Thinking Metaxologically

William Desmond's Philosophy between Metaphysics, Religion, Ethics, and Aesthetics
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CHAPTER 16

The Gift of Creation

Richard Kearney

It is an honor to pay homage to the work of William Desmond in this volume. I have known William for almost 40 years as both friend, colleague and fellow Irish philosopher. We have had many exchanges over four decades of intellectual conversation including pieces in the William Desmond Reader and After God, not to mention numerous reviews and critical papers in learned journals and conferences on both sides of the Atlantic. In what follows I will revisit some of these past conversations as they pertain to Desmond’s philosophy of religion as well as addressing some of William’s most recent thinking on the subject. In doing so I will be paying particular attention to what I see as a series of critical productive paradoxes ‘between’ apparent opposites—divine creation and human creativity, gift and imagination, theology and philosophy, ethics and poetics, othering and selving. I offer these few reflections as a set of appreciative meditative commentaries on Desmond’s poetic-metaphysical pondering of the sacred.

Let me begin with some introductory remarks on Desmond’s approach to the question of God. Desmond speaks of a ‘companionship of religion and metaphysics’ which resists the secularist framework of much contem-
porary philosophy. He challenges the sway of what Charles Taylor calls ‘exclusivist secularism’ which dismisses religion as an eligible subject for serious philosophical consideration or, at best, consigns it to the realm of private conviction (Taylor 2014). Desmond equally obviates the ‘phenomenological reduction’ of religion, carried out by Husserl, Heidegger and most of the French existential phenomenologists, which ‘suspended’ or ‘bracketed’ the question of faith as an interference with the pure questioning of Being. (Heidegger goes so far in the Introduction to Metaphysics, as to declare that ‘a Christian Philosophy is a round square and a misunderstanding’.) And Desmond also chastises the methodological neutralism of certain current trends in Biblical studies which reduce sacred scriptures to philological tracts or historical-sociological data with little appreciation of their spiritual, theological or metaphysical truth claims. Against such pervasive ostracizing of religious faith from philosophical discussion, Desmond offers a deep metaphysical engagement with religion as an experience of ‘passion and compassion’ (a passio essendi and a compassio essendi).

But if Desmond circumvents the modern embargos on philosophizing about God, what does he actually say about reason and faith? In what follows, I propose to look at five specific texts where I believe Desmond positively addresses the liaison between philosophy and religion. I want to suggest that this affirmative kinship ‘between’ (metaxu) the questions of Being and God is a central leitmotif of Desmond’s metaxology, albeit often discreet and poetic in its articulation.

I

In chapter eight of The Intimate Strangeness of Being (2012), entitled “The Confidence of Thought: Between Belief and Metaphysics”, Desmond calls for a new form of thinking about the sacred. He writes: “The confidence of thought asks a willingness to hearken to what is worthy in the beliefs of religion. Once again an old companionship calls for renewal, after the great divorce of modernity” (ISB 204–205). He goes on to state the need for “a new postmodern porosity between the religious and the metaphysical. Of clé in modernity we knew the self-understanding of the philosopher as a scientist or technician or revolutionary and latterly as perhaps even a poet after his or her own fashion. But the more archaic companionship of the philosopher with the religious and its vocation is worth new thinking and renewal” (ibid.). Later in the same chapter, Desmond links this new thinking to a special kind of ‘affirmation’ or

‘confidence’ in the metaphysical nature of Being itself—a certain “ontological love that is present in being ‘truthful’” (ISB 225).

Such a rethinking of the kinship between faith and metaphysics entails a series of important affirmations across a broad existential spectrum. It involves a fundamental ontological confidence expressed as much

in religious faith as in the trust in reason itself, as much admonitory of the overreaching ambitions of human power as in solidarity with human poverty, as much rejoicing in the excellence of human nobility as compassionate in sight of the tragedies of failure, as much tender to human limitations as laughing with its folly. (ISB 225)

Desmond even goes so far as to name this consoling affirmation of the spirit a “mysticism of deeper communication ... in love with the good of mortal things because secretly the divine love of mortal things has been confided to them” (ISB 226). Striking this mystical note, Desmond dares realign the perennial questions of Being and of God under the guidance of the unmentionable word ‘love’. Confidence in Being, he implies, is ultimately expressed as caritas. And the consequences of this primacy of love are real and multiple for our lived existence. They express the great mystery of what Desmond calls the intimate universal:

