

like Swinburne's out-and-out dualism: we are 'pure mental substances' (p. 194). Swinburne discusses an argument from providence, which requires some evils. He then tries to decide whether the amount of suffering in the universe can be justified. He finds that, on balance, the evils are not so great that they make the existence of God improbable. Surely, one of the lessons to be learnt from the *Book of Job* is that we cannot go in for this kind of weighing up of the evils in the world against good; it is beyond our capacity.

It comes as a surprise that Swinburne thinks the strongest argument for the existence of God is religious experience (chapter 13). This is rather the least certain argument, for it depends on subjective judgement and the reliability of other people's reports of their own experience. It is particularly open to objections from the natural scientists. Human religious experience is anyway too varied: one first has to agree on a common set of principles for assessing all its varieties.

Swinburne concludes that, on balance, theism is more probable than improbable. One may ask how much is achieved by arguing only that God probably exists.

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SEEN AND UNSEEN: VISUAL CULTURE, SOCIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY by Kieran Flanagan, *Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004, Pp. 288, £50.00 hbk.*

Kieran Flanagan is that comparative rarity among today's sociologists of religion – an accomplished and acute theorist whose self-assigned task has long been to liberate his peers from methodological and conceptual banality and to direct them towards a richer, more theologically sensate and culturally reflexive understanding of religion. Given the increasingly utilitarian expectations of funding agencies, the over-specialization of much social research and the ever-contracting cultural horizons of many students, such a transformation must surely remain problematic. Yet Flanagan's gift for clear, critical exposition (for example, his accounts of Bauman and Bourdieu), his exceptionally wide reading within and beyond the social sciences, his sheer stylistic versatility and almost Joycean evocation of place (whether the Lady Chapel at Ely or the Limerick townscape of his boyhood) make him a very persuasive advocate for shifting the focus of his own sub-discipline.

Indeed the notion of 'focus' is itself, in Flanagan's hands, much more than routine metaphor. For although he is adamant that 'sociology should have no ambitions to resolve what theologians cannot, ... the link between spiritual and corporeal sight' (p. 140) he is equally clear that 'if it is not continually to fail eye tests for gazing at an unseen order, sociology needs to make radical adjustments in its ways of seeing' (p. 159). In six thematically linked chapters, directed especially at his fellow sociologists of religion, he suggests how this might be achieved. One way is to pay more attention to Simmel than to Weber. Although Flanagan perhaps overplays what he calls the latter's 'disdain for the visual' (p. 24) and ignores his contention (albeit in the context of music) that 'it is the profoundest aesthetic experience which provides an answer to one's seeking self', his rehabilitation of Simmel in this context is wholly justified. He argues convincingly that 'Simmel's distinctive contribution to understanding the link between visual culture and piety lies in his emphasis on how the unseen acts on the seen through the means of the artistic imagination' (p. 171), although his claim that '*uniquely* for a sociologist he treated religion in ways that could be married to theology' (p. 6, my italics) surely disregards the homegrown work of David Martin, Robin Gill and indeed Flanagan himself. Others, too, may find Simmel's notion that 'in the colour of religion are to be found its vibrancy and its property of light'

(p. 110) more suggestive than persuasive, although certainly worth empirical investigation. It also resonates with what that Protestant pastor *manqué*, Vincent Van Gogh, wrote to his brother a generation earlier: 'I want to paint man and woman with that something of the eternal that the halo used to symbolise, but which we now seek to confer through our colour vibrations.'

A second major theme of this book is an extended and penetrating exploration of the religious consequences of today's symbiotic relationship between visual culture and the virtual. Here it is very rewarding (especially for those of us ignorant of, indifferent to or plain bored by the topic) to have such an enthusiastic and well-informed sociological colleague to do our thinking for us. Indeed it is especially fascinating to see Flanagan – a conservative Catholic – readily acknowledging the autonomy of cyberspace, the interdependence of the real and the virtual, and the implications of both for religion as very few sociologists have done – with the notable exception of the equally conservative Protestant, David Lyon! Nonetheless Flanagan is surely right to suggest that 'the Internet has expanded the significance of the seen and unseen in visual culture in ways that would seem unimaginable to the medieval mind' (p. 76), although one might well argue that his fear that 'the trouble with cyberspace and the reality it produces is that both seem to imperialise visual culture' (p. 76) would have been equally intelligible to mediaeval men and women visually colonized by, for example, Byzantine or High Gothic imagery. At the same time, despite a certain Baumanesque cultural pessimism – 'things become more hidden with the expansion of opportunities to see' (p. 89) – Flanagan is not merely alert to the direct role of websites in conversion, personal transformation and activating vocations; he also remains convinced that 'far from entrapping religion, cyberspace enlarges its possibilities and offers new opportunities for the self to find itself in mirroring the reality it desires' (p. 95). We shall see.

