

finds an accommodation to himself sufficient to journey onwards. This chapter represents a fruitful re-casting of seeking in contemporary culture, where matters of conversion and redemption and emptiness and incompleteness are brought into focus in ways that point to the imagination for their resolution. In this chapter, Murphy seems to find his voice for his own pilgrim journey into imagination and redemption, and it is here that the sense of narrative of the study most clearly emerges, and where it counts, in the final chapter.

Although clearly and well written, there is a microscopic property to the book, particularly in the examples used, yet overall in the text, sentences of real brilliance break out and steely insights emerge. The learning is there, but rather episodically distributed in the study. At occasional points of languor, one waits hopefully for relief. Understanding of the contemporary relevance of Balthasar is well sketched (chapter 2) and what is sought is credible, of an imagination that would surmount the contradictions emerging in postmodern philosophy to realise a coincidence of opposites. But 'seeing the form' of God, in ways that relate to the imagination (p. 156), signifies the need for some accommodation to the visual, however well the text feeds the mind's eye as to what to imagine. This is the missing dimension of the book that makes its text at times seem arid.

It is just not enough to conclude that the Catholic imagination is 'incarnational, sacramental and trinitarian' (pp. 157–8). What Murphy ends on brings into focus a nagging worry of the study, as to how *Catholic* the imagination is that he wishes to present for coherent theological inspection. Invoking Balthasar and three Catholic writers and directors hardly suffices to produce what needs to be distinctively stipulated, perhaps in a sectarian way Murphy is reluctant to envisage. Also, a more telling conclusion is required, one that more fully draws together the thesis of the book. Somehow, the study just stops at the end. Good in parts, bibliographically rich, and broad in sweep and ambition, it provides a useful reference point for a reading of facets of the Catholic imagination, a topic seemingly flourishing in the US but decidedly dormant in the UK. Much is to be learnt from our American cousins and this study is indicative of what is worthy of emulation.

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ZIZEK AND THEOLOGY by Adam Kotsko (*T&T Clark*, London 2008) Pp. vii + 174 pp., £14.99

Theology has opened up to what is often dubbed 'continental' philosophy. Whether or not the harvest of this philosophy always rewards the labour of its reading is a moot point, but there is no sign that the labours cease. There is always new flora to be examined and, perhaps, introduced to theological soil. Slavoj Žižek is the latest transplant. In this thorough and accessible book Adam Kotsko sets himself the task of carrying out an initial examination.

Žižek's intellectual and political roots are a curious hybrid of a reading of Hegel, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Althusserian structuralist Marxism, and an obsession with popular culture. He defines himself as a Marxist and an atheist. However those confident self-designations fly in the face of his philosophy, which is concerned to undermine the ready and ideological acceptance of the world so that emancipatory potential might be released. This Althusserian project of ideology-critique is linked to Lacan in that it is identified as an assault on the 'big Other', the master signifier that at once represses possibility, creates the space for fantasy, and establishes that against which emancipation must be achieved (by this argument God can be identified as one such big Other). The method is Hegelian; Žižek makes a statement about the big Other, contradicts it, and then

out of the synthesis announces that a truth has been reached. This explains why his books contain assertions, philosophical exegesis and political commonplaces, tell jokes, contradict themselves, often lack narrative and so on. Zizek is trying to force the reader to emancipate her or himself from thrall to Zizek and, thus, think for himself or herself. The irony is of course that with all of his publications Zizek is doing nothing other than ensure that his name itself becomes part of the big Other, and the industry of exegesis that he has inspired (and of which Kotsko's volume is one of the better examples) denies space for the emancipation of the reader.

Zizek's work is not possessed of any great humility, and therefore it is unsurprising that it has turned to questions of theology and, specifically, Christianity. That turn happens because what he is trying to do is deal with the question of what happens after there has been emancipation from the big Other. Kotsko calls this the 'morning after problem'. It is the problem of the fate of the moment of emancipation.

Zizek draws on Alain Badiou's theory of the 'truth-event' according to which truth is something that *happens* as an *event*. As Kotsko shows, for Badiou a truth-event erupts unpredictably from a situation that is occupied by all and yet only fully apprehended by those who are excluded from the 'official' definition of the situation. Badiou gives a secular reading of the conversion of St Paul as an example of a truth-event. In Kotsko's gloss, 'the resurrection of Christ is the unexpected truth-event that seizes Paul, causing him to dedicate his life to spreading the gospel' (p. 79). Consequently Badiou sees the truth-event as the irruption of a 'new beginning', but Zizek argues instead that it is better seen as a moment of detachment from what has gone before. For Zizek then the truth-event is an emancipation from the big Other, a kind of death of the old. In an interview that Kotsko does not cite (and Zizek's output is massive so this is no criticism), but in a passage that he makes it possible to see is typical, Zizek said: 'What I like is to see the emancipatory potential in institutionalized Christianity. Of course, I don't mean state religion, but I mean the moment of St. Paul. I find a couple of things in it. The idea of the Gospel, or good news, was a totally different logic of emancipation, of justice, of freedom' ('IDEOLOGY IS A CERTAIN UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF THE UNIVERSE AND YOUR PLACE IN IT, TO PUT IT IN STANDARD TERMS, WHICH SERVES THE PRODUCTION OF THE EXISTING POWER RELATIONS AND BLAH BLAH BLAH' at http://www.believmag.com/issues/200407/?read=interview_zizek).

