

Introduction

Traversing the Theological Fantasy

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The Real Introduction

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S PROTAGONIST IN *Notes from Underground* nicely identifies the central thesis of this book, namely, that theology in the wake of Lacanian psychoanalysis is devoid of the “the big Other,” i.e., a guarantee that a system of belief is forever secured by a master-signifier around which all meaning takes its place. Indeed, this book reverses this thesis: Only after Lacan can theology mean anything at all. It is precisely by rejecting the idol of God's necessity (*deus ex machina*) that theology can only make sense in and through the wild untamable flux and fury of an uncontrollable contingency. Radical contingency grounds the truth of an infinite faith beyond our primordial drive and instinct to control all things—like Aaron's golden calf that attempts to hijack the infinite in terms of a master-signifier into which all our longings and desire can be cast upon ever so easily. With our hands washed free of faith by controlling the absolute, the desire for living is denuded and life is substituted by believing in a fake god, the big Other. In short, Lacanian psychoanalysis diagnoses the symptom inherent in theology, namely, a symptom that relies upon the hidden idol underneath its golden veneer. Thus the very term *theology* is metonymic in that it refers to a structure that unconsciously misnames its own truth, the truth of the infinite that is substituted for a fake reality of a false God of the absolute.

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One of the principle goals of the psychoanalytic method is to release repressed traumatic experiences so that those experiences can be articulated and desire flows again. It is our contention that traditional theology has been the *raison d'être* for trauma, (the impossible demands of the Superego, The Paternal Father, the Big Other, God, etc.) which needs to be drained into the symbolic order so that desire once again flows through contingency, otherness, difference, and ultimately love. In treatment, the analyst listens “sideways” for shifts in tone, sounds, words, fixated images, stutters, and metonymic displacement in order to integrate the subject deeper into their fantasy, what Bruce Fink calls “traversing the fantasy.”¹ In a way, Post-Lacanian theology traverses the fantasy of an absolute God in order to live into the calling of a radically contingent love; or, that which we have no control over and yet desire. If you like, we want to rename theology as a flow of desire devoid of the big Other, a desire that gives birth to an ethics beyond morals, and to a connection beyond the centered Ego at home with itself.

Traditional theology has never been very good about coming unstuck. Indeed it has a tendency for a bi-polar logic wherein it either raises to a level beyond critique, solidifying in absolute authoritarianism (mania), or else it becomes drained of all authority (depression). We are all too familiar with theological mania, and the 1960s so-called death of God theology gave birth to this depressive form of theology in which God was simply dismissed only to be replaced with the Ego as Absolute devoid of community, difference, and infinite contingency. What we are proposing is a method of traversal, namely, traverse the theological fantasy in a manner that neither slips into mania (pure enjoyment, authoritarianism) nor depression (no enjoyment, depression), but rather the release of desire that won't kill itself, but live in-and-through-itself. But how does one traverse this theological deadlock? The answer this book suggests is through Lacanian psychoanalysis. To this end, we would like to draw on Fyodor Dostoevsky's example about how he proposes to traverse the theological fantasy.

In his powerful novella *Notes from Underground*, Dostoevsky gives a voice to a suppressed language, i.e., the “underground” voice that functions like the unconscious, or in Lacanian terms, the “order of the Real.” In the French language, the “Real” (*Reel*) means “to stop short of the actual object”; indeed “the order of the real” for Lacan inherently resists symbolization. The Real is that which cannot be encased in language. “The real is impossible” as Lacan says, in that it cannot be represented in language, but is nevertheless present in its very absence of the act of trying to symbolize it. So the very

1. Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 27.

use of language itself inherently creates a double-bind: language is necessary in order to communicate ideas, concepts, and desires, yet, in the very use of language, something always gets lost, and escapes the grasp of symbolizing those very ideas that we want to communicate. This loss is the presence of the Real in its very absence. In this way, Lacan identifies a paradox at work in the very use of language—in trying to communicate, we can only do so through a necessary *miscommunication*—and the “missing” part is that which haunts every word—it is the hidden *other* found in language itself haunting it like a ghost. So to get to the hidden (otherness) found within language, which is the very process of traversal, Lacan proposes a method not of direct engagement with language, but rather an *indirect* avenue of approach. This approach must therefore look for desire, the hidden otherness, in slips of the tongue, in unlocking trauma, sideways, if you will.

