

The History of Philosophy as Perversion

On Karmen MacKendrick

Richard A. Lee Jr.
Depaul University

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It surely must be the case the Karmen MacKendrick has been lied to many times. I know this because I, too, have been lied to many times. Let me be clear, the lies have always been good-natured and well meaning, attempting to make us feel better. I am sure that she has been asked many times about the project on which she is working. To which she must have replied sometimes, “Oh, I have this project on medieval philosophy” or “the history of Catholic doctrine (focusing primarily on medieval texts)” or “Augustine.” And then comes the lie: “Oh, that sounds really interesting.” It is well intentioned, meant to make those of us who spend most of our time on a period that is, in point of fact, of very little interest to the world of Continental philosophy feel welcomed and appreciated. However, I know that it is a lie because none of the leading journals in our field seem to welcome pieces on medieval philosophy, not to mention the history of Catholic doctrine. And when was the last time you heard a discussion of medieval philosophy at the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy?

I do not want simply to call people out for having lied to us. I do appreciate that they care enough to make us feel welcome, even if not entirely “normal.” Rather, for me, and I suspect also for MacKendrick, the lie that is told to us actually speaks a great deal of truth. One of the most important lessons we have to learn from her work is that the texts from the history of philosophy and from Western culture more generally are not nearly as stable as we would wish them to be. Why has our tradition largely passed over Augustine, Aquinas, Avicenna, Scotus, Ockham, and Suarez? It is because most assume that we know what they say, and what they mainly say is essentialism, asceticism, religious orthodoxy, and so on. We know that that is an old and very boring story, made old and boring, so I must assume, because we have progressed well beyond that kind of philosophical nonsense. Yet it is this “progressing beyond” that is precisely the question we should keep asking. It is interesting that many of the great figures from our tradition, Heidegger, Arendt, and Derrida, just to name a few, were returning over and over again not just to Plato, Aristotle, and then Descartes but to the entire tradition that is ours. It does not stop there; the works of Deleuze, Agamben, Althusser, and Nancy are filled with deep appreciation of the tradition that spans between Aristotle and Descartes.

But this is not simply to argue that we should pay attention to this tradition because the heroes of Continental philosophy did. Rather, there is a deeper lesson to be learned from MacKendrick’s work. The very discussion of having gone beyond, of having surpassed, may be nothing more than a symptom of an incredibly deep suppression, if not repression. That is, what if our contemporary forgetfulness of these difficult texts and authors forgets, to borrow from MacKendrick’s *Fragmentation and Memory*, its own forgetfulness?¹ In this way, the forgetfulness of this aspect of our tradition risks a repetition of its worst aspect, risks a repetition of a disaster. In other words, MacKendrick’s work challenges us to think about what we lose by passing over

¹ Karmen MacKendrick, *Fragmentation and Memory: Meditations on Christian Doctrine* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

the Middle Ages in silence and what we take up, silently, from the Middle Ages because we have passed over.

The issue in *Fragmentation and Memory* is the question of the relation between unity or wholeness and difference or fragmentation. The argument could be put quite generally and abstractly: wherever there is a drive for unity or wholeness, there fragmentation will always and necessarily be found. More specifically, MacKendrick argues that it is fragmentation that is, in fact, primary and that the obsession one finds with unity and wholeness is, in fact, derivative of this primary fragmentation. The key to this is memory. In a sense, memory as always fragmented remembers this primary fragmentation: “Multiplicity and singularity are mutually implicated both for Plato and for his Neoplatonic interpreters, and the ‘truth’ of memory always ‘only’ remembered—and thus always primarily forgotten, because to remember ... must be to recall after an absence, however brief” (26).

MacKendrick then takes this question of memory and fragmentation or the memory of fragmentation through some of the central aspects of Catholic doctrine—taking the *Baltimore Catechism* as her clue. The first stop on this tour is the doctrine of original sin. MacKendrick argues that original sin presents a forgetting that is at the same time a fragmentation, a cutting off. It brings to the fore a splitting of the self and a splitting of the will. We are tempted to step in quickly and say that this is, precisely, the problem with the overly Christianized West, namely, that it has always insisted that being human as such, particularly being an embodied human, means always already to be fallen. MacKendrick, however, is a bit more patient at this moment. There are two moments in the story of original sin. The first moment is the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In this moment, desire is the main issue, a desire to have the knowledge that belongs only to the divine. However, if Adam and Eve have this desire, it must point to a loss or lack that belongs to them as such. If the serpent could seduce them into eating the fruit, it could do so only because Eve and Adam must have a “memory” of something that they do not currently possess. They are, in fact, seduced not by evil but by the divine itself: “As human ... we are constituted precisely by our limits. Yet we have, when we listen for it, a paradoxical desire to exceed those limits, thus a push toward our own fearfully redemptive destruction” (50). This moment, then, not only is decidedly not about the containment and repudiation of desire but is precisely about the desire that is always already quickened by the divine. The original sin is, MacKendrick argues, the result of a seduction *by God*.

The moment in which the story might turn toward a regulation of desire and pleasure is only subsequent to this initial moment of seduction. As a result of the sin, Eve and Adam come to recognize their own limitation, their own flesh, as the source of disease-like condition. When the result of the fall is this shame in one’s own flesh, the story comes to be read as an attempt to regulate the desires of the flesh. The limitations of flesh are the result not of being human as such but of being sinful. The reading of original sin, the reading that we tend to rest assured that we have surpassed, is a reading in which our desires of the flesh are turned away from what it means to be

fully human and become a sign only of sinfulness. The result is one we all know too well: in order to be restored to the fullness of humanity, we need to turn away from our flesh and toward our nonembodied spirits.

On MacKendrick's account, "Original sin is a fragmentation caught up in a distraction both of and from desire" (38). This fragmentation, however, is a split of "God" and "I," and in this sense original sin gives me myself. This has a dual result. On the one hand, the move toward this fragmentation was a move toward and in desire. It is because I desire that I split "myself" off from the divine. I desire to enjoy, to take delight in, my own will. On the other hand, this fragmentation opens up a kind of desire, now human and finite, that is satiable, and thus the pleasure is diminished. As a result, the traditional doctrine of original sin is, in MacKendrick's hands, entirely about pleasure. It takes place in pleasure, it opens up new pleasures, and it makes possible another kind of joy in pleasure, "something even more astonishing than pure infinity, into infinite and finite at once" (39).

The point is not that this is an extremely interesting reading of the doctrine of original sin, though it certainly is that. MacKendrick opens up the possibility that in our rush to criticize Christian/Catholic doctrine, in our rush to move beyond the damage that the Christianization of the West has done, we just might risk losing something crucial, and therefore we might actually repeat the worst aspects of that which we criticize. In order to show this, let me take a step back from MacKendrick's analysis to the methodological level.

Fragmentation and Memory operates with what I would call an archaeological/deconstructive method. The method is deconstructive, it seems to me, in that it reads texts and doctrines against themselves. Or perhaps more precisely, it takes up a doctrine like original sin and shows that the conditions for its possibility necessarily include the conditions for its impossibility. We could say that one thing MacKendrick shows is that original sin is something that is passed on to all humans, and yet, as she shows, it must "occur" prior to the constitution of the human as such. As she shows, the sin in question is precisely what makes an origin at all. In this way, there is no prior to original sin. Its original character is that it makes the origin. In this way, original sin cannot be a sin of a human because "original sin is the split into finitude, the split of the ante-original 'God' and T'" (38). A similar deconstructive move can be seen in her taking up of other doctrines such as penance, love, the veneration of saints, and ultimately redemption.

Yet this deconstruction is not alone a sufficient description of the method at work because, I would argue, it fails to rise to the level of the basic "So what?" question. In *Counterpleasures*, MacKendrick outlines a strategy that I believe she is continuing to pursue in *Fragmentation and Memory*. "I would situate this work into a trio of contexts: the tradition of theoretical (and often practical) disruption-by-pleasure, by which I would trace its sources and influences; the tradition of opposition to precisely these disruptions, by which I would enter into the predominant discourse; and the context of various historical periods, by which I would suggest something of the modes

of disruption-by-pleasure.”² In a sense, these are not three contexts but, rather, three steps in an overall strategy, the strategy called disruption-by-pleasure. As MacKendrick argues in this text, it is never sufficient to oppose dominant models of the control of pleasure through counterpleasures precisely because that countermove may already belong to the domain of control. For this reason, the disruption of the predominant discourses requires an investigation into those very discourses themselves. The final step is thus required, namely, to uncover the historical sites of the control of pleasure and, in MacKendrick’s view, show how they construct an inside and outside on the basis of the outside itself. This last step has to do with the dangers of normalization: “To normalize, which is part of what it means to take any marginal element into the mainstream, is to render safe and harmless, and *that* is to render these pleasures null, because they are pleasures *dependent upon* transgression.”³

I take it that this notion of a pleasure dependent upon transgression is what MacKendrick refers to throughout her works as “perversion.” In fact, in many ways one could say that the issue of perversion is one of the central themes of MacKendrick’s work. We have here an outline of an argument about why an investigation into Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, or Aquinas or an inquiry into original sin, the sacrament of penance, or saints’ relics is not only interesting but crucial for the strategy of counterpleasures.