We would be infinitely loved. In our most idiotic intimacy, we live ourselves never as a neutral replaceable something but as intimately singular. God is the endowing source of the intimate universal. Only the personal, transpersonal God could endow the trusted singular with the universal as the intimate universal. Bist du bei mir: the air quickens our confidence, heartens it, but it is love that the air consecrates. (ISB 230)

In this same text Desmond makes what I take to be a powerful distinction between divine ‘investiture’ and human ‘investment’ (ISB 207). The first, he explains, operates according to a sacred economy where a reserve of enabling power is passed over from a source to a recipient. Thus, we find ourselves invested with certain powers as gifts, as grateful recipients of prior ontological investitures, before we ever invest our own powers in the world of give-and-take, before we subscribe to a finite material economy of credit and debit. Our very being, as Desmond puts it, our very esse or ‘to be’ may be seen as an endowment. “There are enabling powers, resources, first given before they can be invested in something further”
Desmond is at his theopoetic best, I find, when writing about the gift of investiture as a form of divine agape, an enabling power or resource which is invested in us before we reinvest it in anything else:

It is the generosity of the endowing God who calls to agapetic return. This is not a surplus in the sense of adding this or that to a determinate store. It is simply generosity and thankfulness lived as both self-enabling and more than self-enabling. It is participation in the overdeterminacy of a surplus good which in being given away is not depleted but augmented. (Ibid.)

And is there a return on such divine investiture? Yes. The return is
to give away the gift, in the sense of passing on the endowment with the generosity fitting to the gift. We own nothing and we are most profitable when we make no profit for ourselves, but pass on the increase in generosity that cannot be increased, and that is itself nothing but increase of participation in the good of the ‘to be’. (IBS 207)

This divine circle of endless kenotic giving is an excellent answer to the anthropology of the gift explored by Marcel Mauss and Maurice Godelier. And one might add to the neutral impersonality of Heidegger’s es gibt. By contrast, it serves as a fitting gloss on the Pauline notion of kenosis as an act of endless self-giving, an act powerfully captured in Andrei Rublev’s famous icon of the three persons of the Trinity, called ‘The Hospitality of Abraham’. The image of divine perichoresis par excellence. Father giving to Son giving to Spirit in an open circle of inexhaustible generosity and gratuity.1

II

The second text I wish to look at deals with the notion of divine creation as ‘possibility’ or posse. This particular discussion is part of an ongoing critical conversation with Desmond, begun in a number of journal reviews and culminating in his piece, “Maybe Maybe Not: Richard Kearney and God” published in After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy (2006). Here, Desmond offers a constructive critique of my philosophical exploration of God in The God Who May Be (Kearney 2001), most specifically as it pertains to the idea of creation as posse or ‘possibilization’. Questioning my eschatological take on posse as being too future oriented, Desmond offers a more archeological interpretation of the act of creation:

This is the giving to be of finite being by the origin (arche). Creation can refer to an activity or an outcome of activity, and I refer here primarily to the ‘act’ of creating rather than the ‘product’ created. This is a possibilizing, but it is more than that, since it is not just the reduction of possibility to actuality, but the bringing to be of actuality and possibility. (Desmond 2006, p. 68)

And there is something ‘hyperbolic’ here about creative possibilizing, “since without this nothing finite would be or become” (ibid.).

Invoking the traditional doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, Desmond reads creative possibilizing as a response to a prior and primordial giving of an originating gift. A giving which, he insists, is closer to archeological agape than eschatological eros. The origin is not creating itself in creating finite being: it is bringing to be the finite other as genuinely Other, endowed with promise, ontological, aesthetic, ethical and religious. He suggests that

creation is best thought in terms of the hyperbole of agapetic bringing to be. We might respond to this suggestion by saying ‘may be, may be not’. Very fair, since we glean something of this agapetic bringing to be from the finite creation as already given. Is that given creation, we are always tested between a maybe and a may be not. (Desmond 2006, pp. 68–69)

Desmond appears to suspect the eschatology of Maybe of a latent activism or voluntarism which underestimates the anterior givenness of the gift. But I do not think this is the case. My notion of divine creation speaks of a possibilizing from the future understood as the loving act of a deus adventurus, a perpetually coming and becoming God, a theopoetic calling of and by posse toward esse, the eventual task being the co-creation of the Kingdom of Possesit, as Nicholas of Cusa put it. Such a divine May Be (or Puis-Etre) deconstructs the old scholastic concept of God as First Cause or Pure Act (actus purus non haberis aliquod de potentialitate, as Aquinas put it)—a concept which become known in continental philosophy as the Omni-God of ontotheology (Heidegger, Vattimo), the logocentric metaphysics of Presence (Derrida, Caputo) and the totalizing ontology of the

