good. As bound up with the intellect but also always in transcendent excess of intellectual capacity, beauty identifies a transcendent plenitude of intelligible content that on the one hand gives itself over to categories and concepts of human discursion but on the other hand withdraws from discursion in its transcendence. And insofar as this withdrawal continually attracts the intellect beyond itself into a transcendent other, beauty identifies an *anagogical* power to elevate the human person more and more into this transcendence itself, and so indicates the way in which beauty can be considered a power to elevate human consciousness.⁶⁷ Of course, consciousness as we know

it was never a theme treated explicitly by premodern thinkers. Nevertheless, it remains valid to recognize the way in which beauty was a locus where being and thought merged, and so where a theological account of consciousness was waiting to be born. In many ways, Desmond's metaxology serves this effort. His metaxology gives rise to what he calls the fourfold sense of being, which describes not only the metaphysical milieu itself but also an account of consciousness in relation to the metaphysical milieu. And it is in such an account where we find Desmond's metaxology enabling the kind of community of being found in the Dionysian-Thomist tradition of beauty. I will bring this essay to a close by examining this and drawing out its significance for contemporary theological discourse.

The Community of Being and Beauty

Derrida famously remarked that "every other is absolutely (or 'wholly' or 'entirely') other,"⁶⁸ representing one of the ways in which postmodern thought tends toward an ontology of unmediated difference. But if every other is wholly other in the way Derrida indicates, then could this condition even be recognized to be the state of affairs? An otherness that is capable of being recognized—even as "absolutely other"—is an otherness that is capable of being known and hence loved. And an otherness that can be known and loved is not *only* wholly other in the way Derrida's remark suggests. For how is it that what is "absolutely other" remains nevertheless hospitable to a rational grasp of its otherness, such that Derrida can proclaim its fundamental nature as 'other'? What accounts for the sharing of this, allegedly, absolute otherness?

Neither the theological tradition of beauty nor Desmond's *metaxu* dismisses the otherness of beings that Derrida wants to secure. But where Derrida, and a great deal of postmodern thought, neglects the place of union, unity, identity, and univocity within the community of beings, Desmond's *metaxu* is a community in which the otherness and differences among beings are shared by virtue of the order of beings that includes both difference and identity, both

otherness and unity, both plurivocity and univocity. Metaxology is a metaphysics of communion, that is to say, a metaphysics that aspires to think difference and identity simultaneously. Nowhere is this articulated better than in Desmond's fourfold sense of being, which bears a remarkable similarity to Aquinas's account of the necessary conditions for beauty.

The fourfold sense of being, in short, constitutes an ordering of the univocal, equivocal, dialectical, and metaxological ways of being and thinking. It is an order that bespeaks not only the way in which human consciousness emerges in its encounter with existence but also the state of existence as such. That is to say, the senses of being as they come to realization in thought reflect the diversity within being itself. And this diversity communicates the unity that follows in tandem with it, such that being as such is most fundamentally a comm-unity, a unity-in-plurality, a plurality-in-unity.

The fourfold sense of being emerges out of the fundamental configuration of being as overdetermined. Because being is in excess of reason's capacity to exhaustively determine it, there is a movement of thought as thought engages being itself. As Desmond explains, "Our understanding of what it means to be comes to definition in a complex interplay between indetermination and determination, transcendence and immanence, otherness and sameness, difference and identity."⁶⁹ Rocked back onto ourselves by the seemingly endless giving of being, we are brought to a place of astonishment, which then brings us to a realization of our lack, or emptiness. Here, astonishment gives way to perplexity, which triggers the fundamental desire to know existence itself. In contrast to the agapeic sense of astonishment—astonishment caused by the excess of what is given—perplexity, deriving as it does from the consequent realization of one's emptiness before the over-determination of being, is "erotic." That is to say, our perplexity derives from our being other to, and so lacking, the origin. The fourfold sense of being emerges within the space between agapeic astonishment and erotic perplexity, where reside all efforts to mediate one with the other. The act of mediating the otherness of being and beings yields, in Desmond's view, a fourfold order:

Very broadly and first, the univocal sense of being stresses the notion of sameness, or unity, sometimes even immediate sameness, of mind and being. Correlative to the univocal sense of being is the search for determinate solutions to determinate problems, impelled by specific curiosity. Second, the equivocal sense accentuates diversity, the unmediated difference of being and mind, sometimes to the point of setting them in oppositional otherness. Perplexities in its restless encounter with troubling ambiguities can be correlated with this sense of the equivocal. Third, the dialectical sense emphasizes the mediation of the different, the reintegration of the diverse, the mediated conjunction of mind and being. Its mediation is primarily self-mediation, hence the side of the same is privileged in this conjunction. . . . Fourth, the metaxological sense gives a logos of the metaxu, the between. It puts stress on the mediated community of mind and being, but not in terms of the self-mediation from the side of the same. It calls attention to a pluralized mediation, beyond closed self-mediation from the side of the same, and hospitable to the mediation of the other, or transcendent, *out of its own otherness*.⁷⁰