As we saw in the discussion of original sin, MacKendrick shows that what is at stake in this doctrine is a question of memory: “But I do want to suggest that a kind of memory, awakened in desire and joy, might also be read as the almost-memory of that ante-origin... More exactly, because to ‘remember’ that state is to remember before the origin of selfhood, in the forgetting of self is the memory that returns us before ourselves” (38). The possibility of being returned before ourselves opens, as we saw, the possibility of a joy that is infinite and finite at once. This would be a joy, however, that would therefore *require* the fall. As MacKendrick argues, “There is as well a redemption of fragmentation: the first fragmentation (provoking separation from the divine) is mended (but not rendered whole) by another fragmentation (rendering the self lost in its openness to divinity); we redeem time in forgetting ourselves, and we forget ourselves only when we are not wholly contained, not self-contained and whole, within the boundaries of our skins and our egos” (40).

How is it possible for us to, as it were, break out of the boundaries of our skins and our egos? The way out is precisely through desire and pleasure/joy: “One does not desire this divinity, this God, as one desires a thing; rather, one and thing make no more sense here, and desire defies the poles of subject and object” (41). Yet the very pleasure MacKendrick raises here depends, as we have seen, on the separation of the poles at or as the origin. So there is a certain pleasure that remains after the fall, a pleasure brought about by the fall. And what else can we call such a pleasure but perverse?

² Karmen MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

One might argue here that perhaps such a pleasure might be pursued independent of the entire foray into the disaster that is the Church's doctrine of original sin. That is, although MacKendrick points to the ways in which that doctrine is intimately connected with its own, internal, counterpleasure, perhaps we could get to pleasure more immediately by simply saying, like Bartleby, "I prefer not." The difficulty here is twofold, and that might be precisely why what I have called the archaeological/deconstructive method has the three moments or contexts it does. If we assume that the doctrine of original sin in the hands of the Christian tradition works toward the taming and control of desire/pleasure, we should also understand that perhaps every practice of counterpleasure is already enframed within that practical/discursive strategy. If, as MacKendrick argues in *Counterpleasures*, opposition is precisely the wrong way to counter the predominant discourses that control pleasure, then the most crucial step to take is the investigation into those discourses. What that investigation shows, however, is that the doctrine of original sin, to take just one example, is itself already involved in practices of pleasure and requires those practices. The question of countering, then, turns out to be the question of turning away from the closure of that discourse, of opening that discourse onto itself, so that the pleasure that it promises can be released.

A similar strategy is pursued in MacKendrick's reading of Augustine. She argues that "Augustine seeks dominance by inwardly demonstrating it over and upon himself. But inward domination is not enough: he must still be mastered by another."⁴ MacKendrick goes on to argue that this move toward obedience puts it in a "troubling and open space."⁵ The culmination of the argument is that "if disobedience could disappear into its own perfection, becoming at once unnecessary and impossible, then we would need, and we would desire, neither breaking nor restraint: we would have not desire at all." With this, I am in total agreement. But then what I find interesting in a way that is not a lie is the next move: "But in the disappearance of (dis)obedience there would be as well the double disappearance of the flesh in which obedience is possible and the word by which it is commanded."⁶

Here again, MacKendrick shows not only that it is interesting to read Augustine but that if we fail to do so, we might fail to discover something crucial about desire and pleasure. What interests me, however, what really interests me and why I keep reading medieval texts and MacKendrick's work, is whether this fundamental linking of desire and lack is essential or whether, in the end, it is a discursive move that can only end in the surveillance and control of pleasure by means of desire. I am truly interested in the role of the notion of perversion through MacKendrick's work, and so when I say that I find her work very interesting, it is no lie. In truth, I find the relation of desire to lack, of desire to pleasure, and of pleasure to perversion troubling and, therefore, very interesting indeed.

⁴ Virginia Burrus, Mark Jordan, and Karmen MacKendrick, *Seducing Augustine: Bodies, Desires, Confessions*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 75.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

Mending: The Hard Work of Repair in a Broken World

Patricia Huntington

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Karmen MacKendrick makes Christian dogma accountable to those aspects of human life it too often obscured or evaded: the fundamental realities of time, embodiment, fleshiness, desire, seduction, pleasure, resurrection, and language. Throughout her engagement with the Christian religious heritage, she brings the struggles of life into philosophy so that we cannot, however unwittingly, sidestep the fragile original vocation of both philosophy and theology, to teach us how to forgive, to desire, to mend, and to heal.

In what follows, I focus on *Fragmentation and Memory*, both because of its remarkable accomplishment and because of its thematic focus.¹ I take MacKendrick's achievement as a necessary starting point when I amplify the disconsolations of philosophy and theology after Auschwitz and when I ponder the impossibilities rather than, as she does, the possibilities of redemption. So I call upon the reader to inhabit the creative tension between laudatory and challenging concern.

In the Beginning Is Trouble

Fragmentation and Memory troubles ontology. A book of manifold virtues, it advances a remarkable attempt to break out of a dualistic, ontological view of wholes and fragments. MacKendrick thus displaces the questionable image of their being an origin of sin outside time and space and instead addresses sin as distractedness from

¹ Karmen MacKendrick, *Fragmentation and Memory: Meditations on Christian Doctrine* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number. My comments focus on *Fragmentation and Memory*, although Karmen MacKendrick's earlier work, *Immemorial Silence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), addresses related themes. For the sake of brevity, I omit comments on "‘giving style’ to one's character" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage Books, 1974], sec. 290, p. 232). That MacKendrick holds to her style also presents a reminder that cultivation of voice and adopting a position, while intertwined, are not synonymous.

the blessedness we can find in the manner of our living (34, 37–40).² Three issues intertwine here.

First, there is trouble. Origin is not prior to time. The logically prior dimensions of creation defy spatially chronological expression as if there were a “time-space” before “time-space.”³

Second comes more trouble. Origination is bound up with memory or recollection; but memory, itself selective and fragmented, does not recall us to an origin that is whole.⁴ “We have undervalued the broken,” MacKendrick says (12). In recalling us to the ontological point of our own origination, memory or *anamnesis* gathers, she suspects, “not the broken bits of a prior whole but an always-prior brokenness” (28).

Third, when we add up trouble with trouble, we discover the maivels too long lost in the neo-Platonic heritage. As MacKendrick shows, and I have long believed, we can give up a two-world doctrine by seeing that memory calls us to a shift in perspective (23,41). Instead of thinking that eternity lies prior to creation and, by implication, subsists after one departs creation, in an alternate static, “antimaterial,” “antisomatic” reality, MacKendrick rightly emphasizes that the key issue is *how to undergo a shift in perspective* from one that views eternity as unchanging and outside time to one that apprehends the eternal as “the intensification or enfolding of... intelligibility ... in Lime” (23–24).

Memory, Sin, Redemption

MacKendrick has learned a few secrets not only from the Christian mystical heritage but from Judaism. Yom Kippur teaches that something precedes creation; this is no simple *Bereishit*, no mere creation myth, but a midrash that undoes desires for pretemporal stasis and postlife changelessness. However much Judaic philosophy may have partaken historically of Greek metaphysical notions, its power and impetus lay in the fact that it is antiliteral from the ground up, not bogged down by the need for certainty, and centered on human life. What, then, lies in the “ante” dimensions, the womb of creative origination? MacKendrick, following Elliot Wolfson, gets it right: Judaically understood, “divine forgiveness ... is fore-given” (57).⁵

² See chap. 1 of *Fragmentation and Memory* for a discussion of the nondual reading of fragmentation and recollection or wholes and parts.

³ An excursus into neo-Platonic thought as well as receiving influence from Judaic thought lead MacKendrick here.

⁴ Precedents for this notion can be found throughout the Christian mystical heritage.

⁵ MacKendrick draws on Elliot R. Wolfson’s *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and his “Fore-giveness/on the Way: Nesting in the Womb of Response,” *Graven Images: Studies in Culture, Law, and the Sacred* 4 (1988): 153–69. Elliot R. Wolfson’s *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) is a tour de force and of interest in this context. As Abraham Joshua Heschel reminded us, the Sabbath is the time out of time, not time past, not a spatialized elsewhere,

In this Judaic-inflected, Christian vein, MacKendrick argues that original sin is, following Eckhart, a “breaking away” not from a wholeness to a fragmented existence but instead from “attention and desire” for the infinite (35–36). She calls original sin not a willful action but a “distraction” (37).⁶ And she argues that memory of the prelapsarian state “is the return to that state” (38).⁷ We “remember before the origin of selfhood” by forgetting the “self” and in this manner find our possibility restored (38).

I stand in wholehearted concert with MacKendrick when she says, in Eckhartian vein, that “memory does not recreate a past but perspectively shifts and amplifies a now” (41). Turning attention back “redeems” us in that it mends our separation from divinity and restores us to living within a sense of blessedness (41–42). And yet, she pliantly reminds us, “I do not get back lost parts of myself, but return to an atemporally precedent joy” (45). This return does not render us “whole,” even as we are mended, but, rather, releases us for another kind of fragmentation, namely, openness to divinity, to the future, or to ongoing change (40).

And Then I Became Troubled

But now I find myself catapulted into a profound tension between the affinity I hold with MacKendrick’s rearticulation of the nature of “the one and the many” and my distress over how to think redemption in the aftermath of catastrophe or Shoah. Although MacKendrick is not a theorist of Holocaust or trauma studies, there is a special need for Christian philosophy to become post-Holocaust. To her credit, MacKendrick courageously includes trauma when she ventures into the territory of forgiveness and redemption. Yet I cannot follow her when she postulates a parallelism between the movement from atonement to redemption and that from trauma to repair.

