

Disease and Disability Metaphors in Gospel Worlds

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This year marks the 40th anniversary of the publication of Susan Sontag's celebrated work, *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), and nearly 20 years since her subsequent volume *Aids and Its Metaphors* (1989) was released. After receiving an advanced breast cancer diagnosis, Sontag reveals how she was exposed to the constellation of negative metaphors which discursively encircled her condition. Sontag contended that these metaphors not only evoked vivid emotional and sensory responses, but also wielded powerful symbolic influence over how her condition was understood and regarded in the public sphere. Cancer was 'felt' to be 'obscene in the original meaning of that word: ill-omened, abominable, and repugnant to the senses'.¹

Other incurable and/or 'feared' diseases incurred similar metaphorical cache. In her words:

The subjects of deepest dread (corruption, decay, pollution, anomie, weakness) are identified with the disease (that is, using it as a metaphor) [and] that horror is imposed on other things. The disease becomes adjectival. Something is said to be disease-like, meaning that it is disgusting or ugly.²

Disease metaphors were for Sontag 'weaponry' which furnished users with the means to brand and denounce certain individuals, ideologies, and/or ideas as 'morally if not literally contagious'³ and thus enforce their exclusion. This has powerful resonance with body politics in Greco-Roman literature which frequently imagined the populace as a body, and social problems as diseases which compromised the health of the whole polis.⁴ Whilst a healthy body often evaded interrogation, the diseased or disabled body demanded more explicit

¹ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrer, Strauss and Giroux, 1978), 8.

² Sontag, *Illness*, 58.

³ Sontag, *Illness*, 6.

⁴ See Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1995), 38–60. Such models have been theorised in relation to the Hebrew Bible by Mary Douglas and others who highlighted the significance of the material body as a symbol of the social body. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

consideration and often provided ‘rich veins’ for metaphorical construction. Disability studies theorists, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, contend that the rationale for such features is twofold: first ‘overheated symbolic imagery’ and second disease and disability’s role ‘as a pervasive tool of artistic characterisation’:⁵ whilst the ‘able’ and ‘well’ body does not demand scrutiny in narrative terms, the diseased or disabled body often functions to represent deviance, disorder or chaos. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their classic work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) also map out how disease and disability metaphors promote certain ideologies⁶ and construct ‘truth’ through the perceptions of those healthy bodies assumed by the discourse. In such rhetoric, the abled body is regularly assumed to be the norm and the diseased and/or disabled body as a jarring deviation from it.⁷ From a disability advocacy position, John Hull, who went blind in middle age, has also chastised those traditions which employ disability or disease metaphors to represent deviance as ableist (prejudicial against bodies which are perceived to fall short of a normative bodily ideal). Ableist metaphors give little thought to the live referents (individuals with illnesses or disabilities) of such images. In Hull’s words, ‘I know you only meant it metaphorically, but it is not very nice to be regarded as a metaphor for sin and unbelief’.⁸

Using Sontag’s classic work as a stimulant here, first, I will trace the ways in which metaphors surrounding leprosy (as ‘un-touch-ability’) and blindness (as an inability to navigate moral terrain) are employed in the gospels as potent sites of socio-political-religious commentary for the evangelists. It will be contended that such discourses work primarily through leprosy’s association with isolation and the stench of death, and blindness as an in-

⁵ David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 16.

⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3.

⁷ Julia Todolí, ‘Disease Metaphors in Urban Planning’ *CADAAD* 1 (2007), 51–60, 51.

⁸⁸ John Hull, ‘Open Letter from a Blind Disciple to a Sighted Saviour’ in M. O’Kane (ed.) *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 161.

ability to navigate both material and moral landscapes. Second, whilst Sontag saw disease metaphors working entirely negatively, here I will probe (albeit briefly) instances of a more transgressive means by which the evangelists also seem to utilize corporeal metaphors of disability (and dismemberment) to re-figure their early Christian body politics, and through which to present their subversive and counter-cultural good news. Ancient assumptions surrounding physiognomy – the tradition of judging an individual’s moral disposition and character from their external appearance – is, in early Christianity’s imaginaries, at points disrupted by metaphorical images of mutilated and half-blind bodies, who like Jesus before them, traverse (materially and metaphorically) the way of the cross.

