

Book Reviews

there is some nervousness that this naturalistic and pragmatic approach to well-being and virtue could steer some away from genuine faith in the divine. Christian scholars are interested, but hesitant – as if they give two cheers for positive psychology.

Needless to say, Hackney covers all of the above clearly and accurately in the first section of this book. While there may have been several excellent books covering this area previously, in my view, this volume has some unique selling points. Firstly, it is a comprehensive introduction to the critical dialogue between positive psychology and Christian thought; Hackney does a very good job of covering many of the major concepts in contemporary positive psychology. Secondly, the reference list alone is worth the ticket price. It takes up over sixty pages and nearly a fifth of the entire volume. For those who want to explore the rich interaction between positive psychology and Christianity further and in more depth, the reference list will be a treasure trove.

Furthermore, the book is well organized, starting with the big picture in theology, philosophy, and psychology, then turning toward more-precise treatments of positive experience, cognition, personality, and relationships. It concludes with two vital areas of interest for positive psychology: its applications in sports education, the workplace, and religion; and an absolutely vital final set of chapters on the second wave of positive psychology (which has given more attention to the important dialectic between the positive and negative in life, a dialectic which prevents positive psychology simply being viewed as the study of positive thinking or a fatuous happy-ology). I particularly liked the title that Hackney offers to this final section: “the positive in the negative and the negative in the positive.” It captures the spirit of the maturing field of positive psychology and makes for some more-nuanced treatments of the questions of sin and eschatology, the absence of which often bother Christians who consider the contribution that positive psychology can make to the life of faith.

It is also worth mentioning the style in which the book is written. It is easy to read, written in simple language, without dumbing down the technical theological and psychological nomenclature necessary for a scholarly treatment of the area. Hackney is not afraid to insert anecdotes and vignettes to enliven and illustrate the treatment of certain areas, and at various points demonstrates a reflexive stance by addressing the reader in the first person. Nor is he averse to a dose of witty humor; his subheading “Repent for the End (of this chapter) is Near” made me laugh out loud.

Overall this makes *Positive Psychology in Christian Perspective* an ideal entry-level text for the first-time

reader. Previous volumes that have aimed to offer a relatively comprehensive analysis of the positive psychology-Christianity dialogue have been mainly multi-author editions or technical volumes written by and for theologians, philosophers, or psychologists. Hackney, however, seems to have pulled off a text that is both comprehensive and accessible. It is unlikely that advanced scholars interested in the field of positive psychology will read the book from cover to cover, but they will still no doubt benefit from dipping into the many pertinent insights that Hackney offers.

I assume that Hackney’s principal audience comprises Christian students, undergraduates and postgraduates, all studying positive psychology for the first time, or wanting a Christian perspective on positive psychology. The increasing number of MAPP (Masters in Applied Positive Psychology) programs internationally often attract Christian practitioners, and Hackney has composed a very good accompanying text for helping them make sense of the alignment of their faith with their studies. For me personally, as a psychology professor working in a secular institution, it is unlikely to be the kind of volume that would appear on a reading list, but I already have in mind several students to whom I will be recommending it when I teach positive psychology in the spring semester. The book would be a perfect recommendation for pastors who are interested or concerned about positive psychology and would like to know more. Perhaps there is no better endorsement than that.

Reviewed by Roger Bretherton, Assistant Professor of Psychology, University of Lincoln, UK, and Chair of the British Association of Christians in Psychology.

TECHNOLOGY

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF9-23Hiestand>

TECHNĒ: Christian Visions of Technology by Gerald Hiestand and Todd A. Wilson, eds. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022. 236 pages. Hardcover; \$49.00. ISBN: 9781666704228.

The product of their 2019 conference of the Center for Pastor Theologians, *Technē* consists of fourteen contributed essays that seek to articulate important elements of the relationship between Christianity and contemporary technology.

The book is organized into two sections: Theological Reflections on Technology, and Technological Reflections on Theology. However, while one might expect a section of articles by theologians reflecting on technology, and then a section of articles by engineers and scientists reflecting on the implications of theology

for their work, this is not what the reader will find. Instead, the sections are best understood as “theoretical,” focusing primarily on questions about the nature of technology and its relationship to the church, and “applied,” focusing on specific technologies, fields of study, or theological methodologies.