Trauma is painstakingly real, and the time of trauma, MacKendrick argues, is “an amplified moment: an endless present” (74). Here we agree. MacKendrick understands that trauma is not original sin.⁸ Nor, as MacKendrick reminds us, is trauma the same as

but the here and now; see his *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (1951; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005). One finds some parallels to the notion of the womb in Buddhist thought (not to mention Daoism). See Rita M. Gross on *tathagatagarbha* in *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 186–89.

⁶ Julian of Norwich’s view of sin pertains to this topic. See *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, trans. with an intro. by Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and James Walsh, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), especially chaps. 38–40. Carol Lee Flinder’s commentary is provocative; see her *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 89–92.

⁷ The notion of “state” does not serve MacKendrick, as it stands at odds with the general force of her thought.

⁸ The notion of natality, viz., that we are welcomed into life, is key to feminist theology. See especially Grace M. Jantzen, who dedicated her life work to effectuating a shift away from death and violence to natality and welcome: see her *Becoming Divine: Toward a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*

banal evil. It is not a convenient and self-serving forgetting that makes a person “close in on himself” and become incapable of responding to another person’s pain (72). In the banality of evil, she argues, a person actively condemns herself to eternal damnation. One elects a perpetual closing off of memory that preserves one’s sense of self from the temporal dynamics of guilt and forgiveness, of being called to remember one’s misdeeds in dialogue with others, and of having to enter the retelling that avails us of possible redemption (70–73). Such repetition of the same, she shows, is eternal damnation or one version of an endless present. Thus, the banal evildoer needs to renounce *her refusal* to enter into an intensive relation to time so that her consciousness might shatter upon her evildoing, induce horror, awaken shame or guilt, or deliver her, by catalyzing deep remembrance, to the antetime of creation where she could atone and avail herself of an open future.

Counterpoised against the distracted folding in upon the self that marks sin, MacKendrick knows that trauma fractures one’s inhabitation of time not by distraction but because trauma is, by its very nature, an experience that has never been fully undergone and which cannot, thus, be remembered without holes and gaps. This is what it means, as Cathy Caruth shows, that trauma is *unclaimed experience*.⁹ Yet, while observing this vital difference between sinfulness and trauma, MacKendrick nevertheless “likens trauma to the banality of evil.” And she draws, at the level of redemption, a parallel movement: “The damned, living in the Lime of trauma, have damned themselves in refusing to forgive or to speak with; they are both those who must forgive what they hate and those who, by that act, could become the forgiven; they are evil and traumatized at once. They refuse the double openness of time and word” (78). This, I suggest, is a Christianity that, while offering a laudable deconstruction of past metaphysics, nevertheless has not become post-Holocaust. MacKendrick claims that for healing one needs a listener. There may be listening here. And yet, we need to listen more intently; our listening needs to become more troubled.

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 135–36, 144–55; *Foundations of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 36–43; and *Violence to Eternity*, ed. Jeremy Carrette and Morny Joy (New York: Routledge, 2009), chaps. 1–2. While sympathetic to this shift, I nonetheless emphasize the need to address unwelcomed or traumatic birth. Not all are welcomed into the web of life, for some arrive fractured, wounded, broken, and unwelcome. Not all, having once been welcomed, remain so. See my 2010 “Redemptive Suffering and Forgiveness: Traumatic Mother-Daughter Relations” (presented to the Gender Panel of the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture Conference, University of Oxford, Oxford, 2010).

⁹ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). Caruth’s book addresses trauma broadly in terms that are not restricted to Holocaust studies. While I draw heavily on her book in depicting the nature of trauma and do not cite most of the central figures in Holocaust and memory studies, I nevertheless have Shoah foremost in mind in relation to philosophy of religion. Among these central figures are Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, Lawrence Langer, Yael Feldman, Berel Lang, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, Helen Epstein, Saul Freidlander, Yael Danieli, Sasha Etkind, and others.

Listening with Trouble; Troubled Listening

While each—trauma and sin—marks a loss of intense inherence in time, all seeming parallelism breaks down when we explore the nature of traumatic suffering and the dynamics of repair.¹⁰ Breach and distraction are not necessarily the same. Yet, above all, *trauma is no simple refusal; and repair, no simple return to the living*. No plain refusal to speak, to be restored to time or delivered to an open future, shapes the heart of trauma. Even the trauma of a single loss, where mourning and grief reign, operates at a level below will. One does not refuse the blessedness of life but, rather, is deprived of it. We miss the inward psychic dynamics of healing when we anchor the dilemma in a refusal of forgiveness and pin the failure of forgiveness to refusal.¹¹ In speaking of violent trauma, whether effectuated by unexpected loss or by catastrophic events like Shoah, *the notion of refusal cannot capture the heart of the matter*.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, it was possible to speak all about the facts, to sort out what occurred, to record the chronology and “crucial Holocaust-related events” of history, concerning who did what and when.¹² Still, silence reigned in “this gulf between Auschwitz and the world,” in “the silence of the beholder” and in “the silence of God.”¹³ There is no dichotomy between the speaking that arose in the aftermath of Shoah and the “outcry of mute things.”¹⁴ The trauma of Shoah erected a wall of silence, held trauma in an “iron box” or a “crypt.”¹⁵ Silence names a dimension

¹⁰ Not to mention the demands that trauma places on representation or the theological challenges it presents. On issues of representation, see Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹¹ There may be traumatized subjects who hate enemies and blame others. Yet trauma lies beneath hatred. Even were a person to resolve the hatred, the trauma would remain or arise. Mending trauma does not occur through a simple, first-order atonement. There are intensities of self-transformation that such a model of redemption cannot address and which place dialectical burdens upon us as theorists, never to absolutize a single moment of radical change but to acknowledge the subtleties of what Kierkegaard called the dialectic of inwardness.

¹² For a fine overview of the chronological events as well as the discussions of silence, see John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications* (1989; St. Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, 2009), esp. “Prologue” (xiii-xxxvi), “Part One: ‘What If the Holocaust Is Unique?’” (1–8), “The Silence of Auschwitz” excerpted from André Neher’s *The Exile of the Word* (9–13), “Part Three” (259–67), and “Selections from Night” by Elie Weisel (268–76).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10, quoting Neher, *Exile of the Word*.

¹⁴ I borrow, and displace the context of, this phrase from Hans Jonas’s *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good After Auschwitz*, ed. with an intro, by Lawrence Vogel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

¹⁵ The transmission of trauma is now known to affect second-generation survivors not only of victims but also of perpetrators, albeit with differing ethical responsibilities. “Iron box” is a metaphor used by Helen Epstein in *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of the Holocaust* (New York: Penguin, 1988); while Gabriele Schwab speaks of the crypt, following Derrida, in relation to children of both survivors and perpetrators in *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 45, 49, 59ff, *passim*. See also

of trauma that is polyvalent and which has many reasons for its absent presencing, its mute cry.

MacKendrick is right that trauma requires a listening because the actual experience of trauma arises only in the telling. She sensitively captures the role of the “first,” namely, that we could not begin anew if there were no antememory, antecreation within our embodied and temporal existence. Trauma needs a listener in order that the story can come into existence for the first time. Here there is something of the peculiar memory of an ante-me, as traumatized subject, who must return to the pit of terror, the secrets unknown and hidden in the silence that haunts and will not release. The first comes into existence in time only after trauma occurred in history. I grant this.

Yet several discoveries in the telling of trauma prove vital. First, there is no “event” that one can remember in simple representational terms. What lies hidden in the ghastly box has no final face and does not rest upon empirical facts. What precisely is the traumatized person to speak? Even where willing, how does the survivor go into the horror of unclaimed experience and find that which is to be spoken? Even if willing, how does the second-generation survivor find the “truth” at the heart of inherited transmission that will ostensibly free him? There is no liberating empirical truth to be found in the crypt of trauma, even though part of the haunting manifests as wanting to know the facts. Healing won’t occur because the truth of one’s experience will be found, because one uncovers a horrific fact of what was done to one’s mother or that one’s father did a dastardly deed. No stable certainty, no missing historiographical link, will jump-start time again in the deep crypt of memory.

Primo Levi taught us that Shoah needs a listener. But who would have believed it? Not condemned it? Not misunderstood?¹⁶

The dialogical problem cannot be located in *a willful refusal or even a mundane distractedness of the victims* of historical catastrophe because trauma, second, pertains to “survival” and not simply to loss.¹⁷ Thus, to locate the trauma merely in remembering or forgetting the events of the past does not capture *the crisis of trauma*. This crisis is not a simple crisis of refusal to forgive or to overcome hatred. Trauma must, Caruth argues and Primo Levi shows, be located in *living in the impossibility of living*, in the

Allan L. Berger and Naomi Berger, ed., *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Katie Geneva Cannon’s work in black womanist theology is instructive here; see her *Katie’s Canon* (New York: Continuum, 1998). The oral tradition of African American, Christian wisdom instructs women to survive, seemingly in the face of the highest ideals of Christianity, which counsel, contrariwise, to die for the truth. Legacies of genocide teach that survival, that seemingly base aim, can prove to be a spiritual virtue under conditions of threat to life. Yet who can hear these lessons from the underside of history? Or to return to Shoah, is survival not proof that Jews are weak or themselves perpetrators of the banality of evil? Primo Levi cannot speak, though he speaks, because there simply are no moral categories to account for survival in Auschwitz.

