

**Kevin Hector. *The Theological Project of Modernism: Faith and the Conditions of Mineness*. Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xiv+217 pp. \$110.00 (hbk).**

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In my view—admittedly idiosyncratic and self-serving—analytic theologians should spend more time reading modern theology. I say this for three reasons. The first is apologetic: as a whole, the project of modern theology is valuable because it offers contemporary theologians a competing worldview, one that is recognizably Christian but also unsettlingly, well, modern. This worldview flourished for three centuries. For better or worse, we still bear its effects and must wrestle with its challenges. Analytic theologians should not shirk this task. The second is interpretive: modern theology is often terrifyingly difficult to understand, and its students would benefit from the help of theologically and analytically-trained scholars who can elucidate its key figures with clarity and concision. (We need the modern theology equivalent of Eleonore Stump on Aquinas.) The third is formative: analytic theologians would themselves benefit from greater immersion in the very non-analytic thought-world of modern theology. Learning how to read and understand Kant, Schleiermacher, and (*per impossibile*) Hegel would help analytic theologians develop skills and habits of mind that would complement their analytic training. At the moment, few analytic theologians are interested in working in this mode, and even fewer are capable of doing it well.

Into the breach steps Kevin W. Hector. *The Theological Project of Modernism: Faith and the Conditions of Mineness* is primarily a work of historical theology, though it also gestures toward Hector's own future constructive proposal. According to Hector, for all its complexity, modern theology offers a series of responses to a basic problem of the human condition. Hector calls this the problem of "mineness." The problem concerns how we can identify with our own lives, such that our actions and projects really express our own goals and values. Various forces threaten to prevent us from fully identifying with our own lives (17–23). They might come to seem meaningless amid the sheer randomness of historical circumstance, as well as the more-predictable evils of illness, tragedy, and social upheaval. Less dramatically, even our more prosaic goals are regularly thwarted in a way that can impede us from identifying unreservedly with our day-to-day lives. ("I didn't get that job, and so now I'm stuck waiting tables for another year. I never thought my life would go like this.") And if determinism and reductive materialism are true, then plausibly "I" am not a self with "my" own goals and values at all, but just another thing among things, an

“it,” subject to the same remorseless, exceptionless laws of physics that govern the behavior of the falling rain.

Modern theology to the rescue. Hector begins with a chapter that helpfully clarifies the idea of “mineness” and address some conceptual issues about what it is to “intend” or “identify with” one’s own life and goals. He next offers careful readings of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, G.W.F. Hegel, Albrecht Ritschl, Ernst Troeltsch, and Paul Tillich. Kant “invented the problem of mineness” (32) because he recognized that “one’s life is one’s own, rather than a consequence of natural causation,” only if one explicitly intends to conform to the moral law; furthermore, “one can reasonably maintain this intention, despite circumstances that would appear to confound it, only if one has faith of a certain sort” (75). Kantian faith posits a God who ensures that moral virtue and happiness eventually coincide, if not in this life then in the next. It is the rational hope “that one’s commitment to morality is not finally futile” (71). Schleiermacher then finds the Kantian solution wanting and develops his own response to the problem of mineness. For Schleiermacher, his antithesis of freedom and dependence is reconciled first by faith in God as the ultimate “Whence,” in whom all oppositions are reconciled, and then by membership in the Church as the body of Christ. Each subsequent figure in Hector’s pantheon builds upon his predecessor by offering a novel account of the problem of mineness and the way that a certain sort of Christian faith can overcome it. Speaking summarily, for all these figures, “God is understood as having taken various oppositions into unity with Godself and, so, as having overcome the ultimacy of such oppositions; to have faith in God, accordingly, is to trust that the oppositions one encounters are not themselves ultimate” (257).

