Foreword

I AM VERY PLEASED to offer a foreword to a work like this. It is a work which takes as central the notion of companioning in my own writings, and in the relation of these to other thinkers of note, and perhaps St. Augustine of most note. Renée Köhler-Ryan's book is a work on companioning, yet it is a work that itself is companioning. Indeed I take the practice of her thinking to exemplify something of what being a companion in thought might entail. I have long admired the sapiential genuineness of her writings over the years and am delighted to see these writings gathered here together, extended sometimes from earlier versions, and deftly molded into an admirable work of philosophical and theological reflection. It is a work in which also there is wise porosity among the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious.

While Renée lucidly outlines what companioning might entail, perhaps it might be helpful to add a word on what companioning is. I have often been asked about the relation of my efforts at philosophical thought to theological concerns. The question is also sometimes posed as to whether philosophy and theology need each other. I find the question pressing because modern philosophy on the whole has a tendency to define itself primarily as autonomous, as marked by thought that claims to be essentially self-determining. The result is hard to avoid: philosophy will tend to deny any need of theology, even to the point of its rebuffing any approach by theology. This point, of course, has implications for philosophy's relation to its others in a wider sense. What of its relation to art, for instance, and indeed to science? Why is religion, and mediately theology, singled out for special rebuff? Why should art or science get treated differently, treated more tenderly? If philosophy demands to be self-determining, its character tends not to be receptive, in the first instance, to what is other to itself. And not receptive in the last instance also, given that if the significant other is to approach philosophy, it will only be accepted on the terms determined

by philosophy itself, and hence the approach will not be quite the drawing near of the other as truly other.

But suppose philosophy, as I think, is *metaxological*, that is, to be essentially defined by its offering a *logos* of the *metaxu*, what then? The practice of philosophy is inseparable from its relation to its significant others. Throughout the long history of different practices of philosophy, our being religious, and mediately, our being theological, have been the most significant of philosophy's other. Self-determining philosophy is not metaxological in this regard: there is to be nothing between it and theology, for it would define itself as for itself. To ask again if philosophy and theology need each other, one would have to say "yes" in a certain sense. The "yes" would also include openness to other significant others, the artistic or poetic, for instance. How then do philosophy and its others retain any freedom? Do they retain their respective freedoms? Ingredient in the answer must be a more plurivocal understanding of freedom that does not delimit freedom univocally to autonomous self-determination. Being in relation to what is other to self-determination forms part of what is at issue in such a plurivocal understanding of freedom. And we might ask: Is there is a kind of "heteronomy" involved in being in metaxological relation, a heteronomy not only generous to the other but in receipt of the generosity of the other?

It is here that one can see the significance of the companioning approach. The companion is an other who, at best, is generously there in the between to offer endowments of presence and support and aid, and indeed often secret gifts of elemental presence. The offer of such gifts witnesses a being-there that is the being-with of love. Do philosophy and theology need each other? In light of what I have just said, we are enabled to think of companions whose "need" of each other is not constraining but *releasing*. Such a sense of companioning is central to this work of Renée Köhler-Ryan.

Such a releasing need is not a dyadic relation in which each might engage the other but not enter intimately into the life of the other. Nor is it simply dialectical, if we define this in the modern way as philosophy including the theological in its own self-determining thinking. Again, I would say the need is metaxological, in that our being both religious and philosophical are intimate others in a porous between where what is most original and ultimate is to be diversely engaged. If philosophy and theology do need each other, the need is such a companioning one. Companions can be themselves, and yet if they are bound together, they may need each other but not always out of need alone. If companions break bread together, it is

their shared need of what is beyond them both that binds them. Renée's work is admirably attuned to the promise of such companionship, and not only as a matter of reflection but more importantly as a matter of participation. Her book gives true witness to participation in this companioning.

The issue here is not on boundary questions between philosophy and theology in an academic sense but on their porosity to each other in a living sense. Our being is to be religious, and this is to be understood in an ontological rather than academic sense. Being philosophical and theological each can refer to an exigence of thought marking our condition of being between, or each can be seen as more formal academic disciplines. This book takes the exigence as more primordial than the discipline, while showing that the exigence points to the discipline to be understood in a fuller sense. Augustine especially as a companion can communicate to us the living exigence, as well as the sense that the discipline without the exigence can become an intellectual *technē* without animating soul.