¹⁷ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 60.

fact that one now lives *in an afterlife* but without joyous consolation—without, that is, redemption.

The psyche permits survival because it screens off, closes one off to, the sudden intrusion of catastrophic violence. And yet, the trauma does not reside precisely in horror over events past but, rather, in the enigma of survival proper:¹⁸ “Trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in *having survived, precisely, without knowing it.*”¹⁹ What proves incomprehensible is one’s own survival not one’s potential annihilation. What returns is not the missing violence of sudden separation but “the endless survival of what has not been understood.”²⁰ Third, trauma is anchored in *latency*, not merely because experience is unclaimed but also because one survives on *the ashes of other lives.*²¹

When Caruth speaks of trauma outside the context of Shoah by invoking a father’s loss of child, she shows us that *awakening*, and not loss per se, is the crisis. In awakening, the father is taken back to the beginning of his own consciousness, with its gaping holes and latent awareness, and in this awakening the father discovers anew what he already sensed in haunted dreams: that he was too late. The past cannot be undone.²² The “truth” that needed to be found in trauma was latent in his psyche, and this truth must now settle into its hard shape: He can never make sense of the accident that tore his child from life, for he was never and can never be a direct witness to her death. He was already too late.²³ To listen to first-person testimony, we need a slap in the face to shock us out of imagining that we can “see” what happened and to destroy in us the desire to connect catastrophe to a figurative, bodily, fleshy representation—a premature resurrection—and thereby miss the hearing.

The father gets the child back but not by knowing her death. He gets the child back as what he did not hear, the cry of mute things, the cry that he missed, the “impossibility of adequately responding to the child’s plea” to be saved from death. He gets back the undigested recognition that he did not see potential death in the child’s plea. He gains the “real established around an inherent impossibility,” a possibility that is not epistemological and not representational but, rather, ethical.²⁴ The realization to which any survivor of traumatic loss must come is that her survival is linked to the death of another. One does not come to know trauma as a representable event but, rather, as a revelatory awakening that unveils how the histories of two are intercon-

¹⁸ Ibid., 62.

¹⁹ Ibid., 64.

²⁰ Ibid., 72.

²¹ Caruth draws on Freud’s notion of latency (ibid., 16–18, 70–72).

²² If there is atonement, if redemption means anything at all, T. S. Eliot, whom MacKendrick likes to quote, teaches that it cannot play sleight of hand and act as if the past can be undone. See T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (1943; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971). Cf. Roth and Berenbaum: “Events do not undo themselves” (Holocaust, xiv).

²³ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, too.

²⁴ Ibid., 103.

nected and how survival consists in never knowing precisely the death of the other?²⁵ There is a shift in perspective here. But is this atonement?

Responsibility and Responsiveness

Al issue in survival of trauma is not precisely atonement. If a traumatized person grapples with hate, this element threatens to distract attention from the heart of the matter and may itself be a psychic deflection rather than, like sin, *a chosen distraction from the blessedness of life*. In Caruth's example, the father does not atone when he awakens but, instead, receives responsibility for that *of which he is NOT guilty*. He accepts the child's unspoken plea, hears it in the dark silence of loss. The child's wounded cry can only be known in the father's telling, in how the father tells, in what is told, in his tonality, in his sobriety; it can only have its afterlife rather than its stifled life through another, but even the quality of its afterlife depends upon the newfound understanding born of listening, in the father's awakening to his impossible and guileless failure to witness the child's death as it was occurring?²⁶

There is no movement of atonement in traumatic awakening that opens the heart to futural hope and possibility. One comes to terms with the impossibility of ever witnessing the death of the child. The father's survival is not possessable; it is not simply his own but linked to the death of the child?²⁷ The psyche is restored not by atonement but by finding its dispossession through its inextricable link to the suffering of another; it is not restored by discovering empirical unknowns that could ostensibly be claimed into experience. Unclaimed experience gives way to the necessary indirectness of representation and telling, not to atonement but to *ethical responsiveness*: not guilty but responsible. This, although brought forward here through the example of an individual case of sudden loss, remains a core lesson of catastrophe and its transmissions. Healing arises in the fortification of the capacity for responsiveness, precisely what is lacking in us.

The other side to this question concerning trauma and catastrophe is this: Have we heard? Not have we atoned, but have we awakened, grown urgent, assumed responsibility for crimes we did not commit? Have we found that we are implicated, we know neither how nor why, but sense that we run too quickly to atonement, which, ironically, functions as our cover to screen off memory. However hard atonement comes in life, it can also be an impediment, bogging us down existentially and conceptually by failing to reframe Christian theology in post-Holocaust terms. Can the story be told if we cannot listen?

I have spent much of my life believing that redemptive suffering could only mean this: that we are required as human persons to be leveled down in our suffering, to

²⁵ I extrapolate from the father's story, which is "no longer simply his own" (ibid., 102; cf. 8).

²⁶ Ibid., 100.

²⁷ Ibid., 102.

discover, in effect, that every suffering lies beyond compare. And yet, to hold this lesson in humble dispossession stands in a necessary tension with the realities of social degradation, namely, that we must also remember that not every suffering is the same. The claim to uniqueness in Shoah lies in some singular loss of trust in human solidarity, in whether mute cries can be heard, perhaps even specifically in loss of trust in Christians. I have been convinced that there is a connection between not suppressing the singularity of one's own suffering and allowing suffering to awaken ethical sensitivity to others. But I am changing how I understand this linkage because the Judaic tradition captures most precisely the inextricable connectedness of sufferings. "Being leveled down in one's suffering" may not, then, be the right phrase to capture the realization that one's living comes at the price of others. And though awakening can effectuate a perspectival shift, we must still ask. To what do we awaken? That noumenal dimension of antes and posts where "all will be well" and "all will be well"? Or the gray zones of human devastation where we learn *actively* to live with the impossibility of living upon the ashes of others?

A Contemplative Beginning

Before Shoah, we knew that *Bereishiti* the antechamber of our ongoing creation and re-creation, exists as a transtemporal dimension of human life. But after Shoah, we question whether we are born wounded. We awaken to the task to listen not simply to what is spoken but to the unspoken and mute, not to what happened but to our own impossibility to bear witness to what happened. We awaken to a claim, a cry out of the full woundedness of everything we once took for granted concerning the blessedness that sustains us in ongoing re-creation?²⁸

If we hear in testimony what is and cannot be told, then we might enter the crisis of trauma from the other side. We might not "see" what we missed but "hear" that the cry has taken over the antecreation of tender mercy, the hope for humanity's future, the whys of understanding and the wherewithal of heart. There is no parallel movement from sin to redemption to be found in the troubled undergoing of catastrophic breach in search of historical recovery. Shoah can and must shatter us if there is ever going to be another way forward, a way to repair the breach of trust in human solidarity. There will be hard work in this dark night, a night that is neither simply evil nor simply banal but lies beyond and outside both, whose showings will take great courage and whose gifts will come unpredicted.

To enter the crypt of Shoah is no easy task. For we must listen to the dead who carry the divine cry. And however much we fear doing so, it will be the case that Shoah

²⁸ I refer the reader to Eliezer Berkovits's midrash "In the Beginning Was the Cry: A Midrash for Our Times" (in Roth and Berenbaum, *Holocaust*, 298–301), where he suggests that God cannot save souls who no longer believe in life but must wait upon humankind to save God from sorrow in the antewomb of creation.

will connect us to other secrets too long kept in the crypt of national identity, the other blood our memory eclipses, the red rivers we still find barely audible—the mute cry of things.²⁹

²⁹ In *Haunting Legacies*, Schwab shows that key historical events, like the Vietnam War, can become cover memories that enable us to evade our histories of genocide and colonization. She argues for a methodology that connects, in uncovering screened-off trauma, memories of global trauma.

Carnal Eternity

Richard Kearney
BOSTON COLLEGE

I

Let me begin with Karmen MacKendrick on eternal flesh. Already in the opening chapter of *Fragmentation and Memory* (2008) entitled “The One and the Many,” MacKendrick makes a strong case for what she calls the “decidedly corporeal foundations” of Christianity.¹ Over and against the Gnostic strains that came to dominate so much of the mainstream Christian tradition, MacKendrick reminds us that there is an “eternity to corporeality” if we read the corporeal “not as dead matter but as flesh already in complex relation with the word” (23). This is the basic hypothesis that underlies what I would call her “carnal hermeneutics of Christianity” throughout the rest of the book.²

One of MacKendrick’s most audacious insights, in my view, is the idea of a radical opening up of ourselves through flesh. But careful—not just any flesh but the flesh of bodies broken open by something (or some time) bigger than ourselves. In this carnal rupturing there is a twisting and disrupting of linear time, exposing us to “another time” outside yet within time: what she terms the eternity of the flesh. This leads directly and logically to what I consider to be one of MacKendrick’s most important notions: the eternal time of resurrection as repetition and return—what we might call *ana-time*, that is, a time *after* time that comes *hack* to the beginning before time, but time nonetheless. (The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of *ana* is a movement “back, up, again, anew, in space or time.”)³

The promise of the resurrected body is a reminder that corporeal afterlife is in fact *ana-life*. It is more-life, again-life: the after returning back to this life anew, but this time at another degree of intensity and depth. This is a time of ceaseless birthing, again and again, re-natally. Otherwise put, the time of *ana-theism* is the overabundance of life *in* this life, just as the invisible is *in* the visible (Merleau-Ponty) or the infinite is *in* the finite (Levinas). MacKendrick would add, no doubt, as the incorporeal (spirit) is *in*

¹ Karmen MacKendrick, *Fragmentation and Memory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 22; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

² See my discussion of carnal hermeneutics in “What Is Diacritical Hermeneutics?” *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1–14.