Unsurprising, therefore, that Flanagan with his strong sense of 'the need to look to see beyond what disciplinary eyes can see' (p. viii) should make a strong case for the centrality of visual culture in helping to fashion a more creative and complementary counterpoint between sociology and theology. The latter relationship has long preoccupied him (see *New Blackfriars* Vol. 78 No. 913 which discusses his work in detail.) Here he attempts a very sophisticated exercise in visual consciousness-raising for both disciplines. He points – rightly – to sociology's current neglect of visual culture, while also reminding us that 'cultural needs in regard to the visual are not adequately recognized in contemporary theology. It still does not feel the need to write a grammar for discerning the visual' (p. 88). Hence one potential growth point might be for both specialisms to redefine their relationship less in terms of competing truth claims, or seeing what the other cannot, and more as a mutual recognition that 'in some mysterious way the social is a vital ingredient in the linking of the seen and the unseen' (p. 132) Yet 'what,' asks Flanagan 'can sociology speak of that theologians do not know?' For him the answer 'is what oddly seems to elude the theologians' gaze; the making of faith *on* the ground of culture and in this context in relation to the visual.' He may be right, although for this reviewer two caveats remain: One is that few sociologists – from diverse religious backgrounds, or none – are likely to endorse Flanagan's own view that 'the face of Christ becomes the end point of the sociological gaze' (p. x); the other is the sheer difficulty of providing a *theological* legitimation for sociology at a time when the latter is perceived increasingly either as one among many 'virtual' religions or as little more than an adjunct to governmental or corporate social engineering. In short Flanagan's cherished 'faith' in sociology as a, indeed *the*, mode of reflexive cultural understanding may be misplaced, given what sociology has now become.

Overall, this is a book brimming with complex, subtly nuanced and closely woven argument. Its stylistic density is leavened by clear sign-posting, helpful recapitulations *en route*, and the author's penchant for aphoristic asides (e.g. 'the deepest of sins is to confuse the virtual with the real' p. 155). Yet certain reservations

continually re-surface. One is that Flanagan seems to regard late modernity, or what Bauman had called 'liquid modernity' ('the melting down and lack of solidification of what passes in contemporary culture' p. 45) as, *tout court*, the determinant of contemporary secular and religious change, while a strong case could also surely be made for the hegemonic parity, at least, of both globalization and the fundamentalist polarities invoked by the so-called 'clash of civilizations. Similarly, not all sociologists – or indeed theologians – would accept Flanagan's somewhat arbitrary division 'between the seen, as shaped in culture, and the unseen, as discerned through spiritual means' (p. 3). Durkheim, for one, often seems to argue that the unseen is culturally determined too, while art history is replete with examples of painters envisaging and depicting an 'unseen' Heaven with unnerving cultural specificity.

Thirdly, while Flanagan's critique of the anti-aesthetic subtext in Weber's 'Protestant Ethic' is certainly sustainable, he seems almost wilfully blind to evidence of any long-standing *visual* aesthetic within Protestantism itself. Dürer's woodcuts, Shaker furniture, some Pre-Raphaelites, even Ruskin himself, seem to pass him by. Indeed the latter's crucial role (as Michael Wheeler has shown) in promoting a 'Protestant Aesthetic' of seeing and believing, whether through viewing Nature or Italianate Catholic art, was integral to middle class Victorian religiosity. Similarly, although Flanagan makes a strong case for Catholic theology's crucial role in shaping Christian visual experience, he fails to acknowledge how, in the last two hundred years, the resultant art-work rarely advanced beyond mere *bondieuserie*. Finally, although one of Flanagan's primary objectives – to re-order and re-direct sociological and theological sensibilities in a more overtly ocular direction – is an increasingly urgent and important one, it could be argued that his focus on the visual *per se* is at the expense of any wider discussion of the sensory in general, and both the aural (e.g. musical form and expression) and the oral (food and drink) in particular. Such a discussion might well have lent more breadth and empirical support for Simmel's own firm contention – cited here by Flanagan – that 'art empowers the soul to supplement one world with the other and thereby to experience itself at the point of union' (p. 174)

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WITTGENSTEIN, AESTHETICS AND PHILOSOPHY edited by Peter B. Lewis, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004, Pp. 255, £49.50 hbk.

On the inside cover of this collection of twelve essays it is claimed that Wittgenstein's work in aesthetics has been 'unjustly neglected.' This may give the misleading impression that Wittgenstein has had relatively little influence on the subject, a claim made more plausible by the fact that this is the first book devoted exclusively to his aesthetics. Whilst it is true that Wittgenstein wrote relatively little on aesthetics, mostly remarks scattered throughout his corpus and notes taken from lectures, it is his broader philosophical views, ostensibly not dealing with aesthetic issues, which have been the basis of his profound influence on post-war Anglophone philosophy of art. For example, modern discussions on questions such as the definability of art, the role of theory in criticism and appreciation, and the nature of aesthetic experience have been greatly influenced by Wittgenstein's writings on family resemblance, language games and private experience.

What is seriously neglected, however, is the question of the relationship between positions in aesthetics arrived at using ideas such as these, and what we are able to infer of his own views on the particular aesthetic questions that