1See my essay ‘Mating God: An essay in Theopoetic Imagination’ (Kearney 2017).
Same (Leviñas, Irigaray). Desmond boldly defends metaphysics against these descriptions, which he sees as caricatures, and against what he sees as the lure of an overly dynamic God of becoming (the divine *posse* having its roots in the Greek term *dunamis*)—where God possibilitizes and humanity actualizes. I think he would say: too much *conatus* and not enough *passio*. Or as he himself puts it, we need to construe creation with reference to a “primal givenness of being ... *a passio essendi*, prior to the becoming of any and *all conatus essendi*” (Desmond 2006, p. 69).

While I would defend the eschatology of *posse* as a mediation between *conatus* and *passio*, I do agree with Desmond’s resistance to the idealist trends of much modern philosophy where an ‘anthropological reduction’ (to use Martin Buber’s phrase) seeks to confine creation to a purely human/humanist activity. In such an exclusively ‘immanent frame’, as Charles Taylor notes, the sacred transcendence of the Other is overshadowed, if not ostracized. Here Desmond and I find ourselves on common ground, both acknowledging the creative life of *Posse* in terms of Gift and surprise, a divine creation calling out for human re-creation in its turn. In this respect, both Desmond’s metaphysical God of *agape* and my eschatological God of *eros*—working from the past and future, respectively—reject the modern Cult of Constructivism, where the other (human or divine) becomes little more than a projection of our finite consciousness, an idea that we produce out of our own autonomous projections. (“Think here, e.g., of the influential constructivist lineage running from Hegel, Marx and Feuerbach down to Freud, Sartre and Ernst Bloch.”)

Desmond proposes the idea of God as creative Gift as a bridge between our respective positions, and I think he is right. He writes accordingly of a sense of the possible emergent beyond the self-becoming in which the other possibilitizes a freedom released beyond our own powers of self-determination. This enabling of release makes possible a transfiguration of our own efforts and claims to be self-determining. Since the openness to the other comes to form for us here in this release, there emerges a more radical possibilitizing of self-becoming that is creatively there for the other in an ethical and religious mode. (Desmond 2006, p. 71)

But Desmond rightly insists, this possibilitizing is not first what we do—rather it is received by us as a gift from the other. He elaborates on this point thus: “The surprise of the generous other is in this gift—itself calling forth our ‘being generous’. It is here, more than anywhere else, that I think Kearney’s notion of the eschatological ‘may be’ finds its opportunity of greatest moment. (Ibid.)

And he asks: “What here emerges as possible and possibilitizing?” (Ibid.) To which he responds: “The most intimate and often incognito creativity which does not insist on itself, in that it is in the image of the origin and the first creation. This is the communicative creativity whose generosity of being is agapeically released beyond itself, making way for the other” (Ibid.). Here is no closed circle, but rather a dialectical between recreation defined as a ‘space of porosity’. A metatextual openness where “communication is enabled, possibilitised, sparked between humans, and between humans and God” (Ibid.). And he concludes, tellingly, with a discreet nod to confessional practice: “Prayer happens in the intimacy of this porosity” (Ibid.).

III

The third text I wish to address is Desmond’s first chapter of *The Intimate Universal: The hidden porosity among Religion, Art, Philosophy and Politics* (2016), entitled “Religion and the Intimate Universal”. Here, Desmond works from the inside out, locating the openness to the sacred in the gap or cleft of ‘nothing’ at the very heart of the human self. He returns to his central notion of the gap between self and other as a porous between-space where the finite and infinite can cross and commune (while never collapsing into each other). He sees this experience of the nothing-gap as a call beyond the reign of “erotic sovereignty” which dominates in our modern age, to a loving experience of “agapeic service” (IU 52). Reflecting also on the internal ‘nothing’ between oneself and oneself, Desmond makes the intriguing claim that in the solitude of such intimacy there is, in fact, no solitude. Raising the question “what is the nothing here?”, he affirms that it the between-space where the “enabling communication of the power of being gives us to be what we are and are to be” (IU 49). There is, he insists, an ‘inward otherness’ marking one’s deepest intimacy to oneself. And this is where we may find the
communication of the incognito God in the deepest ontological porosity of one’s soul, so deep that it seems like nothing, since the porosity is itself nothing—the open between space in which communication of the power to be is given and different selvings take determinate form. One is never alone even when one is alone. (Ibid.)