The “theoretical” section of the book illustrates the divide between thinkers who are optimistic about the potential for technology to advance the faith (chap. 4) and those who are concerned about the impact that technology might have on the church or the Christian life (chaps. 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6). The book is relatively one-sided. Douglas Estes (chap. 4) and Jennifer Powell McNutt (chap. 14) both defend the adoption of digital technologies by the church, and while she does not make the argument in these terms, McNutt’s article suggests that pastors should begin developing relationships with engineers working in information technology. However, Joel D. Lawrence (chap. 1), Nathan A. Brendsel (chap. 2), Andy Crouch (chap. 3), Christopher J. Ganski (chap. 5), Jonathan Huggins (chap. 6), Karen Swallow Prior (chap. 12), and Felicia Wu Song (chap. 13) are all much more cautious about the adoption of technology.

Estes claims that “the rot at the root [of Christian scholarship on technology] is the uncritical acceptance and appropriation of Martin Heidegger’s ideas about technology” (p. 66). Certainly, Estes is correct that the discussion is heavily influenced by Heidegger’s thought. However, this still allows for an array of views ranging from Lawrence’s claim that we need to learn from the Amish (p. 13) to Crouch’s distinction between *technē* as “the artful, cultural engagement in God’s world” (p. 58) and *technology* (though perhaps “technologism” would be better) as a dream for a life of total ease and complete control brought about by near-magical technological artifacts. Certainly, we do need to *critically* interact with the Heideggerian roots of much contemporary writing on technology, and Estes’s critique of Heidegger’s thought is helpful, but perhaps we do not need to simply “exorcise Heidegger from our thoughts” (p. 74).

There is also a significant divide between two approaches that authors take to thinking and writing about technology. First, some want to speak of technologies or artifacts such as CRISPR, Digital Readers, or Virtual Reality Technologies. Second, others want to speak in terms of a technological worldview, social imaginary, culture, or society that shapes our motivations in interacting *with* technology. The concern of authors like Lawrence or Crouch is not primarily that eReaders are bad for our brains or that dishwashers are making us lazy. It is primarily that we have developed a milieu that prioritizes comfort, convenience, and ease

as the highest good. The development of modern technologies has enabled a socio-culture perspective that enables and reinforces our idolatry of comfort, convenience, and ease.

The “applied” section addresses three specific contemporary technologies: AI (chap. 8 and 9), biotechnology (chap. 10 and 11), and social media (chap. 13). Neal D. Presa (chap. 8) defines AI as “a robot that functions autonomously” (p. 131) and focuses on the applications of AI in robotics. Missy Byrd DeRegibus (chap. 9) distinguishes between weak, strong, and super AI and focuses on the theological implications of strong and super AI. Nathan A. Barczi (chap. 10) and Jeff Hardin (chap. 11) both focus on applying theological insights to biotechnology. However, Barczi, a theologian, focuses on explaining the functional view of the image of God while Hardin, a scientist, focuses on explaining the process of embryonic development. However, their articles could both go much further in relating those subjects to the development of biotechnology. Song (chap. 13) provides a clear explanation of the ways in which social media is personally and morally deformative.

The three remaining articles are somewhat harder to categorize. Bruce Baker (chap. 7) provides a set of catechetical questions raised by new technologies and then attempts to answer them. Prior (chap. 12) argues for the importance of print reading over and against electronic mediums for reading. Finally, McNutt provides a detailed description of the important role that printers and the printing press played in the Reformation and claims that the same kind of relationship could be developed with the wide variety of digital technologies.

Some of the articles are excellent. For instance, Crouch and Wong both provide very persuasive and detailed arguments for their positions, and Estes gives an impassioned argument in defense of the adoption and use of technologies of many kinds by the church. However, some of the articles in the book miss the mark. As one example, Baker’s catechism could be much more clearly organized. At the end of each question, he includes several scripture verses, but it is not always clear how they relate to his topic. This is perhaps most evident in question 8, which asks whether AI can be spiritual, but it is unclear how the passages he cites (Isa. 40:13, Job 5:9, and John 1:18, which appeal to the greatness of God) are related to the question. Further, the questions that he poses are good, but the answers he provides could be more clearly explained and supported. For instance, Baker argues against hard and soft materialism and dualism about the human person. He then endorses an “irreducible, intrinsic interdependence” of the human person, but if this is neither a version of soft materialism nor dualism, it is unclear what his position entails.

