
Kevin W. Hector: *The Theological Project of Modernism: Faith and the Conditions of Mineness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, xiv, 271pp., Hardcover, £ 65.00, ISBN 978-0-19-872264-9.

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Kevin W. Hector's *The Theological Project of Modernism* counters and corrects the well-worn narrative which tells the history of theology since the Enlightenment as a historicizing and humanizing sell-out of God. In his theological-philosophical study, Hector argues that the protagonists of the modernization of theology had a common concern. They pursued a problem and a project which Hector interprets as the question of "mineness", the question of how a person might identify her life as her life (1). Analyzing the major modernizers of theology since the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Georg W. F. Hegel, Albrecht Ritschl, and Paul Tillich, Hector "investigates [...] the conditions of a life having a shape such that one can identify with it, paradigmatically by its conforming to a life-plan with which one identifies; to count as 'mine', in other words, one's life must not only hang together, but do so in such a way that one can experience it as self-expressive" (2).

Hector offers careful, clear, and concise interpretations of the theologians he has chosen for his study. He describes the development of their thought, depicts the part faith plays in their answers to the question of mineness, and discusses objections to their proposals. To offer one example: Hector's analysis of Albrecht Ritschl's theology opens with a succinct assessment of Ritschl's theological

teacher, Ferdinand Christian Baur. Hector portrays Ritschl's disappointment with his teacher's interpretation of history as a causally connected continuum which erases novelty from the course of history. For Ritschl, novelty is imperative for the interpretation of history because novelty allows for spirit. By "spirit", Hector explains, "Ritschl means something like 'personhood'" (182). What makes a person a person, then, is that she is not a pawn in the hands of nature. Rather, personhood is characterized by the ability to plan one's practice and to practice one's plan. Thus, the whole life of a person – her cognitions, volitions, and emotions – can be oriented toward a plan as in Hector's example of a "dieter" who "may feel hungry but resists the urge to eat, deciding that it is best to wait until dinner" (186). This plan shapes the dieter's life as much as the dieter's life shapes this plan. Putting the plan into practice, then, enables the person to make her life *her* life, to take matters into her own hands.

According to Hector's account of Ritschl, religion helps to address the problems which a person faces when she pursues a plan. Considering her circumstances – the surprises and the strokes which she might attribute to fate – the mineness of her life cannot be taken for granted. Here, Ritschl emphasizes the significance of trust in God. Hector analyzes Ritschl's theory of trust in depth and detail. Essentially, Ritschl argues that trust in God allows a person to orient her life towards God, to act morally rather than immorally, because such trust frees the person from trusting the world, her own abilities and her own accomplishments (such as keeping a diet). For Ritschl, the preaching and practice of Jesus is crucial for a person to learn how to trust God. As Hector argues: "Simply stated, Jesus's vocation is to devote himself wholly to a loving fellowship with God; given who God is, such devotion necessarily entails that Jesus will aim to bring others into this fellowship, who will in turn aim to bring others [...] such that in taking this as his end, Jesus also aims at establishing a loving fellowship among persons" (197). Thus, Jesus exemplifies the devotion to a plan and to a practice oriented toward God – a "vocation (*Berufung*)", as Ritschl famously formulated, for which Jesus is willing to die. To pursue such a vocation allows a person to identify her life as her life, because it cannot be distorted or destroyed by circumstances, either positive or negative. "Every time one faces [...] obstructions, one faces that which would tempt one not to trust God; hence, insofar as one trusts God in the face of these temptations, they become occasions for that trust, and, therefore, are incorporated into a life oriented toward that toward which one wants to be oriented" (206). "On Ritschl's account, then, if one trusts God, one will commit oneself to love for others – trusting God is a sufficient condition of such love. Those who trust God will love others, therefore, as God loves them" (207).

Ritschl's theology exemplifies how Hector interprets the protagonists of the

modernization of theology who “offer an alternative approach to ‘mineness’, a key component of which is faith. On this approach, God is understood as having taken various oppositions into unity with Godself and, so, as overcoming the apparent ultimacy of such oppositions; to have faith in God, accordingly, is to trust that the oppositions one encounters are not themselves ultimate” (256). Hector succinctly summarizes how these modernizers argue “(a) that one’s experience of oppositions is due to humanity’s fallen state; (b) that God is the one who overcomes oppositions, including humanity’s opposition to God; (c) that faith in God sets one in new relation to oppositions, such that the latter are no longer experienced as ultimate [...]; and (d) that one can see oneself in this faith [...] insofar as (i) one can see oneself in God’s own identification with humanity, (ii) one can express faith through one’s individual vocation, and (iii) faith opens up new expressive possibilities for each” (262 f.).

Methodologically, Hector characterizes his study as “analytic theology”, an approach to theology which, for him, is marked by clarity on the one hand and creativity on the other (x). Countering the claim that analytical theology is a-historical, Hector applies its terms and its tools to the history of theology. His application impresses with its lucidity, rendering his study equally instructive to those who teach and to those who are taught courses in modern theology. It offers sound and succinct introductions to thinkers who modernized theology.

Nonetheless, I am not convinced that Hector has analysed and assessed “the” theological project of modernism, as the title of his study announces. Ritschl – to return to the example – addressed what Hector calls the problem and the project of mineness. But mineness is not the only concern of his theology. The fact that Hector tends to tackle “mineness” only at the end of his accounts of the theologians he covers in his study casts doubt on the significance of the question of mineness for the major modernizers of theology. Moreover, the rationale Hector uses to decide which thinker to include and which thinker not to include in his interpretation of the modernization of theology is ambiguous: “In approaching modern theology”, he writes, “my strategy has been first to read [...] several figures almost universally recognized as belonging to the class ‘modern theologians’, and only then to determine what project – if any – these figures have in common” (2). I wonder what would have been “the” theological project of modernism, if Hector had chosen different theologians with different theologies for his study. Can theological modernism be confined to German theologians, as Hector’s selection seems to suggest? Can theological modernism be confined to male rather than female theologians, as Hector’s selection seems to suggest? And is it a project, as Hector’s selection seems to suggest, of Protestantism rather than Catholicism? What indeed is modernism? I would argue that Hector has analyzed *a* – but not “the” – theological project of modernism. His analysis,

however, is as clear as it is convincing, correcting the reduction of the history of theology after the Enlightenment to a historicizing and humanizing sell-out of God, a reduction which has been repeated too many times. Hector's study proves that the protagonists of the modernization of theology were concerned with the vulnerability of concrete persons in concrete situations, pointing out that faith might play a crucial part in their lives. These concerns render Hector's modernizers important and instructive for theology today.