(a) *Leprosy (un-touch-ability) as Metaphor*

Leprosy rendered individuals as un-touch-able. Social and religious sensibilities ordered and censored the leper’s haptic interactions for fear of the pollution they presented to others.⁹ Akin to AID’s status as a metaphorical plague in Sontag’s work, leprosy similarly functions in biblical tradition as a powerful metaphor for the invasion of evil, transgression of social norms and ultimate exclusion, self-mortification and death. The sensory organ of touch, the skin, presents a suggestive frontier between community and isolation. To be un-touch-able (ceremonially and ritually ‘unclean’) was (and still is) to be closed off from contact with others. Leviticus 13 shows this graphically when it submits that disease penetrates and breaks up the skin’s boundaries, and like sin, defiles and isolates its victims. So much so that the leper’s garments, like the sinner, should ultimately be destroyed in fire (Lev 13:52-57).

⁹ A leper’s interactions in populated areas were necessarily controlled, indeed customary practice was, like the untouchable, to visually perform their status as proscribed in Leviticus as a warning for others: ‘The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be dishevelled and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, “Unclean, unclean”’ (Lev 13:45–46).

Leprosy was also frequently used as a metaphor for death. Like the corpse the leper is as defiling as a corpse (Job 18:13; 2 Kings 5:7). Josephus thus attests: ‘socially the leper was the equivalent of a corpse (Josephus *Ant* 3.11.3).’¹⁰ A leper’s metaphorical association with death was also no doubt due to the skin disorders which produced corroded and putrefied flesh. Theophrastus, in the fourth century BCE, gives a sense of the ‘disgust’ aroused by a ‘squalid leprous character’ who goes around ‘leprous, covered with ulcers’ and ‘sores and wounds’, ‘hairy as a bear, his teeth . . . black and decayed; . . . an unapproachable and most unsavoury personage.’¹¹ Rejection on account of real and perceived ‘odours’ would have frequently evoked disgust and revulsion in others and also offered the sort of negative metaphorical cache to which Sontag alerts us. Even though odour is not overtly contained in the representations within the gospel stories of lepers ((Mk 1:40–45/Mat 8:1–4/Lk 5:12–15), nonetheless the ‘stench’ (both physical and symbolic) of their bodily conditions is frequently understood to represent sin and mortality.

In the synoptic parallel accounts of the healing of the leper (Mk 1:40–45/Mat 8:1–4/Lk 5:12–15) this individual performs the paradoxes of his oppressed condition, moreover, he persuades Jesus into likewise realising the ironies of un-touch-ability. In the gospel accounts, no specific warning is given about the leper’s approach to others. He does not shout ‘unclean, unclean’ but rather is presented as within crowds (Mt 8:1) and boldly coming straight up to Jesus (Mk 1:40; Lk 5:12). Second, the leper ‘begging and kneeling’ (Mk 1:40; Mt 8:8) and most evocatively in Luke, literally ‘falling (*peswn*) on his face on the ground’ (Lk 5:12) is marked out symbolically as a worshipper, an identity the leper would normally be prohibited from enacting within the temple. In all three accounts, the leper’s question is rhetorically framed to put the onus on Jesus: ‘if you choose you can make me clean’ (Mark 1:40; Mat 8:2;

¹⁰ Josephus cited in Robert Stein, *Mark* (Baker, 2008), 105.

¹¹ Theophrastus, *The Characters* (Boston: Federic Hill, 1831), 47.