Exposing the Real can thus take on different formulations, genres, and mishaps. One way to attempt to expose the Real is through literature, and one of the great masters of this genre is Dostoevsky and his brilliant novella, *Notes from Underground*. We submit that Dostoevsky represents an extraordinary example of psychoanalytical treatment, that is, traversing the theological fantasy. The title of the work itself, *Zapiski iz podpol'ya* (also translated as *Letters from the Underworld*), immediately splits the world up into two parts: there is your standard “world” or *status quo*, the conscious world, and then there is the “sub-world,” the world beneath consciousness, that is, the unconscious world. The main thrust of the novella then is to try to express the unconscious world in the language of the conventional dog-eat-dog world. Interestingly enough, Dostoevsky wrote the novella as an attack both against Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s defense of a utopian, utilitarian novel *What Is to Be Done?*, as well as Western European philosophy, especially targeting Kant’s purely rational universe. But in his attack against determinism in all its forms, philosophical, traditional and social pressures to conform, he articulates what many consider to be the first existential novel.

What you see in this short novel is a struggle at the most fundamental level of existence; it is a struggle above all in trying to find the language for expressing the inexpressible—the Real. The key term here is *trying* to express the Real, but knowing all the while that it is impossible to do so. It is like Sisyphus, a crowned king condemned to repeating the seamlessly absurd act of rolling a boulder up the side of a mountain only to watch the valley swallow the boulder up again. Sisyphus’s punishment was repeating this meaningless act forever. But as Albert Camus masterfully concludes in his *Myth of Sisyphus*, what matters most of all in life is not finding meaning as a fixed thing (the big Other), but living the fullest life possible given the non-existence of fixed meaning itself.

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Camus thus echoes Dostoevsky's realization that expressing the Real is impossible; nevertheless one committed to a true, authentic life is compelled to try to express the inexpressible *anyway*. And that is the basic matrix that structures *Notes from Underground*. Further, the very matrix itself thus gives rise to the enigmatic protagonist, "The Underground Man" who opens the novel in the Imaginary register: "I am a sick man. . . . I am a wicked man. An unattractive man."² The very appearance of a self-reflective and conscious ego "I" that appears in the midst of the conscious "everyday" world is deeply disturbing to the reader, and a product of the Symbolic Order itself, for as Dostoevsky himself maintains: ". . . such persons as the writer of such notes (i.e., the Underground Man) not only may but even must exist in our society, taking into consideration the circumstances under which our society (i.e., language) has generally been formed."³ In other words, what makes the Underground Man so disturbing is that he calls attention to the very sickness of what society and tradition have fashioned, namely, a world without a conscience, a world, if you will, that systematically enacts and socially reproduces⁴ repression of the unconscious/Real as such. Said differently, society and tradition, according to the Underground Man, have a vested interest in *not* exposing the absence of a center point of *static* meaning around which all social mores take their place and into which the subject is determined as if they are a fixed, infinite object at home in the house of the "ego."

The Underground Man impolitely deconstructs our assumptions and tacit presupposition about meaning. The act of socially repressing the truth of the void of our existence is precisely what gives rise to boredom and creates action without substance and truth.

I emphatically repeat: ingenuous people and active figures are active simply because they are dull and narrow-minded . . . [And] . . . as a consequence of their narrow-mindedness, they take the most immediate and secondary causes for the primary ones, and thus become convinced more quickly and easily than others that they have found an indisputable basis for their doings, and so they feel at ease. . . . For in order to begin to act, one must first be completely at ease, so that no more doubts remain.⁵

2. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1993) 3.

