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Review of Terra Schwerin Rowe, Of Modern Extraction: Experiments in Critical Petro-theology

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Book Review

Terra Schwerin Rowe, *Of Modern Extraction: Experiments in Critical Petro-theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2023), 200 pp., \$115 (hbk), ISBN: 9780567708342.

Of Modern Extraction opens with an anecdote about biking in South Dakota and, as someone who bikes to work in South Carolina, I was hooked. Rowe connects philosophical questions regarding extraction, the body, and religion in a compelling way. In this theoretically-complex work, Rowe offers a distinct interpretation of the past five centuries of history and philosophy in Western Europe and the United States. This book brings ideas of embodiment, particularly from critical race studies, feminist theory, and studies of masculinity in these and other areas, into conversation with connections traced between religious studies and energy humanities by scholars like Cara New Daggett. *Of Modern Extraction* connects this work to capitalism's magical thinking and further develops Daggett's interpretation of the theology of capitalism.

Rowe explores five general areas: energy, extraction, capital, oil, and alternate energies. Each chapter investigates the main issue through contemporary philosophy and theology, employing careful historical analysis of primary documents, largely from the nineteenth- and twentieth-century US, and then brings these contemporary ideas and more recent history into dialogue with multiple important thinkers in philosophy from many centuries ago. Each chapter is developed so carefully that there are clear throughlines between contemporary cultural analysis, the development of philosophical ideas, and historical research.

The first chapter discusses energy and shows that energy science 'has been profoundly enchanted' (p. 30). To demonstrate this fact, Rowe explores twentieth-century race science, statistics, the climate crisis, and philosophers and theologians like Paul and Aristotle. This chapter gives the reader an idea of the broad swath of culture and history that the book will take into account in order to advance its argument. The second chapter, 'Extraction', examines the notion that there is potential within the earth and that humans ought to be extracting it. To explore the roots of this idea, Rowe examines sources that range from nineteenth-century philosophy, twentieth-century scholars critical of 'race science' to twenty-first-century ecofeminist philosophers. She grounds these more recent studies with a discussion of the work of Gregory of Nyssa and Jerome, to Aquinas. In this way, *Of Modern Extraction* shows the deep roots of the idea that humans should change the earth by taking what they can from it (p. 73).

Rowe's subsequent chapter on capital builds on her exploration of extraction. Here she expands studies of the connection between capitalism, Presbyterianism, and the idea of the necessity of work. Her discussion ranges from theological ideas

of Augustine and Martin Luther, and offers a compelling analysis of how preachers in the nineteenth and twentieth century used similar rhetoric to describe grace in Christian context and oil in broader culture (p. 110–111). Here, and in the previous chapter, Rowe's discussion frequently turns to the colonization of the Americas, and in those instances, would have benefited from engaging with Latin American cultural studies, such as the work of Aníbal Quijano and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo.

In Chapter 4, Rowe situates her discussion of oil in postcolonial theory that addresses white ideas regarding the resource. Drawing on their work, and the works of other theorists, Rowe observes that 'animacy, vibrancy, activity, and activation have been racialized, masculinized, theologized, and are internal to petroleum imaginaries' (p. 125). This frames her proposal of the need for a queer understanding of oil, which would disrupt these imaginaries and allow for better futures.

Of Modern Extraction re-examines many familiar philosophical sources and brings them into conversation with a rich history and critical theory to show the overlooked religious and theological aspects of extractive industries. It concludes with a discussion of alternate energies and the decline of oil. Here, she offers a critique of alternate energies, and draws on disability studies to confront the cultural obsession with productivity, which itself is based on extraction. Rowe concludes with a series of questions: 'If energy culture has shaped bodies, then can't different embodiments—habits, daily rhythms, orientations, and fluctuations—also contest the current monolithic energy regime?' (p. 170). As we engage with Rowe's ideas, or read the book as part of graduate and undergraduate classes in religion, philosophy, history, and critical theory, we would do well to heed her.

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