Hector’s story is not the one that many contemporary thinkers would tell about modern theology. On the more common account, modern theology is not a series of responses to human vulnerability and the problem of mineness. Rather, modern theology has contributed to human vulnerability because it has given a religious imprimatur to such evils as capitalism, racism, and European colonialism. Worse, modern theology has made an idol out of a particularly male, particularly Western notion of “universal human reason,” and then used that idol to dehumanize those others—the bulk of the human race—who failed to worship at its feet. Hector’s own reading is meant as a retrieval, a constructive rejoinder to this hypercritical account of modern theology. Hector identifies with the emancipatory aims of contemporary contextual theologians like J. Kameron Carter, but argues that the theological projects of Kant, Schleiermacher, et. al. can actually contribute to those aims.<sup>1</sup> Both modern theology and contextual theology seek to offer theological responses to the problem of mineness. If Hector is correct about modern theology’s central focus on mineness and vulnerability, then it follows that *on its own terms*, modern theology finds its best contemporary expression in contextual theology.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). “Contextual” theologies like liberation theology, black/womanist theology, and feminist theology all treat concrete, culturally-conditioned human experiences as major sources of theological reflection. The implied contrast is with allegedly universal, purely theoretical theologies that abstract from such experiences.

*The Theological Project of Modernism* is a terrific achievement. I am impressed by Hector's sheer erudition. To become sufficiently conversant with even one of these fearsomely difficult interlocutors is heroic; to become conversant with all six, and conversant enough to be able to find heretofore unnoticed threads that bind them together and connect them all to contemporary contextual theology—well, let's just say that there are not many scholars, at any stage of their careers, who could pull this off as well as Hector does here. There are the usual quibbles, of course. Hector has convinced me that the problem of mineness is one of the overlooked concerns of modern theology. He has not quite convinced me that it is as central as he claims. Nor am I entirely convinced that the abstract, theoretical versions of the problem that Hector so expertly draws out of Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel are really all that close to the more down-to-earth practical concerns of contemporary contextual theology. I especially want to know how Karl Barth fits into the story, and whether it has room for Catholic forms of modernism—and not just obvious exemplars like Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar but even modern neoscholastics like Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.

Above all, I wish that Hector had considered whether his own project of retrieval might also have usefully rehabilitated the notion of universal reason. Hector seems to accept the contemporary contextualist critique that regards universal human reason as an oppressive chimera, "a kind of optical illusion" (viii), and he presents his own story of mineness as an alternative to the more common story of modern theology's excessive valorization of reason. But what can be more "mine" than my own reason? We experience the demands of reason as internally binding demands: the voice of so-called universal reason is authoritative, but it is also very much our own voice, our own innermost guide to what is the case. In different ways, modern theology and analytic theology require a viable notion of universal reason. In a work of modern theology that also presents itself as an exemplar of analytic theology, I would like to have seen more reflection on the nature of reason.

At this point, I must tackle a somewhat delicate issue. For all its virtues, it is not obvious that this book naturally belongs in the *Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology* series. It doesn't *look* much like analytic theology for one thing. Hector doesn't offer us much in the way of formally-structured propositional arguments, and for the most part he is content to exposit the figures under review rather than subject their arguments to sustained scrutiny. His prose is clear enough—especially in comparison with other contemporary scholars of modern theology—but the density of his subject matter occasionally weighs it down. In part because it is sometimes dense, the book is by no means an introductory work. (Nor does it claim to be.) An untutored analytic theologian who wants to read more modern theology and turns to Hector for a way into its major themes and figures will find the book difficult. Valuable, yes, but difficult. All this must be said, given the readership of this journal.

Academic boundary-policing arguments are almost always deeply uninteresting. So instead of defending its membership in the OSAT series, let me instead close with this: *The Theological Project of Modernism* is what the future of academic theology will look like if the analytic theology movement actually succeeds. Hector writes: "As I understand it, 'analytic theology' is an approach characterized, above all, by a commitment to the precision, clarity, and rigor

prized by analytic philosophers, and by a creative deployment of these philosophers' best insights. I intend for this book to exemplify both of these characteristics.... I simply could not have written this book without drawing significantly on the resources of analytic philosophy" (ix). This statement is about analytic theology, but it actually describes all good theology. Good theology exhibits the intellectual virtues of precision, clarity, and rigor not because they are distinctively "analytic" but because they are virtues. Good theology draws as needed on the resources of analytic philosophy not as a way of signaling membership in a guild, but because those resource are helpful for the work one needs to do. Hector is not trying and failing to be an analytic theologian. He is trying to be, and succeeding at, being a good theologian.