Lk 5:12). The story ends with Jesus ordering the leper, or in Mark's version 'harshly criticis[ing]' him (Mk 1:43), to say nothing to anyone about what has happened but go and present himself before a priest 'as a testimony to them' (Mk 1:44; Mt 8:4; Lk 5:14). Jesus thus pays lip service to purity conventions, whilst at the same time presumably through breathing in the odour of the leper (due to this individual's close proximity to Jesus), experiencing at least in part, a dimension of a condition which deemed this individual as 'socially dead'.

Blindness as Metaphor

Akin to Sontag's thesis, blindness is also frequently used as part of the gospels' discursive arsenal to reject ideas and individuals as 'other'. Matthew's 'blind leading the blind' indictment appears in the context of a dispute about ritual purity (Mt 15:4). Jesus exposes the falsity of the Pharisees' teaching (Mt 15:3–6) and brands them 'hypocrites', literally stage players, whose faces (and eyes) conceal corrupt (and corrupting) natures and purposes.¹² Poignantly, physiognomic reasoning seems not to make their dispositions public, on the contrary, their appearance functions as a veil for their tainted and immoral inner characters. Jesus reprimands the Jewish leaders as 'blind leaders of the blind' adopting prophetic counsels regarding deceptive leadership (see Isa 3:12; 9:16). The 'dis-ability' that blindness carries metaphorically, is related to an inability to navigate terrain. Commentators record that 'falling into a pit' is commonly employed to signify disorder, devastation, the underworld (Ps 7:15; Prov 26:27) and chastisement for the depraved (Isa 24:18; Jer 48:44) thus the metaphor denotes their decisive disorientation.¹³ The metaphorical relegation of the Pharisees carries on in Matthew 23:16–26 in which they are categorized variously as 'blind guides' (Mt 23:16, 24),

¹² See Louise Lawrence, *An Ethnography of the Gospel of Matthew* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 113–141.

¹³ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Orbis Books, 2000), 319.

‘fools and blind’ (Mt 23:17, 19) who cannot appropriately lead others through literal and/or spiritual/moral landscapes. Luke’s version, similarly, of ‘the blind leading the blind’ parable (Lk 6:39) is set in the context of an extended discourse surrounding discipleship ethics, attitudes and the construction of group identity. Judith Lieu notes that this parable may point to the significance of cultivating disciples with ‘clear vision’ to steer others, in contrast to the ‘blindness’ of deceptive authority.¹⁴

Comparable negative metaphors can be determined in reference to the construal of blind characters portrayed in gospel narratives. The man at Bethsaida (Mk 8:22–26) and Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46–52) have for instance, been understood as symbolic equivalents for Peter and the disciples’ spiritually impaired vision, and their incapacity to wholly grasp the way of the cross. Situated around the pivotal statement of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:27–33), which consecutively lauds him for identifying Jesus as messiah and then vetoes him as ‘Satan’ for being blind to the significance and certainty of Jesus’ death to his vocation, these blind individuals are deduced to perform as interpretive vignettes exemplifying misconception. As Marcus Borg attests: ‘by placing these stories where he does, the author of Mark gives them a metaphorical meaning, even as one or both of them may reflect history remembered. Namely, gaining one’s sight – seeing again – is seeing the (topographical and ideological) way of Jesus. That way, that path, involves journeying with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the place of death and resurrection, of endings and beginnings’.¹⁵ Comparable exegetical moves have been performed in reference to the man born blind in John 9, who has also been understood as a metaphor of obscurity and immorality. His corporeal sightlessness becomes the metaphorical locus of the Pharisees’ internal blindness. The cure thus also functions as a metaphor for Jesus’

¹⁴ The saying regarding the teacher and pupil and the log in one’s own eye (Mk 6:40–41) which immediately follows, cautions the addressee not to assume too high a status, or too readily deal out judgement on others.

