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Kotsko, Adam. *The Prince of This World.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017. 225 pages. $22.95 (paper). ISBN: 978-1-5036-0020-1.

From the opening paragraph of Adam Kotsko's book, the reader forms a clear impression of the trajectory it will follow. Kotsko relates the testimony offered to a grand jury by Ferguson, Missouri police officer Darren Wilson after he shot and killed the unarmed Michael Brown. "It looks like a demon," he said. The implication is clear—the depersonalized association of an unarmed black man with the demonic shares in the responsibility for his senseless death. This book attempts to develop an account of how that demonic simile came to be possible in the mind of a Ferguson cop. The attempt takes us back to the Hebrew biblical tradition and then on a whirlwind tour through the New Testament, the early church, and into "monasticism and medieval Christianity," where the figure of the "medieval devil" "is essentially the same devil handed down to secular modernity and therefore the devil best known to contemporary Western culture" (109). Kotsko then changes course; the second half of the book sketches the outlines of the biography of that medieval devil, from fallen angel to the "earthly city" to life in hell. This book covers quite a lot of territory in a very short time. It therefore skips like a stone through the very deep swell of the waters of Jewish and Christian theology, politics, and eschatology. Kotsko writes with wit, intelligence, and the sure-footed pace of an author who knows he is right and knows that it matters. This book bears a scholarly sensibility, very much in the spirit of Giorgio Agamben, whom Kotsko has frequently translated into English. But by the end, it is clear that Kotsko has written his own apocalypse, condemning our demonic world order (206) and inviting his readers toward a new vision of that world order overturned, of the devil saved.

Theological and philosophical study in the last twenty-five years has been rife with genealogies, from Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* to John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* to Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* and Thomas Pfau's *Minding the Modern.* What these genealogies share is an interest in the birth of modernity. Kotsko's genealogy aims more narrowly and more deeply, returning genealogy to its Foucaultian roots. He aims to unearth the symbolic frameworks and developments that create the Christian demonic imaginary. He chooses to write a genealogy instead of an intellectual history because the method of the latter "can never allow them to answer the deeper and more urgent question of *why* such ideas emerged

and developed in the way they did" (9). It is essentially an anti-theology, one that Kotsko writes with the urgent zeal of an evangelist. "On one level," he says, "theology has always been a victim blaming discourse" (3). He concedes that it has also served as a "weapon against oppression and injustice," but that is not the tradition he is trying to expose, and, to get at this destructive "long theological heritage," "one must learn to read texts as *strategies*, as interventions in a power struggle. It means accepting, with Foucault, that knowledge is not separate from power or even a mere tool of power but a form of power—and a particularly powerful one at that" (11). Kotsko grounds this discipline and obedience in what he describes as a "methodological credo," Nietzsche's famous depiction in the *Genealogy of Morals.* Having articulated these tenets of faith, Kotsko is prepared *credere ut intellegere,* to believe so as to understand. When seen through the lens of genealogical faith, the discourses of Satan, of political theology, of the problem of evil, of the atonement, of eschatology, all emerge as strategies of power. The task of this book, then, is to trace the particular lineaments of these several theologies that, he argues, all center around the figure of Satan.

The shape of the argument, to simplify an account that takes many parallel tacks as it goes, is something like this: Monotheistic traditions, given their structure, have to wrestle with the problem of evil. This speculation leads to the crafting of a figure of Satan, an adversary to God's will and authority. However, strict monotheism constrains the power of this figure, as Satan cannot in any sense be an equal and opposite force to the monotheistic God. So, in the context of Israel's experience of oppression and suffering at the hands of external oppression, first Pharaoh and then Antiochus Epiphanes provoke speculation on a hostile other who is both opposed to God and yet still subject to God's authority. Kotsko recasts the standard von Radian division (without citation) between "prophecy" and "apocalyptic" as different ways of accounting for this enemy. It is striking here that Kotsko does not cite or discuss much of the relevant literature on the development and definition of ancient apocalyptic, for which there is an abundant literature that would call some of these bifurcations into question.

The apocalyptic schema, which answers the problem of evil by casting it forward into a final conflict and judgment, is transformed in the Constantinian age. (Note, the Edict of Milan, such as it is, was written in 313, not 318, as the book reports (72).) The dawn of Christian establishment, to Kotsko, mandates the displacement of demonic authority, "the great world-historical reversal whereby the devil becomes a tool of the oppressor rather than the oppressed" (75). Kotsko goes

on to argue that, in the hands of Athanasius and, even more clearly, much later in Anselm, God adopts the role of Satan. He notes, e.g., that Anselm critiques the "rights of the devil" theories of atonement, and proposes "the notion that Christ, rather than being a ransom offered to the devil is now a sacrifice offered to God" (97). Christ's death becomes "the ransom paid to God" (96). Kotsko does not trouble to consider the differences, cultic and scriptural, between "ransom" and "sacrifice," and instead equates them absolutely. This becomes a pivot point around which "God becomes the devil" (103). "In short, the God of medieval Christianity is a God who delights in suffering, a God who has become demonic" (103). This medieval God "has become indistinguishable from the arbitrary and cruel rulers against whom the apocalyptic tradition protested […] he has become the devil" (105).

And, at the same time, the demonic is displaced onto the marginal and the powerless—onto Jews within and Muslims without, onto women, mystics, witches, and heretics within, "but also the increasingly repressed and reviled demands of the physical body itself" (105). For Kotsko, this is the deep truth of medieval politics and culture. This seems to be the energy that is driving Kotsko's narrative, and the rest of the book is devoted to exploring how this plays out in Western culture. These later sections are more explicitly in conversation with Foucault and Agamben, even as Kotsko engages Augustine, Dante, and Luther, among others. Here Kotsko has landed on something worth exploring, but it is something that has been explored in several venues already. R. I. Moore's *Formation of a Persecuting Society* comes to mind as perhaps the most significant critical challenge. A disappointment of this book is that Kotsko shows no awareness of this literature, or much else on apocalyptic thought, Satan, Antichrist, or so many of the other dimensions of his argument. Perhaps this could be attributed to Kotsko's preference for genealogy over "intellectual history," but it leads too often to superficial, cliché, or imprecise descriptions, e.g., of the monastic account of the body, of Anselm's doctrine of the atonement, of predestination, and so on. Kotsko's passion is striking, but the critical power of his argument is often obscured by this lack of depth of field. He often will be found reinventing the wheel (say, in his discussion of the demonization of the marginalized) or missing fundamental elements of argument (such as Anselm's distinction between ransom and sacrifice). So much time and space is covered, so quickly, that it is hard to absorb that critical force.

To manage a genealogy of this magnitude in one short book is quite a challenge. And, indeed, Kotsko has doubled down on the challenge, because, as I mentioned above, the book is composed

of two parts, and each is its own sort of genealogy, related to but distinct from the other. That, plus the sort of prophetic urgency that suffuses the book, make for an overall sense of compression. Kotsko can be incisive and creative in his readings of texts—his typology of political theological paradigms in the Hebrew Bible into Deuteronomistic, prophetic, and apocalyptic is both provocative and helpful—but every reading seems to move too quickly and without sufficient argument. One can appreciate this book as a prophetic *cri de coeur*, and with the author we can desire and hope for a world in which even the devil may be saved. But the roots of that hope are sunk just as deeply in the soil of ancient and medieval Christian sources, in the subversive (though too often subverted) claim that it is finally Love, and not power, "that moves the sun and other stars."

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