3. See *ibid.*, Dostoyevsky's "Author's Note" on the bottom of page 5.

4. This is Louis Althusser's basic question in his famous essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster [Monthly Review Press, 1971]). Althusser states, "The Ultimate condition of production [i.e., social formation via language] is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production" (85).

5. Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 17–18.

Society thus rests on the notion of fake peace so as to justify their actions that are morally acceptable to do. Doubt itself is repressed out of existence so one's social actions are not based on the truth of our radical contingency, but rather on a false sense of a master-signifier that neutralizes risk, openness, and real personality, even love. To this problem, the Underground Man asks a series of disturbing but necessary questions about our subjective contingency: "Well, and how am I, for example, to set myself at ease? Where are the primary causes on which I can rest, where are my bases? Where am I going to get them?" And his answer reveals less a stability than a continual and infinite growth, for he ". . . exercises thinking, and, consequently, for me [the Underground Man] every primary cause immediately drags with it yet another, still more primary one, and so on *ad infinitum*."⁶

The honesty with which the Underground Man penetrates beyond the social crust of consciousness reveals a contradiction: everyday social consciousness is false consciousness because it rests on a premise that cannot hold up under the conditions of "thinking" that is, living a true and authentic life in the face of the void. This is the traumatic act of "traversing the fantasy." Dostoevsky's Underground Man unveils a deeper more profound logic operating beneath the surface (like the unconscious) that society projects and maintains. This unveiling by no means captures the Real (this is impossible), but it does challenge the categorical social—desire to control human beings by means of a purely rational, mathematical measurement. However, as the Underground Man says, "All man needs is independent volition, whatever that independence might cost and wherever it might lead."⁷

It is not new knowledge that what the Underground Man is pointing out with regard to social logic is intimately related to the highs and lows of bi-polar disorder in general as discussed above. Theology in the twentieth century has reached an apex of both authoritarianism and fundamentalism in absolute terms (mania), as well as being reduced to a nominalist disinterestedness (depression), i.e., the death of God theology as well as a general laziness that collapses into an indifference toward all possibility of meaning making. What this book is proposing above all an attempt to traverse the theological fantasy by one's own life lived in the wake of an infinite power beyond the purely rational on the one hand and apathy on the other. The psychoanalytic structure of Lacan's through, we surmise, gives us the matrix of traversing the theological fantasy.

6. Ibid., 18.

7. Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 24 (different translation—Penguin Classics).

The Symbolic Introduction

How then does this collection sit within the current of scholarship on Lacan and theology? In many respects this collection is both a tribute *to* and critique of the first such collection to expressly treat the work of Lacan and theology in tandem: *Lacan and Theological Discourse* (1989).⁸ For those intellectual pioneers, including Carl Raschke, Mark C. Taylor, Charles Winquist, and Edith Wyschogrod, the chief import of Lacan was his critique of the ego as an alienating form of defense against desire (i.e., lack). Their orientation was distinctly Heideggerian, but they took their cue from Derrida and Levinas as well. In the eyes of these authors Lacan was a thinker of “Otherness,” forcing theology, in the words of Charles Winquist, “to seriously assess the problematic of its own textuality”; Lacan reminds us that all theological discourse is a form of speech and it therefore speaks a lack.⁹

Derrida had already made connection between his philosophy of *différance* and negative theology, as had Lacan concerning his own work,¹⁰ and it was a short step from there on the part of theologians to couple postmodern “Otherness” with the biblical injunction against idolatry. As Catherine Clément put it: a Lacanian theology would be a

miss-tical *a/theology*, [is] one that would involve real risks. . . . For Lacanian analysis “does not provoke any triumph of self-awareness,” as Roudinseco rightly points out. “It uncovers, on the contrary, a process of decentering, in which the subject delves . . . into the loss of his mastery.”¹¹

By ceding mastery theology could become less concerned with defending existing doctrine to become instead an “ethical experiment in letting things be in their otherness.”¹²

Given that the barb of Lacan’s critique was aimed at American ego-psychology, it is understandable that the American contributors to *Lacan and Theological Discourse* made the critique of the ego their central point. Through attenuation of desire, reified theological forms are opened out into the uncertain play of the symbolic. In this sense their work may be

8. *Lacan and Theological Discourse*, ed. Edith Wyschogrod et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

9. Charles Winquist, “Lacan and Theological discourse,” in *ibid.*, 26–38, 32.

10. Jacques Lacan, “Seminar XIV, Logic of Phantasy,” trans. Cormac Gallagher (unpublished manuscript), 25.1.67, lecture ix, 3.

