

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.

Book Reviews

Ellul was a professor of history and sociology of institutions at the University of Bordeaux in France, but he is most known in the English-speaking world as a technological critic and lay theologian. Over the course of his life, he wrote over fifty books and over one thousand essays on topics ranging from cultural critique to biblical exegesis. In his early life, Ellul was influenced by the French personalist movement, especially by his friend Bernard Charbonneau, and played a role in the French Resistance during World War II. As an academic, thinker, and commentator he considered his three main intellectual influences to be—perhaps a strange mixture—Karl Marx, Søren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth. Throughout his life, he was a committed member of the Reformed Church in France although, in significant ways, his thought diverged from both historic Calvinism and varieties of modern, liberal Protestantism.

In *Jacques Ellul: A Companion to His Major Works*, Jacob E. Van Vleet and Jacob Marques Rollison take readers through succinct, well-ordered summaries of eleven of Ellul's most important works, including a one-chapter summary of his theological ethics. Both scholars are well versed in Ellul's corpus. Van Vleet, a professor of philosophy at Diablo Valley College in California, has already published at least two books on Ellul. Rollison, an independent scholar in Strasbourg, France, has published on Ellul and edited some of his work. The authors divide their book into two main sections: the first, reviewing Ellul's theological works; and the second, his sociological works. They borrow from Ellul the image of train tracks, "separate but parallel, moving toward the same goal," to describe the relationship between theology and sociology in his body of work (p. 2). The two disciplines have different frameworks and methodologies, but the authors argue that examining both in a "dialectical" way is necessary to understanding the heart of Ellul's thought.

In the first five chapters, the authors review what they consider to be Ellul's most important theological works. Chapter 1 reviews the book *Presence in the Modern World*, published originally in French in 1948; in English in 1951. That book introduces the main concerns of Ellul's project: a critical analysis of society and an approach to Christian engagement with society through the category of "presence." Cautious, for theological reasons, about creating explicit ethical systems, Ellul instead gives readers a general commentary on how to "live in the world, but not of the world"—a world marked by an idolatrous concern for efficiency, quantification, and

bureaucratic control. Chapter 2 does a good job summarizing the book *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, first published in 1969. Critiquing both uncritical acceptance of violence and traditional just-war theory, Ellul outlines instead his own defense of Christian nonviolence. In chapter 3, the authors review Ellul's masterful work *The Meaning of the City*. This book is an extended meditation on the theme of the city in the Bible as both a symbol of human sin and hubris, and a symbol of hope. Jerusalem, in particular, becomes a sign of God's willingness to meet humanity on our own terrain.

Chapter 4 deals with the book that Ellul considered to be his greatest theological work, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*. The book puts forward the thesis that, while God "perhaps ... still speaks to the heart of [an individual]," he no longer speaks or is present at the level of society's institutions or its history (p. 47). In the context of God's marked absence, Christians are called to a peculiar practice of hope marked by perseverance, prayer, and a disciplined, fearless realism. Chapter 5 explores Ellul's commentary on the book of Revelation published in English as *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* in 1978. The book follows some sort of personal religious transformation for Ellul, and in it, he boldly proclaims his hope for universal salvation. Against interpretations of Revelation that see the book as a promise that evil people will be judged and defeated, he sees in it instead a promise that God will be victorious over evil powers—the spiritual systems and sociological forces that rule our lives.

Chapter 6 ends the theological section of the book. Unlike the chapters before and after, this chapter does not look at a single book but instead looks at Ellul's theological ethics. The authors admit that, while Ellul wrote both theology and biblical commentaries, none of these were his specialty. "It is most correct," they argue, "to view Ellul as a theological ethicist (rather than a theologian)" (p. 70). His theological ethics are marked by a refusal (most explicitly in his book *The Ethics of Freedom*) to set up any kind of moral system, universal solutions, or rules for Christians. He writes, "We can only put the problems as clearly as possible and then, having given the believer all the weapons that theology and piety can offer, say to him: 'Now it is up to you'" (p. 69). Van Vleet and Rollison do not explore the historical or theological circumstances that led Ellul to such a unique approach to Christian ethics. If I were to hazard a guess, it seems that this particular approach was influenced by Kierkegaard's existentialism and Barth's theology of revelation. Such an atypical vision for Christian ethics, to my

mind, deserves more contextual explanation than Van Vleet and Rollison afford it.