While I myself have wanted to engage with Augustine in this companioning sense, and not simply as a scholar in a technical, professional sense, Renée engages both myself and Augustine in the same spirit. And not only Augustine, of course. She does exemplary justice to the way I have counted Augustine as a companion in my own efforts to think about fundamental questions, such as God and the soul, the nature of desire and love, and one's being in community with the neighbor. But there are others like Plato or Aquinas or Shakespeare to whom one relates not as objects of research but as companioning one's own search. The other thinker or writer is a source of inspiration and challenge, not always explicitly acknowledged as such, but of influence perhaps at a more intimate level, providing something like a secret touchstone, in relation to intellectual and spiritual excellence. Of course, in conversation with a companion one might be tempted to project one's own thoughts onto the other and take one's own thoughts as if they were that of the companion. I call this the ventriloquizing approach. One uses the other to make that other say the things that one would want to say in any case, regardless of what the other actually says. This is always a temptation but true companions manage to transcend ventriloquizing and learn to listen. Of course, one need not always agree with the companion, even as the companion may reprimand and correct one. The communicative passage between oneself and others, others and oneself, is the life of wording the between in fidelity to all of us being true.

Diverse dimensions of that companioning approach are shown in the present work. In the metaxological orientation what counts is less the erection of formal boundaries between disciplines as the ability to *pass between* philosophy and theology, beyond dyadic exclusion and dialectical inclusion, and without dodging hard questions in an equivocal middling fudge. The companioning side of the present work reveals rich possibilities of conversation in friendship, richer than in *polemos*, richer than in *agon*. Seek the truth with love: the work gives new freshness to philosophy understood as sapiential. This is something old, and something always to be renewed. The deepest point about companioning is not struggle, not competition, but mindfully being with the other in the embrace of a superior call on us to be truthful in the company of truth.

Needless to say, something of the more personal voice inevitably is to be heard in this sapiential orientation. One might echo Pierre Hadot: philosophy of old was a way of life, not just a theory or the construction of a system. The personal voice resounds in Renée's work. To take one instance: I found very illuminating the way her reflection on person as mask, and on mask as *personans*, threw significant light on the company of my own thought with that of Augustine and Aquinas. What comes across is the figure of the thinker as a place of passage and communication, porous to the divine at depths of intimacy the thinker herself or himself mostly does not know explicitly at all. Often the significance is revealed, or perhaps suggested, at certain extremities, such as Aquinas's retraction into sacred silence. I think also of the striking extremity of Macbeth's not being able to say "Amen," so well explored here in connection with Shakespeare's play. In the silence of one, the word has come, making further human words straw; in the other, the word does not come at all, and the "Amen" sticks in the throat.

Renée is very deft in lighting on illuminating possibilities in my own work and bringing it into conversation with other companions. The between space is articulated as multiply traversed, and this not only by thinkers but also in relation to central themes in ethics, aesthetics, religion, and metaphysics. In addition to the surprising connections with respect to the mask and the "Amen," as well as her bringing together of Macbeth and Augustine in relation to the soliloquy, I am intrigued at her sensitivity to my relation to Aquinas. She discerns the point about the forensic univocity of the surface, and the need of the reader of Aquinas to be a listener beyond the univocities of the rational surface. Among other things, I am

taken by her archaeological exploration of the original good of the "to be," by connections made between the elemental and creation, by her sensitivities to the relation of prayer and porosity, by her sense of thinking itself as endowed, by her discerning feeling for the mixing of the Cities of Man and God in our sojourn in time, and the challenge to us to read wisely the often perplexing signs of agapeic community. I also find a feel for the surprise of revelation, being put in mind of the disciples at Emmaus who were gifted with a second awakening though they seemed already to be awake, a second awakening that was an awakening for the first time. Metaxology here asks for *metanoia*. Companioning thought can seed a metanoetics. The gifted eyes of love truly see what is lovely—and see the lovely because it is lovely.

It is a pleasure to hear the voice of Renée but in that also to find something of oneself again in Renée's voice. I do not mean the pleasure of vanity but more the finding of one's own voice othered through the voice of a discerning other; and in this, coming back to oneself newly, like and unlike, that is, newly in a renewing way. I take this to be the mark of the conversation of companions. Releasing companionship is also refreshing of the companions. The companion is not a simple mirror that reflects an original back to itself point by point. Passage in the between with nuance of communication transforms the plurivocal intimacy of communication. There is a passage between companions that augments the between in giving itself to the other, and that augments itself in giving itself over to the other and giving itself away. The response of the other brings one out of oneself. But it more than just allows one to be seen newly or differently; it releases one to see things anew—old things and things now becoming new to one, becoming newly friendly, becoming new friends. In companioning one learns as much about the others as about one's own otherness. Renée's voice speaks for itself intelligently, engagingly, lucidly, communicatively, and wisely. It is a privilege to have a companion such as Renée in whose company we come to know that we are lifted up. To be gifted with such companions is to be graced. This is a gracious work for whose gift one is grateful.

William Desmond
David Cook Chair of Philosophy, Villanova University, USA
Thomas A. F. Kelly Visiting Chair in Philosophy,
Maynooth University, Ireland
Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, Institute of Philosophy,
KU Leuven, Belgium