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JOHANNES ALTHUSIUS, NEIGHBOR LOVE, AND THE ORIGINS OF SOCIETY | SIMON KENNEDY

Where did society come from? How did politics come about? Why do people live together? Perhaps these aren't questions that you've ever asked before. But political thinkers from Plato through to Rawls have tackled questions about the social nature of humans, and how it is that we get into political situations in the first place. It's the question, the problem, if you will, of the origins of society.

How one answers this question has substantial ramifications. It affects, for one thing, how we understand the origins of political legitimacy; who justly decides who has political power? It affects, too, how we account for the nature and form of the political sphere; is it—should it be—democratic, or monarchical? And what about humans? Are they naturally political, or not? Different accounts of the origins of society would lead to different answers to all these questions.

Johannes Althusius (1563–1638) was a Reformed Protestant political scientist and jurisprudential thinker, as well as a scholar and politician of some note. In his *Politica methodice digesta* (*Politics methodically set forth*, henceforth *Politica*), Althusius sets out a large-scale account of politics. At the beginning of this work he defines what politics is, what the elements of it are, and how political community came to be. How Althusius addresses this last point will occupy the rest of this article.

Althusius held, as did his Reformed forefather John Calvin, that humans were naturally social and political. For Althusius, politics was

a good and necessary thing, rather than a corruption of the created order. People are naturally “neighbourly”. That is, they are called by God to live in such a way that they might serve their neighbour. Political community, according to Althusius, is meant to facilitate and encourage neighbourliness in order that humans might live out the demands of God's moral law: to love the Lord our God, and to love

our neighbours as yourselves. Only when we are in political community can we love our neighbour, and so it follows for Althusius that we must naturally find ourselves in such a community.

Althusius begins his description of the origins of society by using Aristotle's explanatory model of four causes for the existence of a thing. The four causes are the material cause, the formal cause, the efficient cause, and the final cause. The *efficient cause* of political society, that is the source of the movement into human society, is, according to Althusius, ‘consent [*consensum*] and pact [*pactum*] amongst the communicating citizens.’ (*Politica* 1.29). That is, the mechanism by which people form society is the making of an agreement to form a political community.

So much for efficient cause—the how, so to speak, of the origins of political community. What does it look like? This is the question of the *formal cause*, which is the form, or shape, of human society, and this Althusius describes as the *vita activa*. That is, the active life of public good works, and political and social interaction, is the shape of human community. His readers would have

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understood this in contrast to both the contemplative life, and to the purely private life of domestic pursuits whereby one seeks the good of oneself and one's household (*Politica*, 1.29)

The *material cause*, that is, the 'stuff' or parts out of which society is made, is 'the aggregate of precepts.' These precepts are the various laws and conventions of society which ensure that people will offer one another services and helps providing for the common advantage of social life. (*Politica* 1.31)

The final cause, the 'why,' of political society, which is the most pivotal both for Aristotle and for Althusius, is the 'enjoyment' of life, 'the common welfare,' and 'the conservation of a human society where you can worship God quietly and without error.' (*Politica* 1.30) The final cause is the end, or the purpose, of human society. The four causes all work together to make human society, one where Althusius envisages that people will live co-dependent, intertwined lives in which they offer one another helps which will preserve and foster human community.

This Aristotelian 'four causes' explanation is only one of the ways in which Althusius explains the origins of society in *Politica*. But it is one of his most helpful. We can see what Althusius held to be the purpose and importance of human society. The highest purpose of political life, according to Althusius, is the common good and a life of enjoyment, along with correct worship and quiet enjoyment of God. In our own day, we often think of politics in terms of individuals, and our assessment of public policy is heavily influenced by an this

atomized view of society. Althusius, along with the early Reformed thinkers, offers a very different take on things.

To be sure, Althusius held that society formed because of a consensual pact between people. But this idea need not lead us in a liberal individualist direction. Althusius' conception of the origins of society, through his 'four causes' explanation, shows that he believed people were naturally inclined toward society, that they are designed by God to perform acts of love toward one another, and that even the laws which people make are to be designed to enable these acts of love. Althusius's conception of the origins of society shows that people are naturally social and political. It also shows that we are naturally neighbours to each other. We are, in that sense, intertwined with one another. Althusius even used the word *symbiosis* to describe our interconnectedness.

Althusius's theory of the origins of society points us to the reality that we are social creatures who are meant to love our neighbours. If Althusius is right, any conception of society, and any conception of the origins of society, which overlooks our symbiotic human nature misses the crucial fact about human society. Althusius believed that we are made to love one another. That is, quite simply, what society and politics are for. And in this, he was in substantial agreement with the consensus of Christian thought.

