

needs of those with disabilities without simultaneously reducing them to their perceived brokenness. Across these chapters we learn that the militancy of God is found in the ability to resist human beings' rejection of one another: 'Real political insurrection ... demands rooting the dismissal and "othering" from the human hearts out of which it springs' (p. 11).

The historian and biblical scholar in me wishes that Brock had interacted with more biblical and early church scholarship than he does. In the past ten years, disability criticism has made inroads into these areas of theological inquiry and it is disappointing that Brock does not utilise this material. This is a highly subjective quibble, however. Brock is speaking with confidence about the paradoxes in modern medical thought and practice and about the uneasy way in which modern Christians have adopted secular consumeristic assumptions. His is a powerful call to arms: to resist the social and cultural structures that induce us to distance ourselves from other and to accept the powerful command of the spirit to receive and embrace others. All of this he grounds in a richly developed incarnational theology of the flesh that is practically brought to bear upon the practices of societies and communities that should know better.

doi:10.1017/S0036930620000575

Christopher R. Barnett, *Kierkegaard and the Question Concerning Technology*

(London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. xviii + 237. \$120.00.

Carl S. Hughes

Texas Lutheran University, Seguin, TX, USA (chughes@tlu.edu)

This is an original book on a subject few would think to associate with Kierkegaard. Barnett contextualises Kierkegaard amid the technological upheavals of his age, lifts up an implicit philosophy and/or theology of technology in his work, provides a critical overview of Kierkegaard's reception in twentieth-century thinking about technology and develops a Kierkegaardian critique of our own digitised age.

Barnett's historical chapters give a detailed account of how the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of nineteenth-century Denmark produced revolutions in transportation, the press, science, art, leisure and many other fields. Once prompted to see new forms of technology referenced in Kierkegaard's work, one starts to see them everywhere. This is particularly the case with new forms of transportation, as railroads, steamships and omnibuses pop up again and again. Kierkegaard did remarkably little travelling compared to his Danish peers, but for this reason his fixation on both the rapidity and the indignities of modern transport is especially noteworthy.

Barnett also offers a fresh and revealing interpretation of Kierkegaard's relationship to the popular press, which he describes as a new kind of 'information technology' (p. 63). As is well known, Kierkegaard's relationship with the press was frequently adversarial, most notably during the *Corsair's* sustained campaign of mockery against

him. But Barnett also demonstrates that Kierkegaard made dexterous use of the press for his own ends. He did so to particularly great effect in the last year of his life when he founded a serial pamphlet publication called *The Moment*, saying that 'I cannot do without an organ by which I can instantaneously address my contemporaries' (p. 92). Kierkegaard used *The Moment* to offer stinging critiques of the very superficiality and sheep-like thinking that he believed characterised the popular press.

As Barnett is the first to acknowledge, Kierkegaard never sets out to offer a philosophy of technology per se. In fact, Kierkegaard never once uses the word *teknologi* (p. 28). Nonetheless, Barnett finds an implicit critique of technological thinking in the deep Kierkegaardian themes of reflection, contemplation and meditation, which stand in stark opposition to the misguided aspirations to objectivity and systematicity in modernity. While Kierkegaard was not intrinsically opposed to technology, Barnett shows that he offers an enduringly relevant critique of its capacity to depersonalise, distract from existential reflection and encourage only the most superficial forms of thought. Barnett offers an appealing reading of Kierkegaard's writing as a kind of 'therapy', which demands from the reader the same patient and contemplative openness that it describes (pp. 97, 110–11).

In our own internet age, when attention spans seem to grow shorter by the day, Kierkegaard's critique of technology is especially relevant. One of the most intriguing parts of Barnett's book is his own Kierkegaardian critique of Google and the technological mindset it represents. Barnett describes Google's very business model as distraction and compares its aspiration to organise and distribute the totality of the world's information to the Hegelian system that Kierkegaard spent his career resisting (p. 108). In this light, Kierkegaard's frequent injunctions to read slowly, to ponder the existential significance of any thought, to replace superficiality with earnestness and to contemplate the lilies of the field and the bird of the air could not be more welcome.

The final section of the book is about Kierkegaard's reception in twentieth-century thinking about technology. Heidegger, whose indebtedness to Kierkegaard is extensive and usually unacknowledged, is the most central figure here, as the allusion to Heidegger's 1953 essay 'The Question Concerning Technology' in Barnett's title indicates. Barnett finds numerous resonances between the two thinkers, especially concerning the value of questioning and meditative thinking as opposed to technological instrumentalism and levelling. Among the other figures Barnett treats, his consideration of theologically minded figures such as Jacques Ellul, Romano Guardini and Thomas Merton is particularly welcome, because technology is more commonly thought of as a philosophical problem than a theological one. The range of interlocutors Barnett considers gives a sense of the boundary-crossing scope of Kierkegaard's thought.

Barnett's book has a dense and technical character that will limit its readership to an academic audience composed primarily of Kierkegaard specialists. At times its aspiration to exhaustiveness and systematicity seems to mirror the very technological thinking that it describes Kierkegaard as critiquing. Still, the book is a welcome contribution to Kierkegaard studies. It opens a new window onto Kierkegaard's work and, more importantly, proves the value of looking through it.