The next six chapters deal with Ellul's sociological writings, in particular, on the topics of technology, politics, and communications. Chapter 7 deals with the book *The Technological Society*, arguably his most famous work. Van Vleet and Rollison argue that in this book Ellul does for twentieth-century technology what Karl Marx did for nineteenth-century capitalism—namely, identify the key systemic forces that shape our lives. While much of *The Technological Society* deals with Ellul's analysis of "technique" as an all-encompassing cultural phenomenon, a more intriguing dimension of his analysis is his application of "the sacred" as a sociological concept to our relationship with technology. Humans cannot live without the sacred and, in our supposedly post-religious world, we have transferred religious feelings and behaviors onto technology itself. Chapter eight deals with one particular facet of the technological society, mass media. Ellul's book *Propaganda: The Formation of Man's Attitudes* was first published in 1965 and looks at how the powers-that-be use mass media to fashion public opinion and manipulate human behavior. After analyzing the social and psychological effects of mass media and propaganda, Ellul suggests that it is imperative for human beings to "wake up" to this reality as the first and most important step in resisting it.

In chapter 9, the authors review the book *The Political Illusion*, also published in 1965. In that book, Ellul condemns the expansion of the state, the increased politicization of everyday life, and society's self-defeating political illusions. Once again, he counsels a kind of existentialist resistance, encouraging individuals to "question clichés" and (implicitly) suggesting the impossibility of any kind of collective, systemic reform. Chapter 10 builds on this political critique with a review of the book *Autopsy of Revolution*. In *Autopsy*, Ellul questions the continued hope among some for a revolution that will solve our political and economic problems. Tracing the history of the concept of revolution from before and after 1789, he specifically critiques the Marxist conception of revolution as no longer viable, particularly pointing out how modern hopes for revolution tend to "absorb all the religious emotions" that have nowhere else to go in a secular society. In chapter 11, Ellul's critical analysis of both technology and politics is brought together in the book *The New Demons*. Once again drawing upon the concept of "the sacred," Ellul argues that our collective religious inclinations have not dis-

appeared but have focused themselves instead on science, technology, and politics. While none of these things are bad in themselves, they have become idols in need of spiritual dethroning. The final chapter in this volume deals with the book *The Humiliation of the Word*. That book begins with a discussion about the different functions of both hearing and seeing in human perception. An ideal society would balance hearing and seeing, the word and image, but, in our society, the image dominates. Cataloguing the negative effects of this imbalance, Ellul urges us to revive an appreciation for the word. The word, he argues, brings qualities of discussion, paradox, and mystery—qualities we desperately need as individuals and as a society.

Overall *Jacques Ellul: A Companion to His Major Works* fulfills its promise of providing short, readable summaries of Ellul's most important works. Van Vleet and Rollison are to be commended for their discerning choice of eleven books that represent well both the sociological and theological dimensions of his corpus. Furthermore, they competently identify and trace core themes that appear book after book so that readers gain an impression of Ellul's overall thought and how his discrete ideas form parts of a coherent whole. The only book that seemed conspicuously absent from the volume is the book *Anarchy and Christianity* (although it is referenced on occasion). This seemed a regrettable omission given the importance of Ellul's anarchism for both his faith and his politics.

When introducing a major thinker and their body of thought, the choice of framework is critical. In this volume, Van Vleet and Rollison chose to present Ellul's work as a collection of sociological and theological writings, with each book contextualized (for the most part) in reference to his other writings. For some readers, this might make an excellent choice, but others may find it unsatisfying for their purposes. For example, I came to the book as someone widely read in political theology, strategic nonviolence, and the appropriate technology tradition (Schumacher, Illich, and others). With every chapter I was left with an unsatisfied desire to understand Ellul in reference to these larger traditions. How do Ellul's thoughts on violence connect to other Christian reflections on violence (Niebuhr, Yoder, etc.) or broader conceptions of strategic nonviolence (Gandhi, Sharp, Chenoweth, etc.)? How does his critique of the technological society compare and contrast to Ivan Illich's vision in *Tools for Conviviality* or E.F. Schumacher's work on appropriate technology?