³ See my discussion of *ana* in *Anatheism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

the corporeal (body)—which is another way of saying incarnation: word *in* flesh. So we are talking here about an eternal surplus within temporal passing that refuses to pass away but keeps bubbling up again and again like Eckhart's *ebulutio* or Hildegarde de Bingen's irrepressible *veriditas*. MacKendrick does not cite the latter mystic (a feminist sister soul avant la lettre), but she does cite Lou Andreas-Salomé to good effect: "The afterlife [*survivance*] no longer means death and the return of the specter, but the surviving of an excess of life which resists annihilation" (112).

This is no reductive materialism (eliminative or positivist). It is, rather, a mysticism of matter that inscribes itself in a long Christian countertradition stretching from Gregory of Nyssa through the medieval mystics to Teilhard de Chardin. At the beginning of *Fragmentation and Memory*, MacKendrick approvingly invokes Nyssa's claim that because the immaterial soul is already incarnate in all the multiple atoms of our bodies, bodily resurrection is an extension of this Word-in-Flesh phenomenon. "There is," writes Gregory, "nothing to hinder the soul's presence in the body's atoms, whether fused in union or decomposed in dissolution" (114). When Christ says, accordingly, that he comes to bring life and to bring it "more abundantly" this hyperabundance—promised to all people and things, to all fragments of the universe no matter how multilocalized and spread out—he does not mean eternal life "after" death but eternal life in this life: a life so transfigured by vital intensification that it defies the finality and annihilation of death. See, for example, the Song of Songs claim that "love is as strong as death" or the sacramental belief that Christ's host-body is available in the multiple hosts of multiple altars throughout the world. The notion of one-as-many (the title of MacKendrick's opening reflection) is powerfully celebrated by Gerard Manley Hopkins in the final verse of "When Kingfishers catch fire":

Christ plays in ten thousand places
Lovely in eyes and lovely in limbs not his
to the father through the features of men's faces.

In this light, MacKendrick offers powerful and persuasive evocations of "how the infinite and eternal are present/absent in the absent presence of living flesh" (115).

2

In chapter 6, entitled "Eternal Flesh: The Resurrection of the Body," MacKendrick devotes much time to this conundrum. Her basic thesis here is that human corporeality is something immortal. (The critical question of whether this applies to every human body or to "some" kinds more than others—for example, bodies of love rather than of hate, of life rather than of dearth—is something I will return to.) MacKendrick sets out to demonstrate how a certain fragmenting of time can give eternity to life. She wants to explore ways in which our bodies may live eternity even as we live through time—and

by extension, through motion, matter, and desire. Her notion of the carnality of lived eternity is, in my view, as intriguing as it is complex. MacKendrick is not coming to this straight, as if she were the first to think of it. Nor is she invoking some kind of New Age mysticism (a mix of Swedenborg and Aurobindo, for example, though she could well have enlisted both in her cause). MacKendrick deploys instead a singular poetic phenomenology of carnal eternity lived in and through time, a phenomenology that she supplements with liberal appeals to contemporary Continental thought (Derrida, Blanchot, Deleuze, Nancy) alongside citations of classic church doctrines (Nicene Creed, Council of Trent, *Baltimore Catechism*) and stalwart theologians (Augustine, Nyssa, Eckhart). She knows her stuff and has no compunction mixing traditional and postmodern idioms. In this she is daring and original. Both her argument and her style have a unique character, a way of turning a phrase, honing a subclause, sounding a caution, pitching a hypothesis, raising a rhetorical eyebrow, that is inimitable. They evoke a sort of exquisite empathy with the texts she discusses as well as with the flesh they spring from. The chiasm between wording and fleshing is omnipresent and perhaps never more so than in this chapter. One can only respond, if one attends to what she is saying, with what she aptly terms, in another text, a “hospitality of listening.”⁴ But more on this question of auditory attention below.

Let me stay, for now, with the time of the flesh. The following is a key, and in my view pivotal, passage in which MacKendrick announces her basic distinction between the metaphysical notion of eternity as a time that *endures* and her own sacramental notion of time that *intensifies*. Speaking of the “corporeality of lived eternity,” she writes:

I want to emphasize the recurrent, breaking, or suspended times of the body, in which we may recognize the capacity of the body to be (as those early monists insisted) more than mere matter, yet wholly material; to be, as flesh, more than linear and brief in temporal occupation. Looking at both function and sensation in the living body, we find more than a time that endures: we find a time cut through and transformed by an eternity we can evoke, if not understand, in memory. What I would like to do here, to phrase it differently, is to take the “eternal” of eternal life seriously, take it as a noontime that already cuts through our time, or within which our temporality is already enfolded; the outside edge of time that we touch, barely, where staying is impossible. I want to suggest that eternal life in the body tells us more about eternal life as well as about bodies. (133)

MacKendrick echoes here Jean-Luc Nancy’s idea of an infinite life that exceeds rather than succeeds finite life: an infinity that brims over inward, from within life, as life that is *more* than itself because it lives on, lives more livingly, more in-finitely

⁴ See Karmen MacKendrick, “The Hospitality of Strangeness: A Note on Sacramental Strangeness,” in *Phenomenologies of the Stranger*, ed. K. Semonovitch and R. Kearney (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 98–99.

in and through its very finitude. She explains this idea of eternity as living beyond ourselves, excessively, superabundantly, thus:

Since, in thinking the resurrection of the body as the materiality of eternal life, I read eternity as a quality and fullness of corporeal life in time and not as indefinite endurance, I would read the “end of the world” (the “time” in or at which the resurrection of the body happens) as language’s struggle with the unsayability in the world of the atemporality that disrupts it; “end” is perhaps no worse a metaphor than “outside.” Somatic eternity is not the endurance of the body but the transfigurative rhythm and rupture of time and the fullness of life, in and through flesh. (133)

Note here the rhythmical repetition and recurrence of the keywords— *eternal, flesh, enduring, body, time, matter, life*—again and again (and it is like this from beginning to end!). The writing unfolds like an incantatory hymn not unlike the poeticizing prose of the later Heidegger or Derrida. (I was reminded at times indeed of Derrida’s description of Levinas’s style as a series of wavelets lapping against a shore incessantly, inexhaustibly, obsessively.) This is the kind of style that can give Continental philosophy a bad name in certain analytic circles. But here it is utterly authentic and, what is more, ineluctable. One is persuaded by the prose and its authorial persona that there simply is no *other* way of saying this. Apart from resorting to the words of certain poets and mystics—which she does from time to time— this is the only way of saying this unsayable thing: the resurrection of the body as crossover of time and eternity.

When MacKendrick does defer to poets she herself practices the sacramental acoustics she preaches. Take, for example, this citation from Hölderlin: “Even in a limited existence man can know an infinite life, and the limited representation of divinity, stemming for him from this existence, can itself also be infinite” (133). From this short passage, MacKendrick spins out a startlingly moving reflection on how our human life can live on exceedingly, *sur-vivant*, embodying an infinite life that does not come after our finite one but overflows from inside out and outside in simultaneously. But what the great poets provide in terms of an acoustics of eternal flesh is also to be found, albeit in different terms, in the greatest theologians of the past. MacKendrick does not hesitate to slide from verses of the romantics to the Athanasian or Nicene creeds. She is the most revolutionary catechist you could imagine! Her audacious and innovative rereadings of the scriptural canon echo those of the great mystics whose feet were often put to the fire—think of Teresa, Eckhart, Porete, and the Beguines (whose perfume of singed flesh still floats between the pages of their once censored works). But there will be no such auto-da-fé for Karmen MacKendrick. We, her colleagues, will protect her!