11. Catherine Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 144.

12. Winquist, “Lacan and Theological Discourse,” 31.

characterized in terms of discourse formation; i.e., their concern is the way theology is falsely unified through institutional forms when desire is lost sight of.

However, such an approach could easily become drained of all authority or institutional mooring, pushing a Lacanian theology into a very private space, a point succinctly put by David Crownfield in the collection when he says that these theologians “locate theological discourse in the . . . imaginary, in the isolation of the solitary and marginal wanderer without context or community.”¹³

Part of the problem was material: the accessibility of the primary sources themselves. One notes in the first instance, and with few exceptions, the range of primary material consulted in *Lacan and Theological Discourse* amounts to little more than Alan Sheridan’s selections from *Écrits*; Jacqueline Rose’s selections and translations from *Seminar XX*, published under the title *Feminine Sexuality*; *Seminar XI*, the first edited and published Seminar; and Anthony Wilden’s critical edition of “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis.”¹⁴

The impact of this limited selection is acutely felt in Mark C. Taylor’s contribution. He pits Lacan against Lacan, reading the later seminar “God and Woman’s *jouissance*” against Lacan’s early work on law and the name-of-the-father.¹⁵ In the later work, Lacan suggests there must be a specifically female *jouissance* not prey to the economy of patriarchy, which Taylor identified with the early work.¹⁶ However, missing from the debate is any reference to the formulas of sexuation around which discussion of gender revolves in the later Lacan.

If part of the problem was the lack of texts, this was further compounded by the texts that were available. To take *Écrits* as an initial example, first: even in the French original the text only covered the period up to 1966; second: neither the French nor English editions showed much regard for any chronological order—the French edition starts with an essay from 1966, followed by one from 1955. All of this conspired to offer up, as David Macey has argued, a neatly homogenous picture of Lacan.¹⁷

13. David Crownfield, “Summary of Chapter 1,” in Wyschogrod et al., *Lacan and Theological Discourse*, 38.

14. A. Wilden, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

15. Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XX, Encore: Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (New York: Norton, 1999) 64–77.

16. Mark C. Taylor, “Refusal of the Bar,” in Wyschogrod et al., *Lacan and Theological Discourse*, 50.

17. David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* (London: Verso, 1988) 10.

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This picture was aided by the inclusion of a glossary and index of concepts. These additions to the text, written and compiled by Jacques-Alain Miller, played a crucial role for an earlier generation determining how the text was read, selectively navigating the reader around the text, shutting out some influences while privileging others.

As Miller himself tells us in a series of pointers in which he justifies his inclusion of an index: “in the index, it is the concept that must be looked for, not the word,”¹⁸ and arguably this was his self-stated aim: “forming a system” for the training of analysts. Nonetheless, as Macey argued, *Écrits* appeared a “conceptually homogenous text rather than a collection of papers written over a considerable period of time, with all the shifts and modifications that implies,”¹⁹ and in this way the presentation flattened out the “polysemic complexity” of the work.²⁰

However, chiefly, the case to be made is that the lack of easy available *Seminars* and a lack of critical attention to reception of the texts also meant that many of Lacan’s most profound discussions on theology remained out of reach. A case in point, as noted by Cormac Gallagher, is the way that Lacan’s fundamental concepts are often accompanied by a major text or paradigmatic point within the history of thought: Love in transference is accompanied by Plato’s *amalg* from *Symposium*; the o-object in relation to the gaze is accompanied by Velasquez’s *Las Meninas*; *Antigone* serves as the paradigm for sublimation in tragedy. Yet as Gallagher points out, none of these figures, literary or otherwise, are accorded the importance Lacan gave to Pascal, who remains curiously absent from discussions on the relation of the subject to Other.

