

Book Reviews

theology, but it would be interesting to hear more on the specific challenges that theology faces in addressing this fracturing, perhaps in an exploration with the similar debates over models and methods that characterize modern science.

While those may be taken as criticisms, they are admittedly modest. For the most part, I found *The Territories of Human Reason* to offer a rich and eminently helpful survey of the land. McGrath's realist orientation combined with his commitment to multiple situated rationalities strikes just the right balance between the Scylla of Enlightenment reason and the Charybdis of postmodern skepticism. *The Territories of Human Reason* would make an excellent (and surprisingly affordable) textbook for a course in science and theology, prolegomena/fundamental theology, or philosophy of religion.

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PSYCHOLOGY AND NEUROSCIENCE

ENHANCING CHRISTIAN LIFE: How Extended Cognition Augments Religious Community by Brad D. Strawn and Warren S. Brown. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 176 pages, including title pages, acknowledgments, and indexes. Paperback; \$21.00. ISBN: 9780830852819.

"I'd like to supersize it" is not a statement I usually utter without guilt and some consternation. However, in *Enhancing Christian Life: How Extended Cognition Augments Religious Community*, Strawn and Brown present an argument that makes me question whether I say it enough—in the right contexts—and whether I live in a way that makes it so.

Strawn, a clinical psychologist, and Brown, an experimental neuropsychologist, wrote this book for individuals invested in deepening Christian lives. Across ten chapters, they develop an evidence-based argument in support of their assertion that "No one is Christian (or "spiritual") entirely on their own" (p. 12). Writing in response to the focus on single persons (e.g., individual spiritual experience) at the forefront of many Western evangelical churches, Strawn and Brown argue that such a prioritization of these internal, private experiences produces no more than a "puny" Christian faith and life.

The text is divided into three parts, guiding the reader through evidence about what persons are like (section 1), how persons function in the world

(section 2), and what this knowledge of persons—what we are like and how we function—means for the church and Christian life (section 3).

Section 1 explores how different views about human persons influence behavior and religious practice. Strawn and Brown contextualize the modern priority of internal, private, and emotional spirituality within the philosophical and historical framework of soul-body dualism. Following Owen Thomas,¹ Strawn and Brown propose that Christian spirituality and spiritual formation should be decentered away from personal piety and the "inner world of a person" (p. 33) and recentered on "the reign of God" and "how one lives one's actual life in the body (the outer)" (p. 33). This perspective, expounded in section 2, lays the groundwork for the implications of understanding persons as embodied, embedded, and extended.

Section 2 begins with the premise that relinquishing Cartesian dualism does not automatically solve the problem of prioritizing internal experiences or its consequences (i.e., salvation of souls as primary; activities related to physical, economic, and social needs are pursued secondarily, if at all). Indeed, some materialist views of persons have replaced Cartesian dualism with a Cartesian materialism wherein the brain, like an encapsulated and isolated computer, functions like a (relabelled) soul. Strawn and Brown reject this notion as well, as it reinforces the idea that there is some "inner reality (whether a soul or a brain) that is the real person" (p. 42).

Pointing to embodied cognition as a robust alternative to Cartesian dualism and materialism, Strawn and Brown note,

Embodied cognition argues that the processes of thinking actually involve the entire body—that is, what we refer to as our "mind" is grounded in interactions between the brain and the body, and is not solely dependent on brain processes. (p. 45)

This profoundly integrated sense of a whole person should also be understood as "fundamentally relational ... A self is a body whose actions are embedded in, and contextualized by, a community" (p. 56). Taken on its own, this view of human persons has important implications for religious practice and community. Yet, Strawn and Brown further the discussion by exploring how embodied and embedded individuals engage in the world in ways that surpass physiological boundaries; that is, humans are capable of extension—*supersizing*—beyond their embodied and embedded capabilities.

Strawn and Brown explore extended cognition in two chapters (chapters 4 and 5), arguing that human beings have brains flexible enough to incorporate objects external to their bodies into their mental processes in ways that extend and enhance their capacities. Take, for example, an expert carpenter who wields a hammer like an extension of her own arm. Extended cognition suggests that this is not just a simile describing the carpenter's expertise with a hammer. Instead, the hammer functions as an extension of her own arm; extensive practice and engagement with the hammer has reshaped her representation of herself, a reshaping that allows her to wield the hammer effortlessly and effectively. This reshaping—this extension of her cognition—is evident behaviorally and neurologically. The important conclusion is that tools can extend human thinking. "Compared to what is possible through extension, the nonextended mind is less potent, diminished, and relatively puny" (p. 71); extending minds to include tools "supersizes" and significantly enhances cognition beyond the capacity of the material and embedded body alone.

In moving toward an argument about religious community, Strawn and Brown apply the logic and evidence for cognitive extension to social relationships. It is not just tools that can supersize human thinking; other people can (and do). Discussion about collaborative projects (e.g., in science), marriage, family, cultural practices, and psychotherapy all illustrate the fundamental principle that "...our minds include and incorporate what emerges from our interactions with others. Incorporation of other minds constitutes supersizing of our mental life beyond our capacities as solo thinkers" (p. 88).

Section three links these ideas to address the question, *why is Christian community important?* Strawn and Brown contend that church was never meant to be a place where individual spiritual people come together. Instead, they persuasively argue that the church is a place where "*reciprocal extension ... and spiritual enhancements ... make Christian life richer, both individually and collectively*" (p. 94), surpassing what could have been possible by a single Christian alone.

Importantly, just as the expert carpenter had to practice extending her cognition to incorporate the hammer and just as collaborative projects do not always go well, enhancement of Christian life through extension is not automatic. It is a process that involves reorienting the purpose and practice of engagement in religious community and personal devotional practices.

I found Strawn and Brown's description of a church community that was soft coupled—extended and connected in a way that something new beyond the capacity of the individual emerges—to be profound and challenging. When applied to corporate practices of prayer, scripture reading, worship, communion, and preaching, the ideas underlying extended cognition require a reevaluation of practice and, in many ways, a head-on confrontation of culturally Western notions of independence. Moreover, taking seriously the idea of extended cognition in religious communities requires that we ask ourselves difficult questions about our personal religious practices: "Is this practice ultimately about God and others or primarily about me?" (p. 126). Personal religious disciplines acquire new meaning and significance when understood through an extended cognition framework.

The book concludes with a brief discussion on the mental institutions ("wikis") that inform praxis along with practical ideas for churches to create spaces for supersizing Christian life through the repeated practice and extension of individuals' cognition. In aiming to develop "a new understanding of Christian life that includes what is beyond our individual selves" (p. 139), Strawn and Brown have written a text that will, at minimum, challenge readers to ask important questions about Christian life—personal and corporate. For example, as I read this text, I reflected on the putative notion of young people leaving the church and asked: *without this deeply embodied, embedded, and extended community, does leaving really change anything? Were these young people ever in what was meant to be the church in the first place?* Readers, with their own experiences and backgrounds, should similarly find this text thought-provoking. And, importantly, I believe this text offers a critical response to the fierce Western independence of self and spirituality that permeates many Christian lives.

Note

¹Owen C. Thomas, "Interiority and Christian Spirituality," *The Journal of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2000): 41–60.

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TECHNOLOGY

JACQUES ELLUL: A Companion to His Major Works by Jacob E. Van Vleet and Jacob Marques Rollison. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020. 187 pages. Paperback; \$25.00. ISBN: 9781625649140.

Jacques Ellul stands as a towering figure in this discourse on theology, politics, violence, and technology.