Developing this quasi-mystical theme of the ‘luminous dark night’—reminiscent of both John of the Cross and Augustine’s discovery of the divine in the interior intimo mea (Confessions)—Desmond contrasts the prevalent modern turn from the other toward the self (think of the modern idealist movement running from Descartes, Kant and Hegel to Husserl and Sartre) with the “religious turn toward porosity to the divine in the intimate universal” (IU 50). But Desmond vigorously resists the tendency to separate the individual experience of intimacy from the public community at large, especially insofar it concerns our social and ethical responsibility to others. On the contrary, he boldly suggests that “religious community alone is able truly to reconcile the singular and the universal” (IU 51). The Beatitudes whisper while never being directly invoked. (This is philosophy after all.) And he goes further to claim that religion, like love, is the most intimate thing for the human being—more intimate to me than I am to myself but with an intimacy that is not narcissistic or autistic but serves, paradoxically, as a rich resource for “communication and communicability” (IU 51). In this sense, pace Kierkegaard in Fear and Trembling, the intimacy of the Single One is deeply compatible with the universal in its deepest sense. In Desmond’s philosophy the mystical, the ethical and the religious are not competing either/or stages on life’s way, but mutually interanaiming spheres of dwelling between the singular and the absolute. In authentic religion the most intimate interiority connects with the most far-reaching exteriority of the ‘whole’; not to exert some kind of totalitarian hegemony over our lives, but to foster a disposition of openness to the all, in a spirit of ‘agapeic service’ to the community (IU 52). This exchange between the singular and the absolute occurs at the level of our most ‘primal porosity’ and requires an active-passive response to the sacred—both a commitment to service for others and a fundamental “patience of being” (IU 57).

This double fidelity is not always easy to sustain and may earn the name of ‘sacred idiocy’; it is a primordial ontological metaxu between apparent opposites (the most interior immanence and the most ulterior transcence) which exemplifies Cusanus’ mystical notion of the coincidentia oppositorum, though Desmond rarely cites Cusa or indeed any of the great mystics by name. But if the mystics go largely incognito in Desmond’s work, they continue, I suspect, to ghost his pages and guide his steps. He always observes a certain discretion of naming in his meditation of the mystical—the unnamableness of the sacred serving its multimamability. And he is also aware of potential misreadings and misdemeanors. Experiencing the mystical ‘nothing’ at the heart of Being can lead to a liberating interpretation of the teaching—“Blessed are the poor in spirit”—in terms of an “essential poverty of the human spirit”—but the same nothing, if we are not careful, can be a gateway to the demonic. To nothingness as an absence of the good (privatio boni). Or to put it in another way: the gap in Being may express itself either (1) as a ‘fertile void’ of sacred idiomatic intimacy, where the self experiences an ‘ecstasy’ of kenosis and self-emptying moving beyond itself toward the other or (2) as a plunge inward to a darkness that curls up in itself (similar to Luther’s notion of ‘self-inculcuration’). The best can also be the worst, and vice versa. There is a drama of choice and freedom here. Desmond’s metaphysics of the void is never sanguine or rosy-eyed. It never forgets the medieval adage ‘corruptio optimi pessima’.

IV

The fourth passage I wish to comment on is in chapter seven of The Intimate Strangeness of Being (2012), which bears the title “Pluralism, Truthfulness and the Patience of Being”. Here, we find one of Desmond’s most sustained and dramatic treatments to the sacred as it pertains to the distinction between creation and construction. Human creativity is at its best, he argues, when it concretes itself not as a willful act of homo faber but as a re-creation of a prior creation, a creative mimesis expressing a second yes in response to the primary yes of divine genesis—an act we experience existentially as call and gift. It is interesting to note that here, as elsewhere, when engaging with the sacred, Desmond rarely, if ever, cites the authority of sacred scripture—any more than the great spiritual masters or church fathers. He seems resolved to remain within a philosophical idiom of discourse. Or to be more exact, he writes as a philosopher of religion rather than a theologian or biblical scholar. (This is an important distinction which I have sought to articulate in my own writing and thinking, especially in recent works like Anatheism (Kearney 2010) and Reimagining the Sacred (Kearney 2016).)
Addressing the phenomenon of artistic creation, he describes art as the receipt of a gift before it becomes a construction of human will. “Gift is prior to construction”, he insists, as “[t]here is a call of truth on us that is coeval with our being ... It releases us into a certain freedom of seeking, but this freedom and release are not themselves self-produced” (ISB 189).