What the *Seminars* have brought into view is the way religious and theological traditions are a constant source of reference for Lacan, and in particular, the degree to which theology plays a central structuring role in Western subjectivity for Lacan.

By contrast what we find in the early theological appropriation is a formalisation of Lacan’s work into a central philosophical critique of onto-theology, but little on the central place theological discourse plays within his texts, or the way they later develop. So where early debates about his status were branded in terms of “structuralist,” “post-structuralist,” or “surrealist,” we now increasingly find “Catholic,” “Reformed,” or “Buddhist” versions of Lacan.

18. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete English Translation*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2005) 893.

19. Macey, *Lacan in Contexts*, 13.

20. Elizabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan: An Outline of a Life and a History of a Thought*, trans. Barbara Bray (Cambridge: Polity, 1999) 305.

Žižek

Central to some of the contributors to this volume is the subsequent reception of Lacan by Slavoj Žižek. Arguably part of Žižek's success has also been, like Miller, to synchronise Lacan's work as a whole into a formal logic, but also and more startlingly, the direct way in which he has brought the later Lacan, by way of Hegel and German idealism, to bear directly on theology, politics, and culture with often surprising results.

Hegel understood the Christian passion in terms of a Godhead who dies absolutely on the cross, kenotically pouring himself out, only to be resurrected both in and as the material world. Henceforth Spirit names not some ethereal animating power, but quite simply the corporal body of the church. All of this makes for a transition from a traditional transcendental framework from which God might be said to participate in reality, to an immanent and dialectical framework according to which God is continually reborn into the things of this world; *traversing the fantasy*.

Speaking of the passion in this way eliminates the need of God to serve as an external guarantor of meaning. In place of the Big Other we get a God who fully abandons himself into his own creation, “fully engaging himself in it up to dying, so that we, humans, are left with no higher Power watching over us, just with the terrible burden of freedom and responsibility for the fate of divine creation, and thus of God himself.”²¹

For Žižek, as Cyril O'Regan puts it, the logic of kenosis signals an end to “obfuscation and fetishization, and a liberation into the inexplicable joy and suffering of the world.”²² In this way he links both psychoanalysis and theology with revolutionary praxis. Indeed, he goes as far as to suggest that theology offers the very first critique of ideology in the Biblical figure of Job. Faced with unending suffering, Job refuses the solace offered by the theologians according to which his suffering is given meaning by way of recourse to a metaphysical answer (e.g., you suffer in this life because . . .); rather he asserts the very meaninglessness of suffering to the extent that even God cannot supply an answer. And because Žižek reads Job as the precursor to Christ, he is able to push the consequences of this logic a little further. Christ's cry of dereliction upon the cross is the point at which God faces up to his own powerlessness: God is an atheist.

As Adam Kotsko has noted, Žižek's approach is in accord with the Protestant death-of-God theology out of which many of the contributions to

21. Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009) 25.

22. Cyril O'Regan, “Žižek and Milbank and the Hegelian Death of God,” *Modern Theology* 26 (2010) 278–86.

the first collection arose.²³ Consider, for example, Mark C. Taylor's heralding in of postmodernism as a "carnavalesque comedy" in which God is dead, and the incarnated Christ becomes ceaselessly disseminated.²⁴ Indeed, more recently both Žižek and Thomas Altizer—the father of Protestant death-of-God theology—have mutually endorsed each other's work.²⁵

However, unlike his theological contemporaries Žižek does not take the death of God as an event that opens the field up for the "reassertion of the true abyss of Divinity as a spectral promise."²⁶ Rather, what dies is the "very structuring principle of our entire universe." The logic of kenosis offers a "properly apocalyptic shattering power."²⁷ And this traumatic power names the event or monstrosity of Christ: the cry of dereliction upon the cross. Žižek's Christology is therefore both orthodox (Christ must actually be God to push the consequences of the logic to its extreme); and exemplary: God's kenotic outpouring becomes the subjective task, emptying the subject of the illusion of a substantial self. In short, Žižek enlists for his emancipatory project all the "perverse twists of redemption through suffering, the death of God, etc., but without God."²⁸

