As the supposed victory of liberal global capitalism becomes more widely accepted, the religious (re)turn to modernity’s secular world deconstructs the haphazardly constructed walls that divide the religious from the secular. While postmodern theology exemplifies those attempts at operating within the postsecular logic, it is decidedly apolitical, bordering on conservatism. Clayton Crockett’s *Radical Political Theology* represents a sophisticated radical theology with the ambitious goal of decentering establishment theology while maintaining an explicitly political focus. Indeed, at its most fundamental level, Crockett’s theopolitical project exists as a union of opposites that exhibits rewarding uses of post-Marxism, postmodernism, postliberalism, and postsecularism.

With the rise of the Religious Right in America and what Naomi Klein calls “disaster capitalism” over the last three decades, many thinkers appear to be lost in the liberal-conservative binary while also stuck relying on pre-modern values in order to counterpose today’s ruling regimes (3). Responding to this climate, Crockett proposes to “sketch out a constructive theology that is neither liberal in a classic sense nor conservative or orthodox in any way, whether politically or theologically” (2). This will demand a radical theology, which finds its roots in the American academy’s tradition of the death of God and postmodern theologies, as a counterweight to the Religious Right’s conservative Christianity, while also pursuing radical political commitments. Crockett explicates the focus of such theopolitical commitments by “suggesting that the political and the theological problem of our time is that of freedom... Radical theology’s task is to think freedom, which means to think the death of God, especially since the idea of God traditionally means conceiving of God apart from being as “event,” as becoming or “attractor,” in a kind of transvaluation of our divine value conception—god-like in the first place. Thus, with theopoetic and philosophical underpinnings, what is accomplished is a kind of transvaluation of our divine value conception—of God as being “no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather laying out of a common plane of immanence on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated” (66). On the one hand, a transcendent sovereign power was expected to actualize a possibility (which does not have being until the sovereignty of God is made complete in investing of the monarch with “the soul of the commonwealth” making “all of its members subjects to this power.” This leads Crockett to assert, “The sovereign power of God is intrinsically connected to the oneness of God” (46). Because classical sovereignty is constructed by opposing unity to multiplicity, Crockett seeks to overturn this oppressive paradigm with thinking of potential, multiplicity, and weakness.

Turning from the political abuse of theology, Crockett targets the theological blunder of conceiving a unified and transcendent God. For Crockett, this means conceiving of God apart from being as “event,” as becoming or “attractor,” as the deconstruction and dis-enclosure of Christianity, or as “impotententiality,” the power to refrain from acting and certainly beyond monotheism. Crockett frames the problem that the unified sovereign power of the nation-state appears to be god-like in the first place. Thus, with theopoetic and philosophical underpinnings, what is accomplished is a kind of transvaluation of our divine value conception—not Being but event, not one but many, not transcendent but immanent, etc. In chapter three, Crockett continues to emphasize immanence via Spinoza by delving into what Deleuze calls “the virtual.” Crockett quotes Deleuze on the significance of Spinoza as being “no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather laying out of a common plane of immanence on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated” (66). On the other hand, the transcendent sovereign power was expected to actualize a possibility (which does not have being until the sovereign brings it into being). On the other hand, the plane of immanence (the “image of thought” which provides consistency for the creation of philosophical concepts) is understood as containing the virtual, which does not lack being; rather it resides within a thing or concept and merely waits to be differentiated.

Crockett, in chapter four, goes on to analyze the problem of liberalism framed by Carl Schmitt, imagining a future beyond liberalism that “takes mate-
rial, worldly things seriously at the same time as it realizes the profound imbrication of religion and politics” (84). The outcome is certainly guilty of the Schmittian critique of liberal realism insofar as it does not favor the overt “friend-enemy distinction” Schmitt argues for in Political Theology. However, Crockett wishes to challenge liberalism on its most basic level: the market. In support of the market, the secular emerges as an “emancipation from theology” that works toward maximal human freedom, which in turn is “ultimately the freedom of the market.” Not only is this divide superficial, but Crockett argues that it fails to fully appreciate the implications of psychoanalytic theory, which put into question our conscious allegiances to theological and political systems. Crockett states, “so long as theism and atheism remain questions of belief, they remain superficial compared to a psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious and derivative of more primary human motivations and desires” (158). It can be, and often is, the case that what we say we believe is refuted both on a material and subconscious level. Hence, a “radical political theology” utilizes psychoanalysis to analyze the material conditions of our physical and psychic existence, and in stride brings religion back into the public sphere, not opposed to secularism, but wrapped up in it as a means of fighting the false ideal of secular human freedom which manifests in free market liberalism.

In the latter half of the book, Crockett gives an argument for thinking of a post-secular theology in terms of Catherine Malabou’s theory of “plasticity,” (Ch. 5, 8), the Deleuzian event and our Biopolitical situation (Ch.6), and how Radical Theology can think through the “event” in terms of Deleuze alongside St. Paul (Ch.7). Among these, Malabou’s plasticity is especially pertinent as it allows Crockett to bind together the various philosophies that have been discussed. In chapter five, Crockett leads us through the “anomalous” aspect of Spinoza’s thought that is not part of the modern liberal democratic state’s notion of democracy, that which Antonio Negri calls potentialia or the “power of the multitude” (98). The passage from any kind of radical democracy as outlined by Spinoza to a Schmittian “state of exception” politics is explained via Spinoza’s radical immanent critique of religion in contrast with Schmitt’s theological conception of an omnipotent, transcendent deity, a theology that is “secularized” in the form of the sovereign.

