

Friendship as Sacred Knowing: Overcoming Isolation. By Samuel Kimbriel. New York: Oxford University, 2014. Pp. xiii + 224. \$74.

At the core of Kimbriel's work is the contrast between the "disengaged stance" or "buffered self" (delineated by philosopher Charles Taylor) characteristic of modernity, and what K. (following Taylor) refers to as the "porous self," which is a richer, more metaphysically grounded understanding of the human person with deep roots in the Christian and Greek philosophical traditions. Friendship as sacred knowing is treated within the wider context of the question of the relationship between these two contrasting understandings of the self.

K. maintains that adherents of the disengaged stance take it to be normative and universal, and that it has come to be accepted as such in much of modern thought and culture. Whereas premodern thinkers understood the human person as deriving meaning from being situated within a wider cosmos, the disengaged stance locates the source of meaning and rationality within the person; it emphasizes careful analysis, instrumental control, and a tendency to impose (rather than discover) rational order (11). For K., as for Taylor, the disengaged stance (contrary to its self-understanding) is itself the product of a particular set of historical circumstances. Not only is it not universal and self-evident, it is a deeply flawed understanding of the human person's relationship to reality.

K. locates the root of the problem in the fact that the buffered self is unsettled by thoughts of its own finitude. Fleeing this condition, the self approaches the world as an array of objects to be mastered and controlled in accord with the dictates of its internally generated standards of rationality. Buffered, disengaged, and turned in on itself, the resulting condition is one of alienation and isolation. Consequently, "if the distortion here arises from a denial of finitude as one misplaces love upon ideals of invulnerability, certainty, and control, so the path beyond disengagement must also consist in a confrontation of human finitude through the remaking of love" (137). Drawing on the Johannine writings, Augustine, and Aquinas, K. explains how, in these authors, charity is understood as a form of sacred knowing. For these authors, finitude is not something to be feared, but is the condition of openness to deification (159). The "very act of enquiring becomes an act of friendship as the soul struggles to become present to the Inner Teacher who has been most intimately present to the soul all along" (165). Through this kind of friendship, the buffered self is dissolved, as "practice, being and vision thus ever more become coterminous" (171).

One of the strengths of this volume is its carefully constructed conversation among varying voices revolving around the particular set of questions he sets out to address. Throughout the book K. goes out of his way to remind his reader how each entering voice can be related to those he has already introduced. He arranges the chapters such that each builds on and advances the argument made in the preceding chapter. For the most part, the writing is clear and free of jargon. While the material being discussed is sometimes technical and will be better appreciated by those familiar with the sources, the care with which K. has structured his argument makes his work quite reader-friendly.

I am sympathetic to K.'s argument and think he has done as well as anyone I know in making the case for the impoverished nature of the disengaged stance as well as for the richness of premodern Greek and Christian reflection on these questions. My only negative criticism concerns his treatment of Descartes and, to a lesser extent, Aquinas. Voltaire said that "if God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him"; and I sometimes think that for many contemporary writers in philosophy and theology, the same goes for Descartes. What would authors like K. do without such a perfect foil against which to direct their arguments? My problem with this is that Descartes becomes a straw man, and the deeply meditative, even Augustinian, character of some of his major work is downplayed, if not overlooked. Descartes was not being ironic when he titled one of his major works *Meditations*. My reservation with regard to K.'s approach to Aquinas is that he exaggerates the limiting consequences of Aquinas's epistemological stance. Where K. tends to see in Aquinas's view a human nature hampered in the pursuit of its final end by an intrinsic finitude, others might argue that Aquinas is emphasizing the joy of coming to know God's creation through sense and understanding. But these criticisms should in no way detract from the overall excellence of K.'s work.

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The Wisdom of the Liminal: Evolution and Other Animals in Human Becoming. By Celia Deane-Drummond. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014. Pp. xii + 346. \$35.

Deane-Drummond indicates that the present volume "could be seen in some sense as a companion volume" to her earlier *Christ and Evolution* (2009) (30). As both biologist and theologian, she seeks to develop an inclusive interpretation of theological anthropology that holds together both evolutionary interpretations of the human condition and the Christian conviction that Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection reveals what human beings are to become. In the present volume, she engages "most closely with evolutionary theories that are of most relevance to anthropology, and as interpreted by anthropologists, rather than focusing more generally on evolutionary theory as such" (51). She is critical, however, of any theory that reduces Christian theology to evolution, as in the linear view of Teilhard de Chardin—"an understanding of the human through theological reflection can never be reduced to or contained within evolutionary biology in the manner that is sometimes portrayed in theistic evolution, even though there are family resemblances in both discourses that help us articulate in a richer way what it means to be human" (196). D.-D. seeks, then, a "convergence" between evolutionary theory and theological analysis (215).

Crucial here is Hans Urs von Balthasar's notion of *Theo-drama*. While critical of his anthropocentrism, virtual ignoring of other creaturely beings, and attitudes toward women, D.-D. finds theologically helpful Balthasar's view of God's infinite freedom