What are the implications of this shift in focus? In the first instance this makes for a more subversive edge. If the earlier contributors were seeking to disrupt imaginary identifications in the name of the symbolic through attenuation to desire, Žižek wants to disrupt the symbolic in the name of the Real through attenuation to the Drive (to which we shall return. Second, because Žižek equates the real with religion it follows that his work develops into what may be termed more broadly a political theology. So, while the former thinkers remain largely critical of institutional religion they rarely touch on political theology. By contrast, not only does Žižek critique institutional religion, he critiques the wider social order, albeit by way of theology. To take an example, while Taylor critiques traditional theology in the name of a return to the "goddess," seen from the perspective of Žižek such a return amounts to reinstating the Big Other; instead Žižek makes the

23. Adam Kotsko, "The 'Christian Experience' Continues: On Žižek's Work since *The Parallax View*," *IJZS Special Issue: Žižek's Theology* 4.4 (2010). <http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/272/365>.

24. Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 163.

25. Žižek spoke on the same platform with Altizer at the AAR Annual Meeting 2009 and affirmed his similarity with Altizer's Hegelian position on the death of God.

26. Žižek and Milbank, *Monstrosity of Christ*, 260.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012) 119.

case for the traumatic perversity contained within incarnational logic as the means to a wider social critique.

One may frame the difference Žižek introduces into the reception of Lacan in terms of the shift in Lacan's own work from desire to drive, and their relative object—the o-object or *objet petit a*. As Žižek explains, “in the shift from desire to drive, we pass from the *lost object*, to *loss itself as an object*.” Desire strives for an impossible fullness which, forced to renounce, becomes stuck on a partial object; drive however represents more radically the “drive” “to break the All of continuity in which we are embedded.”²⁹

To put this in theological terms, when God is treated under the rubric of desire, God is taken simply as the impossible object, forever pursued, but also that which forever eludes the subject. This is the God of negative theology in which God's impossible fullness forces the subject to renounce in one way or another any positive predication of God. By contrast, it is precisely the bizarre passionate attachments of faith that highlight for Žižek the point at which “human life is never “just life”: humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by a strange drive to enjoy life in excess, passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things.”³⁰

As the above quote highlights, related to the economy of the drive is the coterminous question of enjoyment. From the perspective of desire, enjoyment is endlessly deferred, pertaining as it does to the lost object; however from the perspective of Drive, enjoyment is “satisfied,” or rather, a satisfaction is generated from the very repetition of failure experienced *qua* desire. One of the key points Žižek takes from this transition is the transformation that occurs between a failure (desire) and the ability to translate a failure into a success (drive). Žižek's point here is that the shift from desire to drive is of itself a paradigmatic example of the way in which, socio-politically speaking, we can transform “failure into triumph.”³¹

Taken together then, it might be said that where earlier theologians took the eccentricities of theology as outmoded, to be jettisoned in favour of the normative (“post-structuralist”) discourse on language and the self, Žižek takes the eccentricities of theology, and Christianity in particular, as the very “lost” cause which as such, might save the world.³²

In his “Extraduction” to *Lacan and Theological Discourse*, David Crownfield closes the book by opening up a future discussion. He points to the relation between Lacan and Kierkegaard: “Lacan's radical diagnosis

29. *Ibid.*, 498.

30. *Ibid.*, 499.

31. *Ibid.*, 498.

32. *Ibid.*, 1010.

of the self as split, decentred, imaginary, unachievable is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's.³³ However, Kierkegaard is seen to offer a resolution of sorts to the extent that the fractured self is unified through a decision, specifically the "decision of faith [or love] in the God of Jesus Christ."³⁴

If, as Alain Badiou has argued, Lacan is "our Hegel,"³⁵ then Žižek may well, despite Hegelian leanings, be "our Kierkegaard" (a reveller of paradox, and a pugnacious, astute commentator on cultural life)³⁶—hence the prescience of David Crownfield's concluding remarks. However, Žižek sees in the passionate attachment of faith, not a resolution as such—any more than Kierkegaard would have—but rather, after Lacan, a perverse attachment of enjoyment to a kernel of revolutionary thought.

