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Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology (Book Review)

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despite what their founding fathers carefully constructed, and of being deceived about what they are supporting or voting for when they agree to protest and vote. This book meticulously illuminates the historical course of that happening. But I say that as a Jeffersonian. I suspect today's Hamiltonians are quite pleased with where things are: that the Tenth Amendment has long been declared essentially non-existent, that the constitutional doctrine of delegated powers has been ignored, and that the US Supreme Court recently refused to rule the Congressional passage of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) as unconstitutional. If change does come, it will no doubt be because old political categories are broken so that new arguments, and unlikely alliances, are made—as Taylor discusses in this book.

No review would be complete without some

negative criticism, I suppose. Were I to offer that, the length of the book (over 600 pages) would be at the top of the list. The length is also a strength of the book, but that strength would be more acknowledged by dedicated college or post-graduate students, or very serious political hobbyists (I consider myself the latter). The fact is, if Taylor wants to have a lot of influence with lots of voters, he should realize that many or most will start reading another book when they see the length of, and small print in, this one. Given that the book appears to be at least in part a compilation of prior articles and papers done by Taylor, perhaps he will do us all a favor by releasing future books that are designed, visually and content-wise, for the reader who just wants to be an intelligent voter and modest political participant. I'll keep this one though.

Schuurman, Derek C. *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2013. ISBN 978030827138. Reviewed by Charles Veenstra, Professor of Communication, Dordt College.

One need not be a computer scientist in order to be concerned with the issues surrounding computer technology. Some might see computer technology as a challenge; others may fear that they are being controlled by it in ways that are uncomfortable. Derek Schuurman, an electrical engineer who became a teacher, steps back from his work as a computer scientist to examine a wide range of issues from his Reformational Christian perspective. For example, he shows that technology is not neutral, that digital technology influences how we think, and how to develop responsible technology. This little book can serve very well as a resource in many courses beyond those in computer science. It provides a wonderful introduction to how Reformational thinking influences all of our work. It demonstrates how a scholar should wrestle with issues, and he includes discussion questions, which should make this a very fine book for a variety of classes—even for church groups. The bibliography itself is worth the price of the book because it points to many Reformational scholars who have laid foundations on which the rest of us can build.

Drawing on a wide range of Reformational thinkers throughout the book Schuurman explains in the second chapter how the themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration set the context for thinking about technology. He draws on Dooyeweerd's scheme of modal aspects to help understand how diverse entities function in creation. He argues that the

lower aspects function more like creation laws and the higher ones appear to be norms rather than laws: "The 'earlier' aspects (starting with the numeric) provide a foundation for the 'later' ones (up to the faith aspect)" (42). And "whereas laws are in effect without human intervention, norms involve human freedom and responsibility" (44). He then shows how the various modalities function when working with computers. This section is particularly helpful in understanding these modalities because he illustrates with computer examples how they function. "A simple example is a digital image; although it is formed using low-level binary pixels (numeric aspect), the image that is formed enables higher aspects in a human subject. A digital image can prompt feelings of affection (psychic aspect), serve as a cultural object (historical aspect) and be used to portray symbols or text (lingual aspect). Digital images can portray friendships (social aspect) and also beauty (aesthetic aspect)" (43).

In the third chapter which deals with the effects of the fall, Schuurman uses Albert Wolters' concepts of structure and direction to explain how the possibilities of computer technology are intertwined with the effects of sin: "The web is useful for communicating and disseminating truthful information; on the other hand, online gambling and pornographic websites are destructive. Email and social networking can shrink the distances between people; but compulsive computer use leads to loss of authentic human con-

tact” (55). While he appreciates technology, he does not worship it as some seem to do. Technicism, the faith and trust in the power of technology, is marked by three key beliefs: that the progress of technology cannot be stopped, that technological progress will improve the conditions of humankind, and if problems develop, technology will solve them. He calls this a religion, albeit a false one because it replaces God. He is concerned that technology may appear to take on a life of its own if we do not develop a comprehensive view of what we construct: “we may shape our machines, but they will also shape us” (61).

Although some may view all technology as a result of the fall (e.g., Jacques Ellul), Schuurman claims that “[t]echnology and rational methods are part of the structure of creation; however, they can be absolutized or misdirected” (65). We must consider both structure and direction as we work with any technology: “ignoring normative principles goes against the fabric of creation and entails negative consequences” (65). Schuurman further argues that when technology is driven narrowly by monetary or economic considerations, “a technical worldview directs things toward efficiency at the expense of many other considerations” (66).

His fourth chapter, on redemption and responsible computer technology, helps us see that “salvation is comprehensive in scope; it is about more than personal salvation. . . . [Christ] comes to make his blessings flow, as far as the curse is found” (72). Schuurman struggles with the question of just what a Christian does in computer technology compared to a non-Christian. Using the insights of several Reformational thinkers, he explains that the starting place is shalom—the way things are supposed to be. From this

point, he rejects technicism and attempts to develop normative principles for technology. Computer scientists cannot operate in a vacuum; they need to seek guidance from other experts. For example, designing computers to help automobile traffic flow requires including a traffic expert cooperating with computer scientists and engineers. Therefore, the overarching normative principle, he says, is one of love. By going back to the modal aspects he discussed earlier, he demonstrates how these aspects are integrated in computer technology—including historical, cultural, social, aesthetic, and juridical norms. In discussing each of these norms, he uses examples that demonstrate the power of these norms and what happens when they are violated. Computer technology should promote the creational norms.

In examining the future of computer technology, Schuurman avoids both a utopian view that technology will solve all our problems and a view of despair that technology will threaten to make humans an endangered species. Instead, he sees technology as part of God’s good creation: “We must discern the good structures of creation without being lured by some of its misdirections” (117). He points to Christ’s return when he, not technology, will heal the nations. He shows how we might think about what technology can do in the new creation when harmful technology will be transformed to conform with God’s original intention for creation.

Finally, he notes that both worldview and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ are essential in shaping computer technology. In doing so, he says, “we need to be new creation signposts, people whose hearts and lives seek to be faithful to God” (124).

Schaap, James Calvin. *Up the Hill*. Moorhead, MN: New Rivers Press, 2014. 119 pp. ISBN: 978-0-89823-325-4. Reviewed by Howard Schaap, Assistant Professor of English, Dordt College.

Anyone familiar with James Calvin Schaap’s fiction should find the premise behind his latest collection of short stories, *Up the Hill*, quite a departure. Actually, there’s only one major change in *Up the Hill* that Schaap makes from his usual style, but for an author who believes in realistic fiction as much as he does, that shift is all the more major: *Up the Hill* is told from a point of view beyond the grave. That’s right. In *Up the Hill*, the stories are told by a small-town newspaper editor, himself a dead, ghostly resident of the cemetery “up the hill,” who tells stories about his cemetery neighbors and especially the newly dead, as they take up residence in an afterlife that has heaven-

ly flavor but an earthly setting. Viewed through the lens of literary realism—Schaap’s forte—this move to a sort of magic realism seems downright shocking. Through another lens, though, *Up the Hill* fits perfectly in with the work that Schaap has been doing for a long time: telling the stories of small-town characters in the tradition of Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*. In *Up the Hill*, Schaap’s Winesburg is Highland, Iowa, only projected into the afterlife where Schaap has found new inspiration to explore the lives of small-town Dutch America.

Perhaps the thing I enjoyed most about *Up the Hill* is how playful it is—or how playful it *can* be,