MacKendrick is rethinking the Resurrection of the Body in novel and startling ways. But, as she keeps modestly reminding us, it is all *already* there in the body of the Christian text and the text of Christ’s body. The risen body of Christ, she suggests, already hints at eternal life for all. For if the doctrine of the resurrected body is modeled on the resurrected body of Christ, is it not reasonable to suppose that spirited human flesh may be likewise read as eternal? Against dualist metaphysics, Platonic or otherwise, Christianity reveals that the most perfect human form is not divested

of the body. And if it is true that human flesh always seems to involve some element of change, motion, time, and matter—not to mention desire and fragmentation—then these properties, too, must somehow sur-vive and re-vive in the glorified existence of eternal life (now)! But how can the fragmentary persist within the whole? How can eternity belong not to disincarnate, immaterial spirits but to the flesh of bodies in their very passing, their living on, their ebullition and brimming over? That is why the risen body of Christ is never, by Christ’s own admission, risen enough (as he tried to point out to Mary Magdalene and his disciples, who wanted to hang on to him and turn him into a fetish of possession, power, and presence). The Paraclete comes as the risen Christ goes. Why? Because coming and going are the very essence of eternity, something recognized by the wonderful poetic notion of *perichoresis*, where the three persons keep shifting and changing places around an empty *chora*, forever filling, unfilling and refilling.⁵

3

So what is this “other time” where, MacKendrick claims, matter is interleaved with the eternal? Well it is clearly *not* a time of chronological progression, as noted, but, rather, one of strangeness, a time that recurs and suspends, ruptures and shatters. Here time and eternity are not opposed as linear to perpendicular but are interwoven in a crisscrossing play of enveloping and enveloped, touching and touched, ascending and descending. MacKendrick rightly sees precedents for this way of thinking in a number of rich and reverberating examples: the reversible carnal chiasm of Merleau-Ponty, the mystical *implicatio-explicatio* of Cusanus, or the endless birthing and rebirthing of the divine in the human of Eckhart. The latter’s bold description of Christ being constantly born within the human soul, traversing the borders of interiority and exteriority, immanence and transcendence, profanity and sacrality, is, for MacKendrick, perfectly fitting: “If someone were to ask me ... [W]hy did God, the All-Highest, take on our flesh?—then I would reply: in order that God can be born in the soul and the soul be born in God. That is why the whole of Scripture was written and why God created the whole world” (138). This double natality epitomizes the way in which all time is gathered into the “now of eternity in which the soul knows all things new and fresh and present in God” (138). The word *fresh* is particularly telling here, for it signals the ceaseless novelty of this process of mutual passing and return, suspension and renewal. Here is an eternal divinity that, to borrow from Paul Simon, keeps “slip-sliding away” even as it keeps revolving and returning. The eternal birthing is never completed; and its very incompleteness is its divinity. It is not deferred to some final future but, rather,

⁵ See my discussion of perichoresis in “Eros, Diacritical Hermeneutics, and the Maybe,” in “Philosophical Thresholds: Crossings of Life and World,” ed. Cynthia Willett and Leonard Lawlor, *Philosophy Today* 55 (SPEP suppl.; 2011): 75–85.

is lived out eternally in each moment as mutual *co-naissance* (Claudel). This is how MacKendrick sums up her central reading of eternity as carnal natality:

Eternity gives us this sense of immortal flesh not as flesh that lasts forever but as time's own redemption, its own transfiguration of this slippage, in rhythm and in rupture. I won't claim that this keeps us from loss either—we do well to retain our sense of the mutual inherence of absence in presence, mourning in joy. But it redeems, or, a little more exactly, transfigures loss, in a more complex sense than the repeating slippage of endurance... The eternal does not hold onto presence but exceeds it. The God mortally sacrificed is the God always just being born. (138)

MacKendrick concedes that it is not easy to comprehend this notion of a nonending newness in the flesh. She is right. The mind buckles and boggles. For without some concept of enduring, how could we make sense of a body that changes while somehow remaining itself (otherwise we would just have a series of discreetly succeeding bodies)? Hence the classic practice of conceiving the resurrected body as a transfigured flesh that endures everlastingly. But how, then, to make sense of the fact that Christ's own incarnation involves mutability, change, passing? Or how to resolve the puzzle (encountered by both Augustine and Anselm) that a timeless God can be temporal and changing in the person of Christ? MacKendrick's considered response to this age-old theological puzzle is to amplify the range of reference and suggest that "no body is in fact lived solely within time," which—careful!—does not mean that "the body has some part outside time, but rather that time has an outside, and that this outside can come to us (as does time) corporeally. That is, once again, *this* world is blessed, and this body, too, is redeemed in time" (139).

Now I have a few questions on this matter of eternal time before moving on to my final comments. First, when MacKendrick speaks of "no body" existing solely within time and adds that "*the* body has some part outside time" and that "*this* body" is redeemed in time, does she mean that every body is so redeemed? In other words, is everyone redeemed within eternal time, or are there some—or parts of some—that are not so redeemed? I am thinking here not just of universal redemption (everyone is saved including Hitler and Attila the Hun) but also of the question of irredeemable evil done to bodies: rape, torture, sadism, child abuse, war crimes. Are these embodied horrors also part of the eternal body? In which case, is nobody or no embodied act, however heinous, excluded from the glorified flesh? What, then, of ethical discernment or responsibility: the choice between feeding the stranger (whose starving, beaten body lies before me on the street) or killing the stranger? Is every evil eligible for membership in the mystical body? Is no one or nothing excluded?

Jung's answer to Job—and that of Gnosticism for millennia—has been that the evil side of the divine is as indispensable as the good side: violence as much as peace, hate as much as love. Would MacKendrick concur? Is her phenomenology of brokenness

another tacit version of “all is permitted”? If so, what of the biblical notion that God only remembers good and overcomes evil by forgetting it? Are we allowed such selective memory in MacKendrick’s poetics of eternal flesh? Or to put this in another way: I wonder how, given her position, we might distinguish, however provisionally and tentatively, between eros and thanatos—that is, between carnal acts that enable or disable, emancipate or incarcerate, heal or maim. In short, is there a real place for ethics in MacKendrick’s poetics? Justice regarding singular persons and acts as well as all-embracing glorifications? In this scenario, who is responsible for what and for whom?

4

This brings me back to the central theme of brokenness. Carnal fracturing seems the privileged means to open the self to the eternal. But how is this compatible with the idea that healing is the answer to fragmentation? I suspect that MacKendrick is challenging the received wisdom in most psychotherapeutic theories—and in a long Christian tradition—that reintegration is the answer to disintegration (i.e., dissociation, dysfunction, destruction, and despair). This is surely what she intends when she invokes the experience of “abysmal... brokenness” as a refusal of “catharsis” (77). Most recent trauma studies, from Judith Harmon to Dori Laub, suggest that the best way to healing is by retrieving the frozen fragments of traumatic experience so as to restore them to some kind of cathartic memory: a narrative of mourning that restores and reconciles one with one’s past. This therapeutic method is supported by two main approaches: (1) the Aristotelian view of catharsis as purgation by pity and fear (in a *mythos-mimesis* carried out in a unity of time, place, action, and character) and (2) the psychoanalytic notion of the “talking cure” deeply informed by Freud’s own treatment of World War I trauma victims in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Most cases of trauma analyzed in contemporary literature concern extreme incidents of torture, rape, incest, or genocide. MacKendrick is clearly not dealing with such dramatic breakings; but her analysis does suggest a certain isomorphism between such instances and the more everyday experiences of kairological breakage—the irruption of eternity in time. In both cases, the power of human agency, initiative, and freedom appear contested. But what are the implications of such a move for theology, psychology, and ethics?

In chapter 4, entitled “Poppies and Rosemary: Love,” MacKendrick speaks of a love that has already happened before I choose it to happen. I can only give the gift of love if the gift is already given to me; I can only keep a promise if I already find myself promised. Or as she puts it, “Love’s promise is given as something remembered.” The “stranger already” precedes any notion of “subjective intentionality.” Promises are made before I know it; love is a commandment obeyed before I say, “I love”—as if I have to remember that I have already forgotten myself.

MacKendrick speaks here of “obsessive memory.” And she might well have added something on Proust’s involuntary memory. For love seems involuntary to the extent that it is, in MacKendrick’s terms, “strange,” “anarchic,” and “greedy.” In other words, obsessive eros precedes and exceeds the ethics of law. And MacKendrick celebrates eros accordingly as “disordering” and “profoundly disruptive of selfhood” (86), “excessive and exhausting” (courtesy of Roland Barthes). Sacred eros is radically transgressive in that it “possesses us” to the point of rupturing the moral self. “I am not there ...,” she explains, “as the one to whom the law, or the commandment, might apply” (87). Love is thus revealed as a kind of suprapersonal excess that divests the self of itself and breaks it open to the other within and without.

Now let me admit straightaway that MacKendrick’s analysis is more complex than my account suggests. She is touching on a deep mystical enigma that goes back to Paul’s prioritizing of love over law; and she is right, in my view, to challenge a long tradition of rationalist moralism and voluntarism in favor of what Pascal calls “la logique du coeur—le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas.” She is contesting the idea of rational control over the senses going from Platonism and scholasticism right up to modern thinkers like Kant and Sartre: namely, the view that desire is a passion to be subjugated lest it subvert the autonomy of conscious will. (Think here of Kant’s moral reason versus inclination or Sartre’s utilitarian view of desire as an ordered pattern of means directed toward an end.) In this, MacKendrick echoes the general posthumanist critique of the sovereign ego from Nietzsche and Heidegger to a host of postmodern thinkers such as Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, and Irigaray.

And we might add Levinas to this list. I am thinking especially of his later work where, in a passage in *Otherwise than Being*, for example, he glosses the phrase “je suis malade d’amour” (Song of Songs) with the claim that the self is obsessed, violated, invaded, and persecuted by the other—hostaged before the self was ever free to think, act, or respond. Levinas’s discourse of the hostaged self has connotations at times of theological masochism; but he confesses deploying a “language of hyperbole.” Would MacKendrick admit as much? And how would she address the Levinasian dilemma of reconciling the hostaged-self with the host-self (the host being morally enjoined to open the door to the invasive Other with the phrase: “Here I am”)?⁶

⁶ MacKendrick does, in fairness, insert a parenthesis later in her analysis admitting the need to address the ethical question; and I take her sentence to be both an acknowledgment of elision and a promissory note: “Although my own religious emphasis has always been rather more aesthetic than ethical, I do think there are real ethical and political implications here regarding the care of bodies” (130). I wholeheartedly agree and look forward to learning from her insights into such an ethics of somatic care.