Let’s be clear: Desmond is not denying the importance of human invention and imagination; he is simply resisting the relativization of efforts to absolutize the claims of human productivity in conformity with the dominant cult of homo faber. He is not against human action per se, only a self-inflicted activism which denies that our conatus essendi is always preceded ontologically by a passio essendi. And, here, Desmond returns to the idea of ‘gifted’ humans as “creatures of an absolute source that gives us to be and give us to be as good”. This is the good of the ‘to be’ (esse) in which we participate and which empowers us to create and re-create in turn. A view which depends on our recognizing an “otherness more original than our own self-definition”. We are only self-defining, Desmond argues, because we are originally given to be as selves. Our selving is preceded by our othering, so to speak, giving a new connotation to Rimbaud’s maxim, “Je est un autre”. As Desmond pithily sums up: we are “only creative because created; only courageous because encouraged; only loving because already loved and shown to be worthy of love” (ISB 196).

In this sense one might say that being patient is not an ordeal but an invitation to participate in the patience of being itself, understood as the intimate giving and givenness of creation. The highest action of philosophy is thus revealed to be isomorphic with the greatest passion of religion in the common experience of ‘wonder’. Ontology becomes donatology: being as gift.

But what does become explicitly evident, at this juncture of ontological compassion, is that Desmond’s poetics of creation embraces an ethics of care. “We become witnesses to the compasaining they write, “in the care we take of the other for the sake of the other. In this care, we may be released beyond ourselves in a minding of the other potentially agapeic” (ISB 201). Desmond intimates that such ontological empathy with finite others is traversed by the infinite Other. The passion of patience yields to the action of compassion in laying us “open to secret sources of strengthening that make us porous to the religious intermeditation with the divine” (ISB 201). Abraham, Jesus, Hafiz and the Buddha would concur.

V

The fifth and final text I wish to address is a recent essay named, felicitously, ‘Godsends’ (Desmond 2016). Perhaps more than any other text, we find here Desmond, the poet of the everyday, taking his rightful place beside Desmond, the philosopher of religion. The very title itself suggests a compelling, engaged reflection on the connotations of ‘ordinary language’ for the relationship with the divine—the colloquial term ‘godsend’ being a typical example.

Godsend conjures up multiple everyday epiphanies of gifting and grace expressing the mystical truth that the world is a theophany. This is something, as Desmond notes in a rare invocation of names, that his compatriots, John Scotus Eriugena and George Berkeley, have both attested—Eriugena with his notion of the divine as a Deus currere, running like a tide of genesis through the flesh and blood of the natural universe and Berkeley with his theory of perception—esse est percipere aut percipi—as an empirical sign language of God (Desmond 2016, p. 12). Here ‘revelation’ ceases to be a proposition, thesis or syllogism, but expresses itself in quotidian acts of creation. These godsends can run from the most simple epiphanies of the everyday—as attested in the poems of Gerard Manly Hopkins celebrating the ‘pied beauty’ of the sacramental universe (viz ‘Glory be to God for dappled things’)—to the great Revelations of Abraham, Jesus and the prophets (to mention just the Judeo-Christian tradition). Citing the latter in an unusual moment, Desmond muses whether Christ might be an “absolute godsend—the single absolute, absolutely intimate with the absolute sender, and yet absolute as sent ... through a kenotic intermediary absolutely porous to the sending source” (Desmond 2006, p. 13). A musing which he translates into a claim for an “absolute community” of
God and Godsend (Father and Son) which in no way signals a diminishing of the "transcendent mystery of the source, even while revealed in absolute immanence" (ibid.). Desmond concludes his meditation with this double hypothesis: "The prophets: singular godsend of the absolute? Christ: the absolved and absolving godsend?" (ibid.). While hinting here at his own personal Christian commitment, Desmond retains his position as a philosopher of religion rather than a proponent of dogmatic theology in leaving us with Christ as a question.

It is telling, I think, that in this most recent sortie into the God question—as a godsend combining the work of philosophical reasoning and spiritual revelation—Desmond returns to a key insight about the metaphysics of the gap. Expressing the opinion that the word ‘gap’ need not be treated as a bad word, he retrieves the idea of a cleft or fracture in being as a potential breach of the ‘immanent frame’. He speaks of “chinks in the closure of immanence on itself” (Desmond 2016, p. 21), echoing Leonard Cohen’s famous lyric—“there is a crack in everything that’s how the light gets in”. Harking back implicitly to the nihil at the heart of the Judeo-Christian creation ex nihilo, and explicitly to the ancient Greek word ‘chaos’, Desmond speaks of how the “giving creativity of the origin can often be most striking in this between space—in this gap” (Desmond 2016, p. 21).

