

indeed to have an awareness of the inconsistencies in our own firmly held views. In ethical terms we certainly need to explore how best to create structures that encourage good behaviour. The power and agency of culture to shape and determine our characters should never be underestimated. Theological ethics in this respect should always be done within an inter-disciplinary framework that can hold the behavioural, the moral and the organisational. Miller is quite right to encourage the reader to explore how good action for the right reason can be virtuous, flourishing and life-giving. Miller manages the inter-relationship between philosophical thesis and an empirical discourse with skill and care.

What is shown in these chapters is that we need some space to be reflective about the nature of character and the ways in which we behave individually and corporately. We certainly need an opportunity to explore the messiness of human life and how all of us respond badly in both thought and talk. Above all we need to nurture community where we can explore our failures of both judgement and action. Far too many of us do not arrange our minds with sufficient imagination and compassion, taking refuge in self-interest, short-term gain and the limitations of the local. Miller argues for a wider horizon, for a readiness to encounter the unexpected, and above all that we live within the virtuous reality of truth which can shape our character. Self-examination and the nurturing of a more holistic view of the world are challenges offered to us if we wish to live the good life.

How all of this relates to justice and punishment, country and continents remains to be seen. Miller, however, provides a map of our journey into this territory.

Kate Ott, *Christian Ethics for a Digital Society*

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). xi + 177 pp. US\$30.00. ISBN 978-1-4422-6737-4 (hbk)

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The digital revolution witnessed over the past twenty years has led to constant and rapid transformation of the technological landscape. Digital technologies, characterised by the combination of artificial intelligence, the Internet, and mobile devices, radically change the fabric of our daily life. As a pedagogue and ethicist, Kate Ott was asked by her audience to make sense of the ubiquitous and somehow overwhelming context of modern technology (p. vii), precipitating her entry into the field of technology and theology. Ott, who currently teaches at Drew University, is better known as a Christian ethicist specialising in feminist theories and sexual ethics. Her previous and first monograph, *Sex + Faith: Talking with Your Child from Birth to Adolescence* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), is a helpful handbook on sexual education geared towards practitioners, parents and educators. Ott enters the conversation about technology with humility, confessing she had to ‘engage a completely new subject area’, and therefore ‘had to become a learner again’ (p. x). *Christian Ethics for a Digital Society*, the fruit of her learning, is not a lengthy theoretical manuscript nor does it present a new revolutionary approach to the philosophy of technology. Rather, it is the result of Ott’s journey in ‘gaining technological literacy’ (p. 142) and her reflection on how ethics fits in this endeavour.

The approach to Christian ethics that Ott brings with her to tackle this new endeavour is deeply grounded in liberation theology. As described in the Introduction, Ott opens and closes *Christian Ethics* with the exact same definition of critical awareness, namely, the process of ‘learning how systems work, developing a socially minded curiosity that often starts with observations about personal experience and connects to larger social patterns’ (pp. 7, 130). The emphasis on critical awareness serves as Ott’s methodological framework and goes hand in hand with the view of ethics that she adopts. She describes this as ‘creative and embodied’ and in opposition to a more traditional ‘rule-based’ approach (p. viii). The aim is to find a ‘moral response’ to all the questions raised by modern technologies through ‘social-moral pedagogy’ (p. 7). Faithful to this approach, Ott combines general factual exposition with numerous anecdotes and practical observations for each issue presented.

But the book’s project is more than simply to enumerate issues with modern technologies. Ott’s ambition is to denounce ‘the ways in which we may experience oppression as well as participate in it on individual, communal, and systemic levels’ (p. 7). The theological answers offered to this situation of oppression created by modern technologies are described in terms of ‘diversity, responsible co-creation, attunement, metanoia, and equity’ (p. 10). Ott applies a hermeneutic of liberation theology to digital technology, and by doing so does indeed build a Christian ethic, or what she names an ‘ethic of digital literacy’ (p. 94), and thereby confronts practices of digital technology with an understanding of what is right and wrong.

Ott builds the book’s structure around four key issues related to digital technologies: the development of algorithmic capitalism (chapter 1), the fabric of the digital self (chapter 2), the rise of digital surveillance (chapter 3), and the impact of technology on the environment (chapter 4). All these topics aim to ‘address a particular issue of inequality or moral deformation perpetuated by digital technologies’ (p. 130). At the end of each chapter, Ott writes a short ‘excursus’ in which she opens up the conversation with personal experiences, a short reflection, and additional questions.

The opening chapter probes the way that algorithms and predictive technology deeply shape the structure of our society and, on an individual level, our desires. A short exegesis of the passage on the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), based on the work of theologian José Míguez-Bonino, is creative and coheres with her liberationist approach. Ott turns away from a traditional reading of Babel—where the institution of languages is typically understood as a curse—to interpret it as a celebration of diversity. Ott compares Babel to modern unification of our ways of life through data, algorithms and predictive analytics, and calls for a push back ‘against the technology industry’s goal or vision of a singular language that dominates and erases difference’ (p. 24). This chapter is part of a broader current conversation in the fields of information studies and philosophy of information. Authors including Safiya Umoja Noble look critically at the oligopolistic position of technological companies (especially the so-called GAFA: Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple) and their oppressive power.