The thesis about the Gospels – note that he sidesteps Christ – leads Zizek to a somewhat hackneyed and predictable assault on institutionalised Christianity. For him, what happens on the 'morning after' is Church building and thus the consolidation in ideology of a new big Other from which there will in turn need to be emancipation. Zizek is not saying that it is possible to return to the Gospel message, rather his point is that its institutionalisation needs to be negated if it is going to be able to shatter the contemporary big Other. And the way to do that is to draw out dialectically the conflict between the Gospels and the Church. In all of this it is clear that Zizek is using Christianity and, by extension, theology, for his own purposes. He is just trying to find a new place to carry out his self-appointed task of negator in the name of emancipation: Lenin, Stalin, St Paul are all reduced to the same status. It is in that spirit of negation that he claims that Christianity is fundamentally a comedy. Kotsko quotes Zizek's question: 'is there anything more comical than Incarnation, this ridiculous overlapping of the Highest and the Lowest, the coincidence of God, creator of the universe, and a miserable man?' (p. 153).

If there is a temper that runs through this book it is, I think, one of Kotsko's increasing apprehension that perhaps Zizek has considerably less to say about theology and Christianity than he thought when the project was started. Attempts

are made to link Zizek with Altizer, Tillich, Bonhoeffer and even Kierkegaard and Chesterton (Zizek has claimed the latter as two of the stimulants of his thought), but the connections that Kotsko forges say more about the ingenuity of his mind than Zizek's own insights. Indeed, Kotsko has written a sophisticated and knowledgeable book, but about a body of work that is perhaps best approached theologically as an over-inflated footnote to C.S. Lewis's identification of the Incarnation as a 'catastrophic historical event' (*The Problem of Pain* 1940, Centenary Press, London, p. 12).

KEITH TESTER

SUBJECTIVITY AND BEING SOMEBODY by Grant Gillett (*St Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Imprint Academic 2008) Pp. xxx + 286, £17.95 pbk

Subtitled 'Human Identity and Neuroethics', this book is the work of a neurosurgeon who is also a well-trained analytical philosopher and professor of medical ethics at the University of Otago, New Zealand. The argument ranges widely – so widely, that it is not always easy to know where it has got to or where it is going. And the author's style, or rather lack of it, places formidable obstacles in a text which would be difficult enough even if it had been written in English. It is, however, worth persevering to the end of the book, not only because Gillett brings together many lines of expertise and enquiry in a novel way, but also because there emerges from these dense pages a challenging vision of the human subject.

Gillett's primary thesis, if I have rightly discerned it, is this. Human beings are animals, but not *merely* animals. They are also persons, and from the first they are following a particular developmental path, the end point of which is incorporation into the world of inter-personal relations. It is only as embodied, however, that they can participate in these relations, and the human condition is that of the 'embodied subject'. Such an embodied subject has a soul – not in the sense of an immaterial entity that could be detached from the body and endure without it, but in something like the sense of Aristotle's 'form'. The soul is that which identifies the human being as somebody, by ordering his life and activities as 'mine'. The development of the human being is in the first instance cognitive, involving conceptual skills, and therefore the grasp of rule-following. However, conceptual skills are acquired only through interaction with others. Hence the moral sense – the sense of being in relations of reciprocity and accountability towards others of one's kind – is an integral part of being human.

The human being also has an individual identity: he is who he is, and not another thing. This identity is not conferred upon him by some real essence to be described in biological terms. For example, a person does not derive his identity from his biological origins in the union of two cells. His identity is in some sense the product of a continuous narrative, of which he himself is the author. Gillett spends some time attacking the views of Parfit and others on the topic of personal identity, while taking from Parfit the thought that what matters to us are continuities rather than Leibnizian principles of individuation. The relevant continuities concern the story that is accessible to me, in memory, intention, and relationships. Hence self-attribution has a central role in the life, and also in the concept, of the person. And my self-attributions are not determined by the biological processes on which my life depends but are essentially revisable, projecting both backwards in memory and forwards in intention a self-conception that evolves through my dialogue with others.