And he pursues this central metaxological intuition as follows:

A gap is a medium of openness, a middle of communication. In and across such gaps, godsend may be sent. There need be nothing osé about such a ‘gap’ at all. And especially so if our too solid world is actually subtended by the more original porosity of being. Godsend happen in the medium of this porosity. (Desmond 2016, p. 21)

If space permitted, it would be interesting to engage here in a deeper critical reflection of how one might relate this porosity of the godsend to the four ‘hyperbolic of being’ outlined by Desmond in God and the Between, namely, the idios of being, the aesthetics of happening, the erotics of serving and the agapeics of communication (GB 22). But that is work for another day. Sufficient to end this meditation on ‘godsend’ with a nod to Desmond’s compelling final suggestion that the giving of the intimate universal in the godsend is basically a ‘birthing with’—a co-natus. This particular notion reminds me of Eckhart’s beautiful notion of the divine birth of itself in and through each human being, as well as Maurice Claudel’s idea of poetics as a perpetual co-naisance between the human and the divine—an idea taken up by Merleau-Ponty in his later writings.

But, as I have already remarked, Desmond is not prone to the hermeneutic penchant for philosophizing with proper names and prefers to speak boldly in his own words with his own voice. He thinks in personal insights not quotes. And for this originality of thinking, as for much else, we can be grateful.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude my modest commentary on Desmond’s philosophy of religion, with a final word on his metaxology understood as a “mindful love of being” (ISB 225). I believe that while Desmond is essentially discreet in his mentions of the divine—one often has to weasel them out of his ingeniously intricate metaphysical speculations—the ultimate task of metaphysics remains for him a ‘patient mindfulness’ of the metaxa as openness to the absolute. But I repeat: patient here has nothing to do with supine passivity or subordination to some Supreme Omni-God or Sovereign Cause. It has to do with a passion of being-between which acknowledges that all our most creative acts are themselves responses to a prior and original gift of creation. Creation is this two-way compasion which runs from sacred genesis down to our ordinary acts of making and praying, doing and thinking. This is finally where philosophy can reenter a dialogue with faith, reason with revelation—a robust and productive dialogue for so long censored in the modern prejudice of what Taylor calls ‘exclusivist secularist humanism’. Addressing the vocation of the metaphysical thinker of being between light and darkness, Desmond pens this quintessential metaxological credo:

Patient mindfulness must open itself again to this passion of thinking—passion as an undergoing and a receiving—passion, one might also say, as an inspiration that already carries us in an arc of transcending, unchosen at first by us and rather choosing us before we, always late(r) choose for it. This confidence is ecstasy into a darkness that is not grim but listening. (Ibid.)

It is precisely here that we see the ‘family resemblance to religious faith’. Desmond clarifies this paradox thus: “This is no univocal light but a trust that comes to hold steady, to be held steady in the light and darkness, in the equivocal twilight, or dawn, that marks our metaxological condition” (Ibid.). In the final analysis, Desmond gives the last word to ‘love’ as a
primordial confiding in being. Love is faith because fides is, at bottom, con-fidens. The truth of love is troth—trust:

When all things are considered, this mystery is what, in our heart of hearts, we love as ultimate. Love is in confiding. We are loved when another takes us into his or her confidence. We love another when we are taken into confidence. We are by our very being taken into confidence. The call on our being is to take what is given into our own confidence. (ISB 226)

It would be hard to find a more fitting philosophical hymn to the caritas of creation.

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CHAPTER 17

On Speaking the Amen: Augustinian Soliloquy in Shakespeare’s Metaxu

Renée Köhler-Ryan

In Shakespeare’s Scottish play, mired as it is in evil that refuses to abate, there is a moment, after the Macbeths have murdered the king, when the main protagonist is on the stage alone. His act of soliloquy not only meets the standard of theatrical convention. At the same time, he carries out the philosophical act of Augustine’s soliloquy in reverse. Macbeth questions himself, and reveals how closed off he is to his moral community, how impermeable to divine communication. He cannot even pray, having found that when he tried, ‘Amen’ stuck in his throat. This is but one of the forms of what Desmond calls ‘sticky evil’ in the play. Desmond’s analysis of equivocity in that work draws from his development of a philosophy of the metakosm. When that concept of equivocity is seen for its indebtedness to Augustine’s insistence on self-reflection, it brings to light


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