

WILLIAM DESMOND AND CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY edited by Christopher Ben Simpson and Brendan Thomas Sammon, *University of Notre Dame Press*, Notre Dame, IN, 2017, pp. vii + 301, \$50.00, hbk

William Desmond's seminal work has had considerable impact on contemporary philosophers, in particular on those who do not regard metaphysics as something merely to be cast to the past as irrelevant and outdated. Rather Desmond's philosophy has offered fresh approaches 'in conversation with postmodern thought' and its reticence towards claims of permanence and universality. The editors must be commended for having assembled ten scholars, – although only one female – who have taken themes and foci in Desmond's *oeuvre* as a point of departure to reflect on, assess and value these regarding their significance for theology, in particular metaphysics, the theology of God and fundamental theology. In their instructive introduction the editors emphasise that this volume 'assumes that there is an essential, and not merely accidental bond between theology and metaphysics ... discernible in and verified by historical analysis'. In his own words, then, Desmond's 'metaxological metaphysics' is 'a logos of the *metaxu*, the between'. It contributes to theological discourse which happens in the between – of creator and creation, human and divine, finite and infinite.

In the first, and extensive, chapter, B.T. Sammons argues that Desmond's metaxology provides an important 'metaphysical foundation that reawakens reason's intimacy with beauty'. He examines how 'Desmond's *metaxu* reawakens the place that beauty once occupied for the theological tradition', in particular the Pseudo Dionysian –Thomistic reading of that tradition. John R. Betz, in Chapter Two, 'Overcoming the Forgetfulness of Metaphysics; the More Original Philosophy of William Desmond', comments how the alleged death of metaphysics is greatly exaggerated and examines the charges against metaphysics, unmasking them thereby as themselves being 'guilty of the very charges' against metaphysics. He notes how even Heidegger himself 'increasingly backed away' from maintaining that metaphysics could ever be entirely overcome. Betz's final sentence is unexpected and moving when he notes that one ought 'not forget that metaphysics is another word – and perhaps the most sublime of philosophical words – for love'. C.T. Tutewiler (Chapter Three) brings Desmond into dialogue with another contemporary philosopher, Quentin Meillassoux, by taking an 'application' of Desmond's metaxological metaphysics and relating it to Quentin Meillassoux's speculative thought. Chapter Four, 'The Positivity of Philosophy, William Desmond's Contribution to Theology', by D.C. Schindler, focuses especially on the positivity of reason, of being and of religion. He concludes that Desmond's 'metaxological notion of being and reason can offer a genuinely new way of thinking about the relationship between philosophy and theology ... in the service of Christian faith'. Closely related to this chapter is J.K. Gordon's and D.

Stephen Long's chapter in which they explore in more detail 'how a theology of God would look like when constituted by a metaxology'. This metaxological theology, conceived as 'ways' to God would be more along the lines of traditional theological approaches and thought, such as Anselm's, rather than more modern approaches. The two scholars end their chapter by calling for a conversation between Coakley's and Desmond's theology of God. Patrick X. Gardener, in Chapter Six, puts Desmond's metaxology in dialogue and expounds its convergences with Erich Przywara's *analogia entis* as a 'Catholic Metaphysics', while Renée Köhler-Ryan explores Desmond's writing on Augustine and Thomas in Chapter Seven, where she particularly focuses on Desmond's idea of the mask (*persona, prosopon*) which 'relies on his [Desmond's] notion of doubling, and forms a way for him to counteract the "counterfeit double" of Hegel's God'. Christopher Brewer, in Chapter Eight, examines – with reference to Howard Root and David Brown – how Desmond's writing on art can contribute to a renewed natural theology of the arts, emphasising rightly, as Desmond does too, how the arts should not be treated as *ancilla* but as equal partner on their own terms in the dialogue between philosophy/theology and the arts. Cyril O'Regan's, in Chapter Nine, reflects on Desmond's writing on Hegel and Gnosticism and John Panteleimon Manoussakis' 'The Silences of the Between, Christological Equivocity and Ethical Latency' which looks at what Desmond does *not* write about, – the 'silences' –, conclude the book.

It is obvious, even from this very brief outline, that Desmond, referred to by some 'as the last metaphysician', is a considerable voice among current philosophers with an openness to the transcendent/the Other/God. He is cited frequently in the book which is demanding reading, at times quite abstract and speculative. It will be of interest to scholars and post-graduate students. The contributions are throughout of a high standard, erudite, well researched and well argued. Theologians may be struck, however, by the notably few references to Christ, the Trinity and other central Christian concepts. Moreover, are Desmond's use of the terms 'porosity' and 'masks', both of which, today at any rate, contain more negative than positive connotations, really helpful in approaching God, God's relationship with humankind and the relationship between philosophy and theology? No doubt, that is the reason why the application of the mask can only work when it is prefaced by an elaboration of its original meaning in antiquity as *prosopon/persona*.

Appreciative of Desmond's scholarship and originality, this book contributes to an examination of central issues in his philosophy, offering wide-ranging discussion and impetus for further explorations.

GESA ELSBETH THIESSEN