The Imaginary Introduction

This volume is divided into two parts. Part One is titled "Lacan, Religion and Others," and productively puts Lacan's work in conversation with other philosophers, theologians, and religious figures around the question of religion. Part Two, "Theology and the Other Lacan," more explicitly and intensively imagines what theology might mean or become after traversing the fantasy of its own identity by way of an engagement with Lacan.

The first chapter is by Slavoj Žižek, the most influential philosopher writing today. Žižek's contribution, "Cogito, Madness and Religion: Derrida, Foucault and Then Lacan," shows how Kant's reading of Descartes gets repeated and amplified in different ways in Foucault and Derrida. There is an intrinsic madness of the subject, and this madness is religious in an important sense. Lacan's work provides Žižek a vantage point from which to appreciate and critique both Foucault and Derrida's reflections on madness and the Cartesian *cogito*.

From Žižek, we step back to consider Thomas Aquinas, and Tina Beattie gives us a provocative constructive re-reading of Aquinas avec Lacan, mediated by the rock group Queen's famous song "Bohemian Rhapsody." For Beattie, "Nothing Really Matters," and yet, strangely enough, everything matters for a Lacanian-inspired theology that returns to the Middle Ages. This return to Aquinas is not intended to become handmaiden to a

33. David Crownfield, "Extraduction," in Wyschogrod et al., *Lacan and Theological Discourse*, 162.

34. Ibid.

35. Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* (London: Continuum, 2009) 132.

36. Slavoj Žižek, "Kierkegaard as a Hegelian," in Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006) 75–80.

sovereign King, but to adopt a position as the “queen” that queers or makes strange all the sciences in the name of theology. Beattie’s essay also helps open up the terrain that is engaged in Part Two.

Shifting from Aquinas to Luther, Carl Raschke’s essay, “Subjectivation, Salvation, and the Real in Luther and Lacan,” shows a strange affinity between Lacan and Luther despite the evident and much-documented Catholic elements of Lacan’s work. Raschke suggests that there is a structurally similar undecidability between law and gospel in Luther’s theology that corresponds to the undecidable tension between the symbolic and the Real in Lacan’s psychoanalysis. Raschke suggests that theological discourse concerns the speech of God, and we must understand this in psychoanalytic terms as speech of the Other that insists upon a truth which is not objective but is subjective truth, *our* truth.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Buddha; Mario D’Amato in “*Lacan avec le Bouddha*” provides an analysis of some of the overlapping concepts shared by Lacanian psychoanalysis and Buddhism, particularly the Yogacara tradition. Both traditions focus on the limits and the possibilities of language, and how language connects paradoxically (or parallaxically) with the Real.

After this engagement with Buddhism we turn to atheism, in the form of Martin Hägglund’s radical atheism, which is the subject of a friendly critique by Adrian Johnston. In “Life Terminable and Interminable,” Johnston demonstrates how a Lacanian perspective complicates Hägglund’s straightforward affirmation of life as infinite temporal survival. He suggests that Hägglund confuses prescription with description, and that Hägglund prescribes the radical atheism he pretends to describe in Derrida’s work. Johnston suggests that both Derrida’s and Lacan’s thinking about ghosts opens up a perspective on the complex and fantastic nature of human desire in its unconscious effects that Hägglund neglects.

In her essay “Solidarity in Suffering with the Non-Human,” Katerina Kolozova develops a provocative understanding of Judith Butler’s thought by crossing it not only with Lacan but also the non-philosophy of François Laruelle. She suggests that Butler and Donna Haraway offer resources for a universal definition of humanity as a creature that is capable of identifying with suffering. We become human by directly identifying with the Real of the suffering body, rather than being caught up in the transcendental and symbolic mediations of language. This becoming human is also an overcoming of the essential limits of philosophical humanism and a way to embrace our solidary existence as a human animal, a non-human in the sense of Laruelle’s non-philosophy. Here both Christ and Oedipus serve as exemplary figures of the non-human. Kolozova’s rich account opens up

Lacan to a kind of non-Lacan, and this political and ethical matrix provides resources to reconceive and reconfigure theology itself.