Letters

I was also surprised by what was not included in this book. The articles interact with two major streams of thought: (1) the Heideggerian analysis of a technological society read through a theological lens, and (2) what Evgeny Morozov labeled “technological solutionism,” coming primarily through futurist writers and science fiction.¹ It is important to note that neither Estes nor McNutt are technological solutionists insofar as they do not claim that all human problems can be solved through advanced technologies. However, significant movements in the philosophy of information and technology are entirely ignored.

Two directly relevant examples are worth mentioning here. First, in the study of information and computer ethics, there is an important push to consider this field within the model of environmental ethics. The Italian philosopher Luciano Floridi has been a primary proponent of this view and has, at times, explicitly connected it with the idea of stewardship prominent in Christian environmental ethics.² Second, there is a turn toward the methodology of virtue ethics that is expressed both in scholarly and in professional work. Shannon Vallor has connected the ethics of technology with the Aristotelian virtue tradition, which has had many classical and contemporary Christian contributors.³

Further, the code of ethics of the Association for Computer Machinery places an emphasis on the moral character of computer engineers and opposes this to the common emphasis on strict rules to be followed.⁴ There is, in turn, a strong Christian tradition of virtue thought, both Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian, that could be put into meaningful conversation with this turn to an ethic of virtue and character.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the book is preoccupied with digital and biotechnical technologies. While understandable, this preoccupation risks ignoring the significance of other areas of technological development such as transportation, energy, or construction technologies. This suggests to me that Christian theologians are, to some degree at least, overly focused on what we already know. We interact with important, but familiar, sources such as Jacques Ellul, Marshall McLuhan, and Neil Postman, but many of us are ignorant of the significant developments in both the philosophy and ethics of technology, and the actual potential of developing technologies. This book provides a helpful cross-section of current trends in Christian theological thought on technology, but it also suggests the need for Christian theologians to branch out.

Notes

¹Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013).

²Luciano Floridi, “Information Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics*, ed. Luciano Floridi (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 95.

³Shannon Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁴Don Gotterbarn, Michael S. Kirkpatrick, and Marty J. Wolf, *ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct: Affirming Our Obligation to Use Our Skills to Benefit Society* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, ACM Committee on Professional Ethics, 2018).

Reviewed by K. Lauriston Smith, Adjunct Instructor, Department of Theology, Grand Canyon University, Phoenix, AZ 85017.

Letters

A Response to Gary Emberger’s Article

I appreciate Gary Emberger taking the spirit world seriously in his helpful article on God, evolution, and Satan (“The Nonviolent Character of God, Evolution, and the Fall of Satan,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 74, 4 [2022]: 224–39). I am among those few who do consider the concept of the angelic fall to be helpful in our understanding of “natural” evil. However, I have a few comments/questions that may further our understanding.¹

First, as with much biblical language, references to evil spirits are fluid and often ambiguous, with multiple metaphors being used to describe them (interestingly, some refer to animals: wild beasts, locusts, serpents, scorpions). Hints of an angelic fall are scattered (the serpent of Genesis 3, the sons of God in Genesis 6, the fall of an exalted one in Isaiah and Ezekiel, and the apocalyptic expulsion of the dragon/devil from heaven) throughout scripture, and describe differing reasons, chronology, and locations of this fall. A primordial fall also requires acceptance of the gap or restoration theory of creation, which has limited biblical support. It remains a logical concept but can only tentatively be accepted.

Second, although I agree that God does not desire suffering and evil works in opposition to his will, I wonder if you (following Boyd) ascribe too much power to evil spirits. The Bible depicts them as disorganized, having limited freedom and abilities, and following Jesus’s commands (not Satan’s). There is only one reference to animals being demonized (pigs in the Gerasene demoniac) and it is Jesus who inflicts the evil spirits on the pigs. Boyd compares demons with “viruses that cannot