

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).

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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

survive long on their own; they need to infect someone or something.”² Viruses have some ontological status, but not autonomous personhood (although more could be said).

Third, in the Gospel stories, and in much anecdotal and theological literature, evil spirits are noted to be associated with, perhaps parasitic on, sin (e.g., Eph. 4:26, 27; 1 Tim. 3:6). Indeed, their ontology may increase when fueled by human sin. However, it is difficult to understand how creatures not made in God’s image, without moral responsibility, can sin and thus allow an entry point for demons. Furthermore, should Christians, who are authorized to expel demons, be expelling demons from animals?

Fourth, all the deliverance stories in the Gospels and Acts have theological purposes—primarily to reveal Jesus’s identity and purpose. As his kingdom advances (Jesus moves to unclean places), we see more demonic activity, since evil spirits work to thwart God’s purposes, and hinder salvation. It is difficult to see how violent behavior in animals may interfere with the kingdom of God, other than in a very general sort of manner, such as suffering and human disillusionment.

Despite these points, I cautiously support the concept of evil spirits possibly being a causative factor in “natural” evil. We cannot dismiss everything that lacks scientific or clear biblical support. I suggest that a both/and or multifactorial approach is more fruitful.³ Some events that are incompatible with God’s character and will may be random (by-products of normal processes, similar to Polkinghorne’s free process defense) whereas others may result from the interference of demons. Or, perhaps more likely, evil occurs due to some interaction between them, as well as human sin or abdication of responsibility. Perhaps demons are parasitic on negative natural occurrences making them worse. It may be interesting to note any association between human sin and “natural” evil—this may strengthen arguments for the role of evil spirits. (David Bentley Hart suggests this with respect to the 2004 tsunami.⁴)

The issue is interesting but complex!

Notes

¹See E. Janet Warren, “Chaos and Chaos-Complexity: Understanding Evil Forces with Insight from Contemporary Science and Linguistics,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 63, no. 4 (2011): 255–66; E. Janet Warren, *Cleansing the Cosmos: A Biblical Model for Conceptualizing and Countering Evil* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012). In support of Emberger’s nonviolent approach, I argue against the use of “spiritual warfare” language.

²Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 195.

³See Warren, *All Things Wise and Wonderful: A Christian Understanding of How and Why Things Happen, in Light of COVID-19* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021).

⁴David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

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Author’s Reply

I welcome Janet Warren’s identification with the “few” of us who consider an angelic fall helpful in understanding “natural” evil. Warren points out that the concept of evil spirits as causative factors in “natural” evils does not enjoy abundant, clear biblical support, but she is also wary of too quickly dismissing the concept on that basis alone. Indeed, as I attempted to demonstrate in my article, the plausibility of the concept resides in its resonance with the Bible’s revelation of an unseen supernatural reality behind observed events, a reality where good and evil spiritual beings are in conflict. A reasonable and defensible corollary is that this spiritual conflict extends to deep time processes such as evolution.

Warren’s comments about the complex causality underlying “natural” evil are well founded. Her suggestions about the parasitic nature of evil spirits and the usefulness of a multifactorial approach to “natural” evil are welcome and helpful. To be clear, the intent of my article was not to simplistically claim that all undesirable natural occurrences are the result of demonic activity; rather, my goal was to question the attribution of evolutionary evil to God’s willful plan. Doing so, as explained in my article, is contrary to the character of God as revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus.

In an effort to better understand the complexity of this issue, Warren offers four comments/questions. I will comment on those aspects of her comments/questions most pertinent to my article.

First, I do not believe a postulated primordial fall of Satan requires acceptance of the gap/restoration theory of creation as popularized in the Scofield Reference Bible of the early twentieth century. This theory postulates a long gap of time between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1 in which an original creation (v. 1) was destroyed as a result of the fall of Satan, followed by recreation (v. 2). My article makes no mention of *when* Satan fell other than to indicate that a fallen Satan likely influenced or distorted the evolutionary process from early on.

Second, Warren suggests I “ascribe too much power to evil spirits.” But why downplay their power? After all,