The ethical question becomes even more problematic, I think, when MacKendrick compares the temporal structures of *evil* and *trauma*. Clearly she intends no moral equivalence here, but by declining to tackle the moral difference between these two human experiences there is room for misunderstanding. The damned, no less than the traumatized, are closed up in their split, separated selves; they are unable (or unwilling) to speak or listen to others: “The damned, living in the time of trauma, ... refuse the double openness of time and word.” MacKendrick explains the connection between trauma and the banality of evil as follows: “The shared characteristic is exactly that of not (quite) being experienced—in the case of trauma, an event is not experienced because the ability of consciousness to register the ‘experience’ is exceeded; in the case of banal evil, a regret or sorrow that would seem appropriate to the rest of us is not experienced because the capacity of otherness, of humanity outside oneself, to register in one’s consciousness is absent. In both cases the offense—the symptom or the evil, the restriction on possibility and on response—is likely to go on repeating” (78).

In short, trauma and evil both epitomize the absence of memory, the “eternal dullness of repetition” from which forgiveness seeks to free us. How? Precisely by releasing a “future from the sameness of the past” (79). The structure of confessional forgiveness and of therapeutic speaking would thus appear to function isomorphically. By recounting the story in a new way, by “remembering and then transforming memory, [forgiveness] breaks open the future.” MacKendrick opposes accordingly the transfigurative “time of revelation” to the “same-again repetition” of both trauma and damnation. The time of such “new narrative” is, she writes, “the time of the promise, the revelation of the future in its openness instead of the traumatic, damning closure of repetition” (83). But my question is this: Are “traumatic” closure and “damning” closure as similar as the juxtaposition in this sentence suggests? For even if they are both forms of “self-separation” (dissociation for trauma, isolation for sin), are they not fundamentally different? Surely there is more separating trauma and damnation than a comma?

Let me clarify. When a therapist helps the traumatized victim (of rape/torture/genocide) to break the paralyzing spell of repetition in order to live a new future, is *she* *forgiving* him? And if so, for what? I am sure that MacKendrick does not wish to *equate* the experience of trauma with evil. But by establishing such an intimate connection between the two it is hard to resist suspecting that such close comparison betrays an implied theodicy (Augustinian or Leibnitzean). Otherwise put: if we are all subject to the temporal structure of trauma in some manner (even if it is what MacKendrick calls “lesser” trauma, similar perhaps to Levinas’s notion of a *traumatisme originel* that all humans experience), if we are all thus temporally traumatized with a small “t,” is it not because each of us is subject to the deadly repetitiveness of fallenness (or what theologians call “original sin”)? And if this is so, are we not all in need of forgiveness and revelation to save us from ourselves? And if this in turn is so, does it not imply that Trauma victims with a capital “T” are even more condemned to the repetitive

nontime of damnation than the rest of us lesser-traumatized beings? Again, I am sure that MacKendrick would not endorse such a view; but by juxtaposing “traumatic” and “damning” as she does, is she not lending herself to such possibilities of confusion?

6

Let me conclude with some remarks on MacKendrick’s poetics of the sacred. In raising my above reservations I feel that I am not taking sufficient account of the liturgical flow of her writing, nit-picking rather than delicately tracing the unfolding fleece of this beautiful text. For this is prose that pulses to its own “delirious beat,” sounding an utterly unique rhythm precisely because it “listens” to a rhythm beyond itself. So doing, it bids its readers to listen in turn, to attend—sacramentally, somatically, acutely—to its inner music, its intensively lived tempo: *adagio*, *andante*, *allegretto*. The prose moves poetically, like the repetition of the rosary, to “something outside of the self” (142). And the author does not shirk from calling this “the shared beating of the sacred heart” (142). But such shared cardiac percussion is not exclusively Christocentric. For MacKendrick the score for this song of the eternal body is as easily found in Deleuze’s “other repetition,” or Merleau-Ponty’s sonata of flesh, or Nietzsche’s chorus of recurrence as in the incantation of Christian liturgy. What MacKendrick terms “the sacred body of all bodies” pulses with the ease of sleep, a temporal phrasing of which we are scarcely aware. It approximates to the beating of breath and blood, respiring and expiring, expanding and contracting, enfolding and refolding, spiraling around and looping back through the flesh of time (142).

One cannot read MacKendrick’s prose—not because it is unreadable but because it is doubly readable. One *rereads* it, as one does poetry. And in rereading one listens and listens again.

So we are back to the *ana*-time of the beginning, the time that goes back by going forward and upward: the double “a” of *a-dieu*—both away from (*ab*) and toward (*ad*) the Infinite. This is what MacKendrick calls the “seductive power of rhythms, drawing us out of self and into beauty” (143). It is a double tempo, which draws human and divine bodies to each other in an intensification—not extension—of time that is the time of resurrected flesh. Here epiphanic (extraordinary) time solicits profane (ordinary) time. It is irresistible. “We find it difficult to walk or otherwise move against a strong beat,” says MacKendrick. And this applies to her own writing. “What draws us to beauty, what draws language into memory, into poetry, and draws our bodies into participation,” she concludes, “is what we have created to seduce the gods” (143): whence what she calls “the fabled seductiveness of musicians generally” (142), and we might add, of certain philosophers—MacKendrick being one of them.

Response

Karmen Mackendrick

LE MOYNE COLLEGE

I am grateful both to the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy's organizers for scheduling a session on my work and to the panelists who so graciously fulfilled the rather selfless task of devoting their time and energy to the responses making up that session. It is an honor, and still something of a surprise, to have several smart people discussing my texts and to have the opportunity to take up those responses for a few, admittedly overgeneral, thoughts of my own.

I cannot really think (those thoughts or any others) in distinction from writing or write in distinction from the carnal. This thinking-writing- moving process tends to start in an obsession with something fairly small—an idea, a passage, a sentence, sometimes just a phrase. Usually, these are in tension to the point of paradox with some other idea or sentence or phrase;¹ I am almost never intrigued by anything unidirectional and easy. I am particularly charmed that Rick Lee has called me patient, even if only about original sin, as it seems to me that impatience may well be my greatest scholarly flaw. But obsession, in its persistence, may pass for patience too—and my concerns and interests do come back anew. Each time it seems to me that they were always there, and I am only uncovering them—and being surprised by them every time. I think Professor Lee is utterly right that we have suppressed rather than gotten beyond what is actually interesting about a lot of philosophical and religious history; and I *hope* he's right, because given the way I return to the same themes, I never seem to get beyond anything. Bodies. Desires. Times. Words. But how could anyone not love these things, not obsessively return to them? Oh, yes: I never get beyond returning, either, especially in its eternal versions and in its fascinating tension with newness.

That tendency to obsess on tiny points, combined with another to draw intriguing bits from all over, to try to weave them into sometimes unobvious places, occasionally gets me into the kind of trouble that Professors Kearney and Huntington both note. My book *Fragmentation and Memory* is concerned with the breakages of time and in it, with mendings and recollections and those aforementioned returns. In one chapter I take up the topic of forgiveness, beginning with a passage on penance and reconciliation from the *Baltimore Catechism* (the book is, not irrelevantly, subtitled *Meditations on Christian Doctrine*). Roughly, I argue that forgiveness opens the future not by

¹ I became fascinated with paradox when I first read Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

forgetting but by remaking the meaning of memory such that the absolute hold of the past upon the future is released and the latter is allowed its proper futurity—that is, its uncertainty and openness, its nature as the space of the possible. Forgiveness is a mode of temporal revelation.

To try to render this vivid, I look at two of the more extreme ways in which futurity can be foreclosed and cut off: trauma, in which the unremembered or imperfectly remembered past forces the future into repetition; and damnation, read in the Deleuzian/Leibnizian mode as the furious refusal of every possibility opened by love.² The terms are neither wholly cognate nor simply reversible: the Deleuzian damned might justly be called self-traumatizing, but the traumatized cannot rightly be called self-damning. Beyond the nuances of temporal differences, the distinction from trauma is a vital one: that of will. Part of therapeutic makingconscious is making more readily available to will; the therapist does not forgive but makes it possible for the person she hears to do so—or not to—though deliberative will alone is not all that's at work. It would be absurd for anyone to downplay the difference between a stubborn choice and an imposed misery but especially absurd for someone who's been fairly obsessed with will and the ways it can be turned about and knotted up.

Why parallel the two at all? Because both fragment by totalizing, by making time one, making the future and the eternal resemble only the past. Forgiveness has to open, and so cannot altogether mend, time itself. It is profoundly uncertain, uncommandable, occasionally unwise, and divinely creative. As I note in the text, I am not equating, or otherwise paralleling, trauma and damnation beyond viewing both as temporal foreclosures, but I think that I didn't say this quite clearly or persistently enough. In any case, one cannot, of course, get away with tossing so loaded a topic as trauma into a text quite so casually and quickly as I did. My impatience to draw out the mnemonic power of speaking-to—in order to link forgiveness both to some fabulous creation stories and to the sacramental notion of penitential reconciliation—led me to neglect much of the richness of trauma theory, and I don't doubt at all that a richer sense of that theory can also enrich theory derived from it. I am not a trauma theorist, and hope I haven't presented myself as one, but I should have been more cautious in my examples.