¹⁵ Marcus Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 45–46.

enlightenment of the world. Jesus' decree to the man to wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam (which the text declares means 'sent') has been considered by some scholars to give a sacramental analogue, namely the cleansing of evil at baptism by following the one 'sent from above'.¹⁶ Metaphors such as these accentuate and inscribe normative (abled) assumptions in persuading gospel recipients that they can cultivate spiritual sightedness, however, those deemed deceptive adversaries and opponents, or attributes regarded as unfit of an aspiring follower, are modelled as vision-less and incapable of navigating material and/or moral space appropriately.¹⁷

Dismemberment and Transgressive Re-figuring of Disability Metaphors

Naomi Schor (who herself experienced visual impairment), focused on disablement, in particular blindness, in her work on metaphors.¹⁸ However, unlike Sontag who wished to break the knots which tied metaphor to disease, Schor submits that to disentangle them would be near impossible. Rather, she urges that metaphors should try to break free from solely negative tendencies, and alternative metaphorical sites where defect and deficiency are dissentingly constructed as 'norms' for a physical (and social) body need to be located. In her words: 'The time has come for a new body language, one which would emanate from a sensorium that is grasped in its de-idealized reality, in its full range of complexity.'¹⁹ Tanya Titchkosky offers a similar appeal when she states that rhetoric connecting a specific disease or disability uniformly with negativity renders disability as 'a dead metaphor that people only use to diagnose

¹⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1997), 336.

¹⁷ Much of this subsection is drawn directly from ideas and arguments presented in Louise Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31–41.

¹⁸ Naomi Schor, 'Blindness as Metaphor' *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11 (1999), 76–105, 77.

¹⁹ Schor, 'Blindness', 103.

injustice.’²⁰ Hull in his reflections as a blind exegete, identifies such destabilizing sites in gospel traditions. For example, he subverts the metaphor of sightedness in the Emmaus accounts, where two disciples are effectively ‘blind’ to Jesus identity (Luke 24:16) and only at the point of recognition actually lose sight of Jesus once more (Luke 24:31). In such an episode, Hull declares ‘they become blind as far as you [the ‘sighted saviour’] are concerned, but now it is the blindness of recognition, no longer the blindness of a failure to recognise. Sight becomes more paradoxical’.²¹

Alongside a disability advocacy agenda, it is also true, as social critics have long recognised, that reform movements which imagine a new order also often construct different body politics and metaphors. Titchkosky, influenced by Franz Fanon’s postcolonial metaphor of ‘resistance to amputation’ – ‘a desire to subvert colonial domination and racist thinking’²² and being ‘cut off’ on account of one’s perceived ‘otherness’²³ – shows how ‘retrace[ing] the edges of the dis-card-able human’²⁴ can stimulate the ‘imagination of new worlds . . . engaging abnormality as something other than a call to return to the ordinary and the same’.²⁵

Particularly arresting examples of such metaphorical refiguring occur in Mark’s and Matthew’s parallel sayings about self-dismemberment and gouging out one’s eye (also cutting off one’s hand, feet or becoming a eunuch), in order to enter the kingdom (Mk 9:47; Matt 5:27-30; Matt 18-20; Matt 19:10-12). The sayings come within respective sections concerning

²⁰ Tanya Titchkosky, ‘Life with Dead Metaphors’ *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, Vol 9 (2015) 1-18, 2.

²¹ John Hull, ‘Open Letter from a Blind Disciple to a Sighted Saviour: Text and Discussion’ in Martin O’Kane (ed.), *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 154–177, 171.

²² Paul Adjei, ‘Resistance to Amputation: Discomforting Truth About Colonial Education in Ghana’ in George Sefa Dei and Marlon Simmons (eds), *Fanon & Education: Thinking Through Pedagogical Possibilities* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 79–104, 81.

²³ Titchkosky, ‘Life’, 2.

²⁴ Titchkosky, ‘Life’, 2.

²⁵ Titchkosky, ‘Life’, 15.

characters fit for the kingdom. In this instance, losing an eye, through avoidance of sin, can enable citizenship in the kingdom over full sightedness:

If your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell where their worm never dies and the fire is never quenched. (Mk 9:47-48).