I have added the emphasis at the very end to stress that the metaxological derives from more than a hope to do justice to the other. Rather, it derives from Desmond's own insight into the otherness within identity itself. That is to say, beings are constituted not only by their unique univocal identity but also by an otherness that is bound up with that identity. This otherness derives from the fact that every being, emergent as it is from the overdetermined origin, recapitulates in its own way this sense of being overdetermined. Metaxology, then, allows us to repurpose Derrida's observation of otherness. It is not that, pace Derrida, "every other is absolutely other," since putting it in this way absolutizes the unmediated differences among beings, which begins to fall apart when deconstructed. Rather, when considered in light of metaxology, it is more accurate to say that *every other is an overdetermined other*.⁷¹ Articulating it in this fashion allows us to preserve the postmodern concern with the integrity of otherness without having to abandon the communal nature of that integrity. The

overdetermination of the other invites a community of beings into its coming-to-identity; that is to say, it opens the way for its being to be constituted by community. In fact, it almost necessitates a communal intermediation for its coming into its own identity. The overdetermination of the other means that even that other's own unique identity as a communication of its overdetermination is not itself capable of realizing—as in “making real”—its own being. Rather, it needs the community of beings in which it first comes into itself. But this need in no way trumps its unique integrity as truly other. In other words, with Derrida the metaxological other remains uncompromised in its otherness. Yet this otherness does not assume absolute difference such that unity violates it. And here, perhaps, is where the kinship between Desmond's fourfold way and Aquinas's necessary conditions of beauty might bring some clarity.

Elsewhere, Desmond explains the fourfold sense of being in tones that we will see closely echo Thomas's account of *integritas*, *proportio*, and *claritas*. Here is what Desmond writes:

If univocity stresses sameness, equivocity difference, dialectic the appropriation of difference within a mediated sameness, the metaxological reiterates, first a sense of otherness not to be included in dialectical self-mediation, second a sense of togetherness not reached by the equivocal, third a sense of rich ontological integrity not answered for by the univocal, and fourth a rich sense of ontological ambiguity not answered for either by the univocal, the equivocal, the dialectical.⁷²

Beginning with the fourth reiteration, we have in Desmond's account an echoing of the plenitude, or excess of intelligible content, that marks both the Dionysian and Thomist accounts of the divine similitude as it gives itself to be as *ens inquantum est ens*. The richness and the ambiguity that cannot be accounted for by the univocal, equivocal, and dialectical ways of being and mind precisely is the excess of being, the plenitude of determinate content that constitutes the givenness of being itself. It is too much for these ways of being and mind, and therefore transcends their mediating capacity. Consequently,

in its transcendence it perpetually provokes a richer, communal intermediation.

Moving back to the first reiteration, the “sense of otherness” that cannot be included in dialectical self-mediation reawakens Thomas’s notion of *claritas*. *Claritas*, as we saw, is the excess of a being’s substance that shines beyond its constituent parts. It is the depth of a given being, its ontological rootedness in the plenitude of being itself. As such, it is recalcitrant to attempts exhaustively to mediate it; it is the more of a being that cannot be finally determined by human cognition. The second reiteration, the “sense of togetherness not reached by the equivocal,” reawakens beauty’s *proportio*. *Proportio* is the necessary condition that accounts not only for the relation between a being’s *integritas* and its *claritas* but also for the relation between beings themselves. The fullness of unity among beings is located in the ontological depth that is beyond mediation where a given being’s *claritas* opens to the plenitude of being itself, wherein it is united with the *claritates* of other beings. Community in this sense is an act rather than a thing, an event rather than a *fait accompli*. And what allows the comingling among the various *claritates* of beings derives from the condition of *proportio*. Equivocity, as Desmond contends, cannot reach the togetherness issued within this *proportio* because, as metaxology allows us to identify, this togetherness is where unity and plurality are in perfect proportion. It therefore cannot be mediated by absolutizing difference or unity. Rather, it must hold both together simultaneously. In this way, a given being articulates the third reiteration—a sense of integrity not answered for by the univocal. This is because where univocity stresses sameness, metaxological integrity—like Thomist *integritas*—stresses a sameness-in-otherness, an identity-in-community with others. For Desmond, the between is “charged with an aesthetic effulgence that comes to be embodied both communally and singularly.”⁷³ As he explains, there is an “integral open wholeness”⁷⁴ that marks this aesthetic show of being’s beauty, echoing the way Thomist *integritas* opens, via *proportio*, to otherness. That is to say, it is an integrity that is in proportion to its own overdetermined substance (*claritas*) which accounts for its ontological bond with all other beings. As Desmond himself puts it, “Aesthetic happening