Part Two, “Theology and the Other Lacan,” more explicitly and intensively reworks Lacan in theological terms that deform our understanding of theology and reconfigure our understanding of Lacan. In his essay “There Is Something of One (God): Lacan and Political Theology,” Ken Reinhard rereads Lacan’s formulas of sexuation in a political theological context over against Carl Schmitt. Reinhard reads Lacan from the standpoint of Alain Badiou, and suggests that Lacan offers not only a political theology of sovereignty based on a masculine logic of exception, which accords with Schmitt’s political theology, but also a political theology of the neighbor based on a feminine logic of not-all. In the latter case, a “something of One” is the product rather than the agent of discourse. Here the “subject” of political theology is not God or the self but the neighbor.

From the idea of the One in Lacan, we turn to the question of “Woman and the Number of God.” Lorenzo Chiesa provides a magisterial interpretation of *Seminar XX*. Chiesa, perhaps the most careful contemporary reader of Lacan, distinguishes not only between a masculine and a feminine *jouissance*, but also and more importantly between two forms of a feminine *jouissance*, one that is phallic and one that is mystical or non-phallic. The non-phallic female *jouissance* subtracts from the more general phallic *jouissance*, and the status of this mystical *jouissance* has implications for how we think about God, including the number of God, which is not One but also not simply two.

In her contribution, “Secular Theology as Language of Rebellion,” Noelle Vahanian inhabits this complex space opened up by Reinhard’s political theology of the neighbor to suggest that Lacan’s psychoanalytic desire is an intrinsically “rebellious desire to no end.” For Vahanian, a secular theology of language in the wake of the death of God as sovereign subject takes up the task of what Julia Kristeva calls rejection in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. What Kristeva calls rejection or revolt, Vahanian names rebellion, and it is this rebellion that drives secular theology in its restlessness. She expresses a rich interpassivity in which “I am active through the Other” that she finds in the jazz music of Louis Armstrong, and this is a profoundly religious experience.

In “Making the Quarter Turn,” Thomas Lynch reclaims liberation theology in light of Lacan’s work as well as Žižek’s political recuperation of it. For Lynch, a Lacanian interpretation of liberation theology produces a new form of discourse that emerges out of the split subject of the hysteric’s discourse, one of the four forms of discourse Lacan analyzes in *Seminar XVII*. What begins as a hysterical discourse then opens up to become a new analyst’s discourse by traversing the fantasy of traditional theological discourse.

For Marcus Pound, theology begins and ends with grace, and grace is an underappreciated theme of Lacan's work. Pound traces Lacan's understanding of grace in his readings of Pascal in *Seminar XIII* and *Seminar XVI*. Grace is not simply a theological problem, but the very locus of subjectivity for Lacan because it mediates the encounter with the Real. Grace refers us to a God or Other that structures our subjectivity and our experiences. Pound attends to the theological framework that underlies Lacan's thought as the very possibility of psychoanalysis.

Clayton Crockett concludes by wrestling explicitly with Lacan's proclamation of the triumph of religion, which is referenced by other contributors. He suggests that we distinguish theology in Hegelian terms into theology in itself, which is ideology, theology for itself, which is energy, and theology in and for itself, which is psychoanalysis. Crockett offers readings of how the question of God is related to the status of the Other in Lacan's work, and he analyzes the shift in Lacan's work from the Other to the other, the *objet petit a*, in *Seminar XVII*. This shift is coincident with an extraordinary transformation of global capitalism, and Crockett traces some of the political and theological implications. Altogether, these essays develop some of the most important theological results of engaging with Lacan's work, as theology struggles with the task of traversing its own fantasy to arrive, however fleetingly, at the Real.