As far as damnation goes, I am inclined to the notion that we damn or delight or redeem ourselves in the turns of our desire, our pleasure, our love. What I so enjoy in Deleuze's reading of Leibniz on damnation is something I also enjoy in some texts of Augustine—the refusal of a consequent punishment, or reward, in favor of an inherent one. Here damnation is nothing but refusal, inherent *in* refusing, not a punishment *for* it. I mean neither to absolve the damned—to claim I could might be a wee bit

² “The damned, Judas or Beelzebub, does not pay retribution for a past action but for the hate of God that constitutes the present amplitude of his soul and fills it in the present. He is not damned for a past action, but by a present action that he renews at every moment” (Gilles Deleuze, *The Told: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], 71).

arrogant—nor to blame the traumatized. But I come closer to the former, and I feel okay about that, though some days a little more or less so.

The question of damnation, and the worry about too close a paralleling to trauma, is not unrelated to the query regarding resurrection and the eternity of hellish moments too. That could be a question about reality, or truth, about the nature of time in its own right. I can only answer it, though, as a question about the time that is ours, time as we live it, even if the “I” who lives is thereby problematized. Perhaps this nontime, this temporal outside, at each moment, is. But, with more certainty, I don’t want to say that it is, at every moment, ours. That is, we don’t always live it. Not every moment bursts, and some that do burst implode (there is a negative *ecstasis* too); the returned moment may come back in the manner of lifegiving rhythm but also as recurrent nightmare. We can refuse eternity as it is given to us, but it can also be taken from our moments, by great evils and by banal inattentions. Yet I suspect that eternity, return, beyondness, remains “in” each moment as a touch of the possible, a possibility enfolded in every passage. And as I do in *Fragmentation*, I would link our breath to the circle of recurrence, to Hopkins’s “original breath” that arches the body in pure affirmation, and our passionate joy to time’s own outside.³ And for these I do have to think that there is more to time than time—but not every more is time redeemed, time lived as a possibility ancient and new. We have an enormous capacity for screwing things up. But that the possible *is*, at all, must nonetheless grace our time. It is in the pull between the impossible and possibility that the moment pulls divinely open.

I am as fascinated as anyone by the impossible, but not in isolation; here, too, the tensions matter. Impossibility is of particular interest to me as it sustains desire; possibility, as it multiplies infinitely, not least as it multiplies desirable directions (think both of Pierre Klossowski’s reading of the eternal return and of Nicholas of Cusa’s notion of God as pure actual every-possibility). Tire infinitely elusive meets the infinitely inclusive, and the tension infinitely draws desire, which draws me, in turn, to keep trying to think it. (Of course, the concept of the infinite as the proper object of desire has a long theological history.)

What interests me about each topic to which I’ve been drawn is not only its fit into my obsession set but its complexity. I really do try to be clear and precise, but as I’ve said, easy things bore me. As part of that complexity, I want to hold on to the sense that we are not altogether fixable—and that this is no evil (forgiveness, for instance, doesn’t fix things; it just makes things possible, and only ever possible). This sense that all sutures show somehow, that all mending is imperfect, and that the imperfection itself may well be a delight is one I have tried to develop before: discussing pleasure in perversity in *Counterpleasures*, the stammers of speaking in *Immemorial Silence*, the cut and scar in *Word Made Skin*, or freedom through obedience in *Seducing Augustine*.

³ Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” in *Poems and Prose*, ed. W. H. Gardner (New York: Penguin Books, 1953), 20.

At least since Homer, who has the identity of Odysseus given away by his scar, we've had before us the notion that we are made ourselves in the mending of our own tornness and absence—but we have emphasized the mend as if the tear were valueless.

I have emphasized, and perhaps overemphasized, the latter both polemically and perversely. I think that we have to revalue the negative terms—that we diminish joy when we too perfectly separate it from sorrow, pleasure when we strip it of every connection to pain. Here, too, my interest is in the inherent: I do not mean that joy or pleasure is improved by following upon sorrow or pain or that sadness is made more tolerable by a good that comes after. This, of course, problematizes positive and negative too—it doesn't simply assimilate either to the other. Perhaps it would be nice to be altogether whole and healed, but it would not be human—nor would it be divine in a mythic system that begins in an incarnation, a crucifixion, and a resurrection of a body that regains its life while retaining its wounds. It is probably perverse to go finding pleasures where not everyone finds them—not least to find the beauty in scars and other spots from which ugliness or grotesquery is never wholly distinct. But, as I once had to explain to a rather upset woman at an Augustine seminar, and as Professor Lee's response makes clear, I don't regard perversity as a bad thing. The perverse is linked to the paradoxical: even etymologically, it is what does not lead us down a straight and simple path. Perversity sustains fascinating and fascinated desire; it brings paradox into pleasure and so complicates it enough to make it interesting—and to sustain it, too.

Though I doubt that he would recognize it in the form I've set forth, no small part of this thinking comes from Augustine. I am grateful for the patient and elegant way that Professor Lee set forth some of the central puzzles of Augustinian desire, and not only because I therefore don't have to. I did not intend to spend so much time with Augustine, but he seduced me—I could not quite resist the tensions and strains of his desirous will or his claim in the *Confessions* that the world says the name of God to him. In my most recent work, I have tried to tie this claim to his highly desirous semiotics, his strange, lovely, determinedly nonpantheistic sense that the world says, signs, is a sign of the divine. Though I am inclined to see desire as more power than lack (we may lack its object but not its force), I am less troubled than I might be by divergences in readings of Augustine; there is always a lot going on at once in his texts, and I am influenced by his own mode of reading scripture—"Why not rather say both," he writes of multiple interpretations, "if both are true?"⁴ In fact, more than just "both" may be true with Augustine: few authors work so tirelessly and creatively against themselves. There is a gratifyingly perverse pleasure in this joyful outcry of a nonpresence, a deeply exasperating enticement.

Enticement, as the enhancement of and play with desire, is obviously central for me. I remain among those irresistibly drawn by words, with a sense of language strangely compatible with the highly theological versions of semiotics that we find from late

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 12.31.

antiquity through the twelfth century or so. While some of these theories may use the divine as a way to ground language solidly, there are many who—to me more interestingly—understand the relation of language to divinity as one of infinite and imperfect reaching, and not always in a single direction. The sense of divine relationality implied is an incomplete and unsettled one. But of course that restless incompleteness does not foreclose delight, and the conditions for the possibility of pleasure, the openings and foreclosings of joy, matter here too.

Those conditions, in and out of language, are not altogether out of our control. Thus I have to touch on ethics, though I am deeply wary of so doing—I know full well that working on ethics doesn't mean prescribing to people what to do, but I can't help feeling as if it might, as if I could lead my readers really quite wildly astray (at least conceptually; I can't really imagine anyone using my texts as a model for behavior).⁵ My sense of the ethical is thoroughly tangled up with aesthetics, with poetics. Several years ago, at a conference with the provocative title "Sex on the Edge," I gave a paper that meditated on, more than argued for, certain painful pleasures, though by the time I spoke it had become fairly clear that this was not quite the kind of edge play the organizers had in mind. Later someone told me that the paper was beautiful—"but so nonpolemical!" she said, with a sort of suspicious bewilderment. If you can hear the beauty, I told her, you have the polemics, the beauty of such practice remaining far from obvious to many people. I think my ethical argument, small and tentative as it is, is still very much like that. It also starts in hearing beauty, in that very Augustinian way: "My question was the attention I gave them," he says of the things of the world, "and their answer was their beauty."⁶

So what does that mean? Trying to unpack that enigmatic statement has taken me an article and a few book chapters so far. But I can say briefly that I'm ethically interested in resonance, in responsivity, and in the sheer difficulty of paying *attention*. We are ethical in vulnerability, but not least in our vulnerability to beauty, to the world that says divinity, which means more often the world that cries out destruction and beauty's absence. This is the ethical sense that I try to develop in the forthcoming *Divine Enticement*, which has, in fact, a chapter on ethics, and this chapter echoes the book's more general preoccupation with the puzzles and paradoxes of divine seduction as it troubles all manner of thinking, draws thought and body to their limits. It's this fascination with limits that makes me hyperbolic, perhaps as an apophatic variant—oversaying as a way to approach the unsayable. I think in this text about faith as both thinking with assent and assenting to thinking, as the willingness to dwell in question—and I insist upon the question's reversibility. I consider the communal nature of meaning and the magic of sacramentality. I talk about scripture and the publication

⁵ This is not a universal impression. One large bookseller used to list *Counterpleasures* under "sex instruction: alternative." I wince to imagine the deep disappointment of anyone who purchased it under that heading.

⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.6. This is one of those lines upon which I have obsessed, for several years at this point.

of flesh, about the possible and divine possibilizing. I am drawn there, too, to the relation of prayer as an unusually pure mode of the element of address that enters into all our speaking—or into which our speaking always enters.

In this sense, it may be that all I have ever done is pray, most often without the slightest clue as to what I'm doing. I write philosophy or theology rather as Paul Celan wrote poetry, though not so well, because almost no one writes anything that well: The poem, he said, is "headed toward. Toward what? Toward something open, inhabitable, an approachable you, perhaps."⁷ My sense of the divine is in approaching and breaking through, but so, too, is my hope in writing. I'd have thought, given my odd assemblage of interests and my inability to keep anything simple, that I hadn't a prayer of being heard. Usually one likes to be right; I am, in this instance, most appreciative of those who have proved me wrong.

⁷ Paul Celan, "Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen," in *Paul Celan: Collected Prose*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Riverdale-on-Hudson, N.Y: Sheepmeadow Press, 1990), 35. Yes, this line would be another.

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Richard A. Lee Jr.

Depaul University

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