Many commentators have noted the hyperbole of this section – ‘Jesus uses this exaggerated imagery to emphasise the urgency of his disciples taking drastic action, even radical extremes, in their diligence to avoid sin.’²⁶ In R. T. France’s words: ‘The theme is impediments to ultimate salvation and the importance of eliminating them at all costs [is] a theme which could have many different applications to relationships, activities, mental attitudes, and the like, certainly not only to sexual temptation’.²⁷ As the above indicates, this section has often been understood to refer to an individual’s inner disposition: the organs are mere vehicles, rather than agents of sin. Eckhard Schnabel represents this position when he submits:

The three body parts signify what people do, where they go and what they see and desire. The hand is the basic instrument for accomplishing one’s purposes. . . . The foot is the basic human means of transport which includes walking to the place where sins are committed. The eye is the organ of sense perception by which the temptation to commit sin enters. The eye is often linked with lust and sexual sins . . . but also with pride, envy, avarice, and other sins that have to do with attitude and proclivity.²⁸

However, ancient beliefs about the power of the ‘evil eye’²⁹ and theories of vision linking the eye with touch (extramission – an understanding of eyesight as visual perception achieved by beams which emanate from the organ of the eye and touch external objects) invite the interpreter to view this sensory organ as more than a mere passive tool. The linkage between

²⁶ Eldon Woodcock, *Hell: An Exhaustive Look at a Burning Issue* (Bloomington: Westbow Press, 2012), 211.

²⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2007), 206.

²⁸ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (IVP Academic, 2017), online version, no pages.

²⁹ See John Elliott, ‘The Evil Eye in the First Testament: The Ecology and Culture of a Pervasive Belief’ in David Jobling, Peggy Day, and Gerald Sheppard (eds), *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 147–59.

the eye and navigation of landscapes may well be in mind when, as John Connell points out, the etymological association of ‘scandalize’ with the obstacle or stumbling block, is considered. In his words, ‘One can imagine an eye or hand metaphorically tripping someone up and causing a fall. Hence the Revised Standard Version understands Matthew’s expression as referring to the bodily member that causes you to sin.’³⁰ Here then, in direct contrast to the more normative assumption that the blind will inevitably fall into the pit, the seeing eye itself causes one to stumble. Whilst such a reading brings out the agency of the sensory organ, still the focus remains on the individual body as the seat of morality. The implication that ‘amputation’ within an individual body can, in Fanon’s terms, also have far reaching implications for the social body in representing transgressive and resistant images for political and social renewal remains largely unexplored. Rainer Guldin’s adoption of Mikhail Bakhtin’s image of the carnivalesque body, in which the body politic is turned upside down, symbolizing through this a rejection of the political and ideological hegemony of the ruling classes is ‘insight-ful’ here: ‘Radical social change is expressed in the imagery of broken corporeal unity’.³¹ Here, rather than a dis-eased or blinded/half-sighted body being universally linked with negativity, the dismembered body takes on more dissident metaphorical dimensions. The stable semiotic world in which the abled, touch-able and sighted body represents power and position is upturned. This is further inscribed by the means by which this body will be altered: self-dismemberment – a practice (often associated in the Hebrew Bible with Baal worship) which assaults the normative body politic as it is prohibited in biblical tradition (Deuteronomy 14:1-21).³² It is perhaps no accident that elsewhere the image of the child and the castrate also

³⁰ John Connell ‘Anatomy of a Scandal: Self-Dismemberment in the Gospel of Matthew and in Gogol’s *The Nose*’ *Literature and Theology* 16 (2002), 270–290, 272.

³¹ Rainer Guldin, ‘The dis-membered body: bodily fragmentation as a metaphor for political renewal’ *Physis* Vol.12 no.2 Rio de Janeiro (2002). Available online at: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0103-73312002000200003

³² Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 161.

become potent images of citizenship of the kingdom of heaven (Mat 18:1-5; 19:11-12). Both disrupting the normative scaffolding of the masculine body politic; both lending persuasion to ‘alternative narratives of nation building and cultural transformation’.³³ All offering visceral demonstrations of how the gospel defies and re-signifies cultural reason.