In the second chapter, Ott turns her attention to the ontological debate. The question raised here is the building of the self in the context of digital technologies and social media. The recent development of nomadic devices connected to the Internet and to social media platforms has seen the rise of the networked self, which has been theorised

by authors such as Manuel Castells and danah boyd (although Ott does not refer to the former). Ott presents attunement as a virtue to correct the potential faults of the networked self and to counter-balance the unwanted desires shaped by social media platforms. Attunement helps to guide the constitution of our digital selves through its three main features: 'discernment, authenticity, and faithfulness' (p. 64).

Chapter 3 is devoted to modern practices of digital archiving and the question of our online activity. Ott highlights the issue of dataveillance and privacy, which arises when institutions share and store our data without our consent. She also explicates ways that social surveillance and peer pressure can happen when users curate a virtual self on social media platforms. Ott brings forth the theological concept of forgiveness, opposing it to the unforgiving and all-remembering activity on the Internet referred to as the 'digital trail' (p. 73).

Finally, chapter 4 is dedicated to the question of environmental sustainability and offers a short reflection on the impact of digital devices and data-collecting structures on the environment. After deconstructing some of the myths associated with digital technologies (including the idea that digital technologies are more environmentally friendly than previous ones) and offering some eye-opening examples of effects of the most recent technological developments on the environment, Ott concludes with thoughts on our interconnected responsibility, drawing on the theological concept of co-creation.

One of Ott's key concepts, hacking, is found in the concluding chapter of the book, 'Ethical Hacking and Hacking Ethics'. Ott refers here to the philosophy of hacking, which is to find the weak point of any system and attack it. Applied to digital technologies, the metaphor of hacking is for Ott an 'ethical call to gain access to the ecosystem of digital technologies and define the vulnerabilities to be patched as the perpetuation of social inequalities and injustices' (p. ix). Ott mentions the term with caution. She recognizes that hacking is a loaded term that 'is often given a negative connotation' (p. 131). The overall comparison between that ethical call and the philosophy of hacking is coherent with Ott's project of raising critical awareness and is helpful to describe the need for personal action. But it is unfortunate that Ott lacks space in this section to expand on the term 'hacking ethics' that she briefly mentions (p. 129). It would have been helpful to give an in-depth explanation of what this entails.

Ott draws on a surprising and welcome diversity of theologians and authors as main sources for this book—thus being faithful to the value of diversity that she preaches—including feminist theologians and majority world theologians (e.g. the South African Peter Knox, SJ, and Muhigirwa Rusembuka from Congo). That being said, I believe that including some engagement with the work of 'classic' Christian ethicists of technology, such as Albert Borgmann, Jacques Ellul, Carl Mitcham, Brent Waters, and philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger and Lewis Mumford, to name a few, would have given more depth to *Christian Ethics for a Digital Society*. Mentioning, even briefly, the history of theories in the field of philosophy of technology developed by philosophers over the centuries could have helped the non-specialist audience of this book to put into perspective the fact that ethical discussions about technology are not unique to the twenty-first century and the digital era.

Christian Ethics for a Digital Society is interestingly located among the conversations about modern technologies happening in the discipline. It is not part of the body of

literature of applied social sciences, where digital technologies are typically analysed through the lens of sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis or anthropology (see as an example Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life*, Princeton University Press, 2008). Neither does it fit with the volumes of more focused analysis in the philosophy and ethics of technology among the scholarship mentioned earlier. Instead, the book offers a comprehensive and helpful picture of the current landscape of digital technologies complemented by a robust theological evaluation. The methodology used in the book is didactic, which makes *Christian Ethics* an accessible entry to the field. Each chapter is a good introduction in itself and could be used separately as supportive material to nourish a discussion on the topic.

The book has the strength of addressing some key issues of modern technology without falling into the trap of adopting either an alarmist or a technophile position. Ott successfully approaches the subject through the lenses of capital, the self, society and the environment and with a 'healthy level of skepticism toward technologies as well as an acknowledgment of their benefits' (p. 2). She is realistic and honest in admitting that the manuscript cannot 'restructure the infrastructure of digital technology', but ambitious in challenging us to 'reorient the purpose of the technologies and our use of them' (p. 131). On balance, I would recommend this book as a practical, well-documented and engaging introduction to the current issues that digital technologies raise.

Esther D. Reed, with a foreword by D. Stephen Long, *The Limit of Responsibility: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics for a Globalizing Era*

T&T Clark Enquiries in Theological Ethics (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018). xxi + 237 pp. £85.00. ISBN 978-0-5676-7934-5 (hbk)

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There are few ethical concepts that have achieved such prominence in both academic and popular circles as responsibility. Commended by politicians, public figures and ethicists alike, responsibility has become a catchword of seemingly universal scope. Prominent in many appeals to responsibility is a focus on a self-possessed individual who acts freely for specific ends, and is subsequently held accountable for those actions. In such accounts, responsibility is immediately personal and traceable.

Reed's incisive book skilfully interrogates such appeals to responsibility, probing their limits and shortcomings, before developing a mature, post-liberal account of responsibility which draws constructively from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology. Crucial to Reed's account is a reversal of responsibility from a possession of the 'I' to a gift received in a Christologically-mediated encounter with the 'You' which is paradigmatically, but not exclusively, learned within the church. What prompts and frames Reed's argument, however, is not Bonhoeffer's concept of responsibility itself, but the structures and effects of global capitalism as epitomised by transnational industry-scale mining. The animating question of the book is how to narrate responsibility in this globalising era, which exceeds the immediately personal and often renders untraceable the