shows the enabling ethos as a togetherness of splendid beings. Beauty here is not something subjectivistic: aesthetic show communicates the beings themselves and their togetherness in terms of integral harmony and community with others.⁷⁵

Throughout the second part of this essay, I have tried to establish the ways in which Desmond's metaxology contributes to theological discourse. I have argued that metaxology reawakens reason's intimacy with beauty. In the first part of this essay, I tried to demonstrate the ways in which beauty as a *metaxu* gave shape to significant dimensions of the Dionysian-Thomist reading of the Christian tradition. For both, beauty not only identified God in himself and God in his creative self-communication, but it also served as that middle space where the good is ordered to the cognitive faculties, that is to say, where desire is continually transformed into knowledge. And for this reason, it is the space of true communion where integrating selves realize the depth of their unique *claritates* through proportion with other integrating selves. Reason's intimacy with beauty, in this sense, secures and safeguards a unifying and integrating adhesive necessary to all discourses since, contrary to a certain posture common to our late modern context, there is ultimately no such thing as knowledge devoid of desire. This is not to say that the relationship between them is an easy or unambiguous one. Quite to the contrary, it is perhaps one of the most complicated associations confronting us today. In reawakening the *metaxu*, Desmond's metaxology reawakens the space once served by beauty. And reawakening beauty may prove to be the most significant step taken for contemporary theological discourse, not only with respect to its own internal relations and complexities, but more important with respect to the way it relates to its others.

NOTES

1. For more on the poetic and systematic in Desmond, see, e.g., Thomas A. F. Kelly, ed., *Between Systematics and Poetics: William Desmond and Philosophy after Dialectic* (London: Routledge, 2007); and *ISB*, 34–43.

2. *ISB*, 233.

3. Among the more notable contributions are Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978); Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), and *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang, eds., *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009); Eric D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007); Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989); Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Among the now-classic works are Jan Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu: Essai sur la structure rationnelle de la doctrine mystique du pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite* (Brussels: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959); Eugenio Corsini, *Il trattato De divinis nominibus dell Pseudo-Dionigi e I commenti neoplatonici al parmenide* (Turin: G. Giappichelli, 1962).

4. Thomas Aquinas, *In de Divinis nominibus*, proemium.

5. Von Balthasar's trilogy is well known at this point and hardly needs citing. Instead, for the ways in which Von Balthasar gets beyond Hegelian dialectic, which is where his thinking interlaces with metaxology, see Cyril O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity*, vol. 1: *Hegel* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2014). O'Regan does not make any explicit mention of Desmond's project in this work, but the analysis of Von Balthasar's relationship with Hegel is revealing for any nascent metaxology in Von Balthasar.

6. *PO*, 6.

7. *ISB*, 129–30.

8. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costella, S.J. (London: Routledge, 1975, 2004), 311: "The unity of 'the metaphysical' is an after-the-fact construction of Heideggerian thought, intended to vindicate his own labor of thinking and to justify the renunciation of any kind of thinking that is not a genuine overcoming of metaphysics."

9. *ISB*, 130.

10. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

11. Plato, *Symposium*, 202a–e, in *Platonis Opera*, ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903).

12. Plato, *Hippias major*, 304e, in Burnet, *Platonis Opera*.
13. For a more complete account of beauty as a divine name in the Dionysian-Thomist tradition, see Brendan Thomas Sammon, *The God Who Is Beauty: Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas and Dionysius the Areopagite* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013).
14. Editions consulted include the following: *Corpus Dionysiacum I: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De divinis nominibus*, ed. B. R. Suchla, Patristische Texte und Studien 33 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990); *Corpus Dionysiacum II: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De coelesti hierarchia, de ecclesiastica hierarchia, de mystica theologia, epistulae*, ed. G. Heil and A. M. Ritter, Patristische Texte und Studien 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991) (cited below as *DN* = *On the Divine Names*; *EH* = *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*; *CH* = *Celestial Hierarchy*; *MT* = *Mystical Theology*); John Parker, *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 2 vols. (London: James Parker, 1897–99); *Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, trans. Clarence Edwin Rolt (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).
15. See also Perl, *Theophany*, 65; O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 9; John Jones, "Mis-Reading the Divine Names as a Science: Aquinas' Interpretation of the Divine Names of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52 (2008): 157–62.
16. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Divine Names*, proemium.
17. Cf. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, ch. 5; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 164 ff.
18. See Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 155.
19. The order of presentation of the Dionysian corpus has been considered in a few different ways. Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu*, argued that the *DN* and the *MT* explicated the ascent of the individual mind, while the *EH* and the *CH* explicate a mode of 'theurgy' (divine work) mediated by hierarchies. In contrast to this splitting of the *CD*, Rene Roques, "Denys l'Areopagite," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 3 (1957): 243–86, and *Structures théologiques de la Gnose à Richard de Saint Victor: Essais et analyses critiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), suggested a more unified sequence that follows the order *DN*, *MT*, *CH*, and *EH*. Most recently, Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, followed Roques but argued that there is a single argument threading its way through all of the treatises, showing "signs of a conscious arrangement which itself reinforces the argument they contain" (127).
20. It is perhaps worth noting that in some sense this is how Albert the Great had also characterized the name "good" in Dionysius's text. See *De*

Pulchro et Bono, q. 1, a. 1, in *Albertus Magnus, Super Dionysium De Divinis Nominibus* (*Opera omnia*, tom. 37); nn. 71–92, ed. P. Simon (Bonn: Editio Coloniensis, 1972), 180–95.

21. Catherine Pickstock explains the *metaxu* in terms of light. See her “What Shines Between,” in Kelly, *Between Systematics and Poetics*, 107–22.

22. Robert Grosseteste, *De Luce* (*De Inchoacione Formarum*), trans. Clare C. Riedl (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1942, 1978), 10; see also L. Bauer, *Die Philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste, Bischofs von Lincoln* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1912), 51.

23. Cf. Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, c. 2, §4.

24. Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, c. 1, §2. It should be noted that Dionysius is here referring to the divine light, though throughout his corpus he uses this imagery for other light forms.

25. See, e.g., Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, ed. C. Barrett, trans. Adam and Ann Czerniawski (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999), vol. 2, 28; Katharine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 120.

26. I know of no studies on the historical developments concerned with this issue. Scholars, it seems to me, tend to uncritically speak of the triad *monos-prodos-epistrophe* and the binary *exitus-reditus* as if there is no significant difference.

27. See Proclus, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text*, trans. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1933), prop. 25–27.

28. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 29.

29. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 30.

30. To date, the single most important work on Thomas’s views of beauty is Francis J. Kovach, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin: Eine genetische und systematische Analyse* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1961). Other contributions include Winfried Czapiewski, *Das Schöne bei Thomas von Aquin* (Fribourg: Herder, 1964); Leonard Callahan, O.P., *A Theory of Esthetic According to the Principles of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1927); Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Thomas Gilby, O.P., *Poetic Experience: An Introduction to Thomist Aesthetics* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1934); Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962); Armand A. Maurer, C.S.B., *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation* (Houston, TX: University of St. Thomas, 1983).

31. For an extensive analysis of the material and formal development of beauty in Thomas's thinking, see Kovach, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin*, 1–83.

32. Aquinas, *In de Divinis nominibus*, bk. 5, l. 4. The phrasing *nam pulchrum addit supra bonum, ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam illud esse huiusmodi* is not without a degree of ambiguity. To what exactly does *illud* refer? Some translations take it as a reference to *the particular* thing that is known (e.g., Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 31; Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case for Thomas Aquinas* [New York: Crossroads, 1996], 343). But the word's case, gender, and number align it with the good in the antecedent clause. If one takes *illud* to be a reference to a thing known rather than the good, one ends up interpreting Thomas to be saying that beauty adds to the good a capacity to know *a given thing* is of a certain kind. This seems to raise a difficulty, however, since it implies that the good somehow already contains a multitude of already determined discrete things that are merely awaiting cognitive reception. Interpreted this way, it is very unclear how beauty differs at all from truth. But for a thing to be known as a thing at all, it must already be of such a kind; that is to say, it must already be a determined "this." Translating *illud* as a reference to *particular things* introduces into Thomas's explanation a redundancy that is not there. There simply are no indeterminate *things* presented to the intellect in its quest for knowledge—"thing" is already a determination. The good, however, exceeds all determination not as indeterminate but as too-determinate, or *overdeterminate*; it is an excess of being-yet-to-be-determined. Therefore, in order for the good to be known it must in some way be ordered toward the determinative capacity of the cognitive powers. This is precisely what Aquinas understands is unique to beauty: it is between the hyper-determination (or *overdetermination*, in Desmond's language) associated with the good and the cognitive determination associated with truth. The *illud* therefore makes more sense when taken as a reference to the good, a view that is supported by other texts in Thomas (e.g., *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 27, a. 2, ad. 3), as well as scholars like Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 167–70; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 2, 259; Edgar De Bruyne, *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale* (Bruges: Éditions De Tempel, 1946), vol. 2, 281–86.

33. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 27, a. 1, ad. 3. Emphasis added.

34. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 5, a. 4, ad. 1.

35. Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1: *The Person and His Work* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005),

102; James A. Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas D'Aquino, His Life, Thought, and Works* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 359–60. Kovach recognizes these texts as occupying the same writing period in Thomas's career; see his *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin*, 33–41.

36. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 2, §4.

37. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 39, a. 8, resp.

38. Ibid.

39. Aquinas, *Commentary on the Divine Names*, bk. 4, lect. 6.

40. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 34, a. 2, ad. 3.

41. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 39, a. 8.

42. Ibid.

43. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 34, a. 3.

44. Ibid.

45. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 45–56, 70–78.

46. Something that is more and more being called into question. See, e.g., Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

47. See William Desmond, "God, Ethos, Ways," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 45 (1999): 17.

48. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1966), Introd., III, A5, B9; G. W. G. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 82/1: 83 [195]; for a more in-depth account of this in Hegel, see O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering*, 103.

49. For Hegel as an instance of this kind of assumption, cf. O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering*, 103.

50. See esp. *PU*, 229–232.

51. *BB*, 230.

52. *PU*, 229.

53. Cf. Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, c. 4; Aquinas, *In de Divinis nominibus*, c. 4, l. 5.

54. *BB*, 256–57: "What would this be? Such a radical origination would not be the shaping of preexistent matter through the superimposition of form, that also might be preexistent, as in the making of the Platonic demiurge. Such origination need not look to persuade necessity, but would give out of unconditional freedom. It need not create with conditions, for all derivative determination of being . . . [o]riginatation rather would be the surplus of the

origin, its free, releasing generosity. Origination would be an absolute giving of being. If one wants to say that the origin gives being out of an internal necessity, this is true, if we mean by internal necessity that it is its being simply to give. But then, of course, freedom and necessity will mean something other than their more standard significations. This necessity, whose being is simply to give for the good of giving, would be absolute freedom, indeed absolute freeing. For this giving would free, release, absolve the given from the giver.”

55. *PU*, 231.

56. William Desmond, “Being, Determination, and Dialectic: On the Sources of Metaphysical Thinking,” in *Being and Dialectic: Metaphysics as a Cultural Presence*, ed. William Desmond and Joseph Grange (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 8.

57. *BB*, 233: “I do not want to say that this train of thought is simply false. I do want to say that the thought of the origin as univocal cannot be the final word. There are hits on the truth here, but the hits also produce inevitable misses.”

58. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 22, a. 2.

59. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 4, ad. 3.

60. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 27, a. 4, ad. 1.

61. *GB*, 69.

62. On thought “singing the other,” see *PO*, ch. 6.

63. See, e.g., *BB*, 7–11.

64. *AOO*, 271.

65. Cf. John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas, from Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 48–52.

66. *BB*, 16; “Being, Determination, and Dialectic,” 6; *PU*, 12.

67. It is worth pointing out here that in this explanation there are three modes of transcendence being employed, which correspond to Desmond’s own trinity of transcendence. This trinity of transcendences can be found in a few different primary texts, but the most concise summary is in *GB*, 22–26: “First transcendence (T¹): The transcendence of beings as other in exteriority. . . . Second transcendence (T²): The transcendence of *self-being*, self-transcendence. . . . Third transcendence (T³): original transcendence as still *other*—transcendence itself, not as the exterior, not as the interior, but as the superior.” See also *BB*, 231.

68. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 82.

69. "Being, Determination, and Dialectic," 28.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Cf. *ISB*, 33: "In other words, I am not talking about a move from the overdetermined to the indeterminate to the determinate to the self-determined. I am talking of the overdetermined that is there always with all of these particular possibilities." Here we see in Desmond a reawakening of the notion—found in Proclus and Dionysius, and in a different way in Aquinas—that there is a *monos*, or *claritas*, which is a creaturely recapitulation of the original *monos* or Divine Light.

72. *BB*, 177.

73. *GB*, 134.

74. *GB*, 135.

75. *GB*, 135.