Of course somatic logic stands at the heart of the ‘way of the cross’ which features a branded, mutilated and ultimately dead body. Crucifixion was a practice designed to visually demonstrate possession, domination, etc. yet ironically in the gospels this oppression and marginalisation are reversed. Like other brutalized peoples across the world, this ‘amputated body, through agency, informed by irony and paradox, denies, and subverts its stereotypes’.³⁴ Nancy Eiesland’s provocative construction of the ‘Disabled God’ who retains the scars of crucifixion torture in his resurrection, speaks directly to such reformulations.³⁵ Returning to ocular metaphors being related to navigations of literal and moral landscapes, the ‘way of the cross’ inevitably re-envision the terrain to be followed. Jesus too in the passion narrative is presented as a blindfolded (Mk 14:65//Lk 22:64ff) and tortured crucifixion victim (dying a publically shameful death reserved for lower classes and political dissidents). As such Christ to is a ‘dis-articulate’ a figure ‘forcibly severed from the social fabric, stigmatized, silenced, possibly physically dismembered’.³⁶ The more transgressive gospel metaphors invite Christians too, as half-sighted and child-like, limbless; castrates) to metaphorically steer a similar mortal path.

³³ C. Barker, *Postcolonial Fiction and Disability: Exceptional Children, Metaphor and Materiality* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

³⁴ Ernest Cole, *Theorizing the Disfigured Body: Mutilation, Amputation, and Disability Culture in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone* (Africa World Press, 2014), 3.

³⁵ Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1994).

³⁶ James Berger, *The Disarticulate: Language, Disability, and the Narratives of Modernity* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 2.

Conclusion

Sontag's classic work alerts the interpreter to the use of metaphors in relation to disease and disability. Reflecting on the discursive purchase of her own condition she saw how 'metaphorically, cancer is not so much a disease of time as a disease or pathology of space. Its principal metaphors refer to topography (cancer 'spreads' or 'proliferates') . . . and its most dreaded consequence, short of death, is the mutilation or amputation of part of the body'.³⁷ Gospel employments of leprosy and blindness metaphors to 'reject' and 'stigmatise' ideas and individuals as 'other' were widespread, linked for the most part through a logic which linked untouchability with social death and sight with the circumnavigation of both material and moral terrain and landscapes. Although it is true to say that the majority of disease and disability metaphors in the gospels fall within this category, there are, as Schor and others have petitioned one to find in cultural traditions, some exceptions which subvert and transgress the normative (abled) body politic. Here attention was paid to a particularly graphic illustration of self-dismemberment, gouging out one's eye, in order to ensure ones moral wellbeing. Rather than sight being the faculty by which one traverses material and moral terrains, here the organ of the eye (and sight), is sardonically posited as a stumble-inducing trip hazard. Set within gospels which (albeit differently) envisage the way of discipleship as following a leader who died on a cross, early Christian discourses needed to wrestle directly with body politics and unproblematic acceptance of a normalizing conception of impairment rhetoric. As such patterns emerge, in Titchkosky's words, they start to invite followers 'to live differently with the terms and conditions of bodies as living testimonies to the history they are made from.'³⁸ In such instances, diseases and disabilities such as leprosy and blindness are not flatly assumed

³⁷ Sontag, *Illness*, 15.

³⁸ Titchkosky, 'Life', 16.

to represent deviance, but rather destabilising prompts, to ‘incite/[in-sight?] critical imaginations’³⁹ and sense the distinctive material and moral paths and landscapes that early Christianity sought to construct. They also provide promising spaces for disability advocates to challenge ableist links between disease, disability and malevolence, and start to imagine resistant counter-narratives in which disease and disability are capable of representing more positive themes and identities.

³⁹ Titchkosky, ‘Life’, 16.