Book Reviews

On the whole, I found this book to be an accessible, useful introduction to the work of Jacques Ellul. That being said, an introductory chapter situating Ellul's thoughts within the larger intellectual traditions would have been helpful.

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THEOLOGY

ECOTHEOLOGY: A Christian Conversation by Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, eds. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020. xx + 228 pages. Paperback; \$24.99. ISBN: 9780802874412.

Have you ever wondered how theologians develop responses to new and emerging issues at the interface between faith and science? *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation* gives readers a front-row seat to that process, recording interactions among four contemporary theologians on the question of how human beings ought to relate to the nonhuman creation. The question is timely, contentious, and exceedingly important. At one time, human domination (dominion) over the nonhuman creation was the most widespread paradigm for that relationship. In the 1980s, Christian environmental stewardship emerged as a corrective to dominion/domination. In recent years, attempts to move beyond stewardship have taken shape. Like many theological questions, a singular and definitive answer is elusive. But the importance of the question is not in doubt. Human exploitation of the nonhuman creation has eroded ecosystems, decimated species, and changed the climate in ways that should cause remorse, bring about repentance, and cause dramatic change. We need to find a new way forward.

Unsurprisingly, the authors in *Ecotheology* don't provide a single answer. Rather, their goal is to "assist individuals and communities to develop their own ecotheology and to explore the spiritual and theological dimensions of cultivating a greater love of the world" (p. 13). In this review, we summarize and assess each theologian's contribution, and we provide some overall thoughts about the *Ecotheology* project. The structure of our review echoes the structure of the book.

Chapters 1 and 2 (reviewed by Matt Heun)

Ecotheology begins with Richard Bauckham's essay "Being Human in the Community of Creation," which contains one of the strongest and most effective takedowns yet of the "dominion as domination"

narrative. Short and concise, he argues (a) that God's predominant characteristic is love (goodness, compassion, justice, kindness) and (b) that "human dominion over other living creatures will reflect God's rule by showing these same qualities" (p. 30). Continuing, Bauckham argues convincingly that although stewardship has been a valuable paradigm, it ill-advisedly places humans above the nonhuman creation in a vertical power relationship. Instead, he favors the "community of creation" in which human beings live in "conscious mutuality with other creatures" (p. 21). These moves by Bauckham are both helpful and important. Rightly understanding our relationship to the nonhuman creation is essential if we are to honor its inherent value rather than focus on its value to us.

My quibbles with chapter 1 are few. First, Bauckham's focus on other "creatures" leaves one wondering about the nonhuman, noncreatures that also inhabit our planet. Does the community of creation extend to air and water? to coal deposits and lakeshore pebbles? Second, Bauckham occasionally slips into stewardship language, despite wanting to move beyond it. Indeed, his re-reading of Genesis includes "God ... entrusting to our care ... something of priceless value" (p. 25). Bauckham struggles, as we all do, to match our diction to our (eco)theology.

Ecotheology continues with Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's "Love Incarnate: Hope and Moral-Spiritual Power for Climate Justice." She exposes the "paradox of the [high-consuming] human," in which the good things of everyday life depend upon fossil fuels and the globalized economy in ways that cause "death and destruction due to climate change and the exploitation of people and their lands" (p. 69). She rightly identifies our consumptive patterns of life to be an externalization of Paul's lament, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:15b). Moe-Lobeda claims that agape love is the antidote to our moral inertia, and she offers eight helpful guideposts for ways to live in agape love.

My only critique is that she could have done more to highlight the challenges to living according to her guideposts. It will be much harder than "calling down ... the [climate justice] music that already exists" (p. 94).

Response from Dave Warners

Matt's praise for Bauckham's dismissal of the stewardship-as-dominion paradigm is spot on. I also agree with his point that Bauckham's "Community