To escape this, Crockett prescribes three concepts as articulated by fellow Continental thinkers: Malabou’s plasticity for “thinking of matter and form in the shadow of religious temporal Messianism,” “equality” i.e. “the power of anyone at all” rather than the “sovereign power of the majority” who dictate which issues are debated in the first place, and Foucault’s analysis of “governmentality” wherein the biopower of the state over human life is opposed. Plasticity becomes the “religious supplement” that is “not merely a supplement” because it is an inherent aspect of the “counter conduct opposing the predominant neoliberal and neocorporative forms of governmentality that capture or constrain life.” Thus, within the bounds of Crockett’s “secular theology,” which seeks to speak of the ultimate concern of the people and theology’s positive role within the parallax of religion, “plasticity and equality can be seen as contemporary theoretical forms of potentiality beyond liberalism” (107).

Deleuze and the “event” in chapters 6 and 7 allow Crockett to explain and speak of a “pure law” that is beyond what Giorgio Agamben calls “force-of-law,” that is “law without law,” i.e. our current political situation is constituted by a perpetual state of exception in which we call “law” is really a suspension of the law in which new laws are birthed (e.g. the Patriot Act, Gitmo, etc.). Crockett posits Deleuze a “successor of Paul” because he provides us the tools to think of the event, which signals “the end of global capitalism because capitalism has reached its earthly limits of resources that make indefinite growth impossible” (144). We, like Paul are looking for an event to proclaim on our own road to Damascus that reorients reality in contrast to the current power alignments and leads us out of the sovereign state of exception. If we are to utilize Deleuze, then we can think of such an event as a “futural possibility in the present,” when our “openness to the future” (143) unlocks the possible realities contained in the virtual reality of our plane of immanence.

Crockett’s last chapter continues thinking through immanence by returning to Catherine Malabou’s reading of Hegelian plasticity and recent developments in neuroscience. Plasticity, which Malabou reads in Hegel’s Phenomenology of the Spirit, allows Malabou to understand the Hegelian dialectic not as a play of simple opposites but as the “stretching and folding of forms of temporality and subjectivity rather than the stereotypical supercessionism that is criticized by postmodern theorists wary of its totalizing operation.” In terms of brain science, “Plasticity refers to the incredible resilience of form of adult brain cells,” (154) their ability to give, receive, and destroy form- a “branching off that is creative and not simply responsive or passive.” Following Henri Bergson, Crockett concludes that theology would remain “A machine for making gods,” however “these gods would be plastic gods, and the theological machine would be a brain” (2). Plasticity allows for shifting religious philosophical discourse from the temporal to the spatial, for it has to do with interacting and creating on the spatial plane and realizing actualities, rather than operating on the temporal line of Christian Messianism or the Derridian “to come.” Lastly, Crockett admires the concept of plasticity for it allows us to move beyond reading thinkers in “either/or terms,” rather allowing normally mutually exclusive thoughts to give and receive from one another because, according to Crockett, “To truly interpret the world is to change it” (159). Plasticity allows for the construction of a truly radical political theology in its forming and receptivity to multiple streams of thought. This is indeed a timely claim that hopefully saves this project, no matter how brilliant, from a kind of formalism that is often an indictment of postmodern thought.

It is Crockett’s explicit refusal to engage with the work of liberation theology- particularly black, womanist, and feminist theology- that ultimately limits his project. While he does not wish to dismiss “other forms of theological thinking,” nor deny liberation theology’s engagement in “important and vital political theology,” his theological concern bases much of its raison d’être on a questionable observation made by Jeffrey W. Robbins that liberation theology “never went so
far as to put the established theology into question” (10-1) However, if the center of the established theological order is properly identified as a white phallocentric value system, then Robbins’ claim seems quite spurious, especially when considering some of liberation theology’s more explicit decentering gestures, e.g. black theology’s assertion of the ontological blackness of God, feminist theology’s castration of the “divine phallus,” and womanism’s radical subjectivity.

Furthermore, Crockett’s sympathy for Robbins’ position is troubling, not for its theologically radical component that demands a freedom to think God without God, but for its lack of consideration of influential liberation theologians and their ideas. What is especially puzzling (in light of the absence of liberation theologians in a work of radical political theology) is Crockett’s simultaneous criticism of radical orthodoxy and process theology alongside his attending to their work and concepts, namely the work of Catherine Keller and John Milbank. One can only wonder how the liberation theologian’s eye to real bodies on the ground might have complemented this thoroughly theoretical project.

Nevertheless, Clayton Crockett has constructed a brilliant work of political theology. Its systematic and methodical arguments make abundantly clear the complex resources that are used to build a radical political theology beyond liberalism. Thinkers from various academic disciplines would greatly benefit from Crockett’s insight and illuminations. However, given the space that Crockett has opened up by uniting so many disparate concepts and thinkers, perhaps the most significant addition he has contributed to the academy is freedom, freedom to (re) imagine religion, politics, and theology without traditional limits and constraints.

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