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Probably in late 1535, four years after arriving at Santo Spirito, Zanchi met Massiliano Celso Martinenghi (1515-1557). Celso was the younger by a year and had spent far less time living the religious life, but he was a nobleman's son. Despite the mismatch of caste and experience, the two formed a fast friendship that remained, as Zanchi put it many years later, "unbroken to the end." Together they read theology and studied Greek and, early in 1541, when fifteen members of the Bergamo community left to join the house of San Frediano in Lucca, both Zanchi and Celso were among the number. In ways they could hardly have foreseen, this move altered the course of their lives.

It happened that 1541 was something of a crisis moment in Lucca. Located about two hundred miles south of Bergamo, the city had become notoriously corrupt. Its absentee bishop provided no moral guidance and even the Augustinian house at San Frediano had grown lax. The responsibility to restore order—both among the canons and on the city streets—fell upon the shoulders of the newly appointed prior, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562).

Vermigli already had a reputation as one of the order's finest preachers, and although he had not yet clearly identified himself with the Protestant movement, he was known for his reforming efforts and evangelical ideas. His theology had provoked a confrontation with Church authorities, who had forbidden him to preach. But he was released from the restriction by spring 1541 and, in May, took up his post as prior at Lucca. In later years Zanchi viewed this turn of events as God's providence, for Peter Martyr became a father figure, pointing the younger man toward a new understanding of the gospel and re-orienting his reading of the scriptures.

At Lucca, Celso taught Greek, Zanchi taught theology, and Vermigli devoted himself to reforming the community, helping guide the town, and lecturing on the Pauline Epistles. Zanchi sat under Peter Martyr's daily exposition of the scriptures, which cast the Bible as the touchstone, that by which both the great works of the past and the writings of contemporary theologians were to be evaluated. In fact, the community at Lucca became an incubator for Protestantism in northern Italy. Immanuel Tremelli, a Jew recently converted to Christianity who came to embrace the Reformation, joined the community. He probably acted as Zanchi's first Hebrew teacher but later developed into one of the great Protestant Old Testament scholars. Another man, Celio Secundo Curione, was not formally a member of San Frediano but frequently fellowshipped with the canons and his friendship with Zanchi blossomed, years later, in the latter's marriage to Celio's daughter.

Peter Martyr stayed barely fifteen months in Lucca. He fled in 1542 in the wake of his rising fame. His increasingly clear allegiance to

Protestant theology made him an easy target for the Inquisition. But he left a deep impression on both Zanchi and Celso, who remained at the monastery for almost another decade, preaching, teaching, and learning. They read the works of several leading Swiss, German, and French Reformation thinkers, including Philip Melancthon's *Commonplaces*, Martin Bucer's *Treatises*, Heinrich Bullinger's *On the Origin of Error*, and John Calvin's *Institutes*. Zanchi read deeply now in the Church Fathers and continued his study Hebrew. He also produced a synopsis of Calvin's *Institutes* for private study, which was published posthumously as *Compendium prae-cipuorum capitum Doctrinae Christianae* (1598)—in English, the *Compendium of the chief heads of Christian doctrine*.

In spring 1551, Celso, who had been serving as prior at San Frediano, decided to leave Lucca, probably for fear of the Inquisition. He planned to make his way to England, join Vermigli (now the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford), and advance the cause of the Reformation. But providence intervened, and while Celso was in the Swiss city of Basel, Calvin and the Italian Protestant nobleman Galeazzo Caracciolo convinced him to accept a call to pastor an Italian congregation in Geneva. He remained there, serving that refugee community, for the rest of his life.

In October of 1551, about six months after Celso left, Zanchi also fled. Near

the end of his life, he described this as a liberation, likening his departure from Italy to the end of a Babylonian captivity. Although he always expressed fondness for his homeland and its people, he was apparently happy to leave. Yet this move must have been a striking disruption for Zanchi. He left the Roman Church, the Augustinian community, and his extended family. He left the places, the food, and the language with which he had been reared. And he did it all for a very uncertain future; he had neither prospects nor clear plans.

Dr. O'Banion's account of Zanchi's life and thought will be continued in the next issue of Ad Fontes.

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ON THE HUMANITY AND DIVINITY OF CHRIST | FROM *DE INCARNATIONE FILII DEI* (1593) BY JEROME ZANCHI

TRANSLATED BY W. BRADFORD LITTLEJOHN & CHARLES CARMAN

In each shorter issue of Ad Fontes, we will include a translated excerpt from a text that contributes to our ongoing conversation. These excerpts will be accompanied by a contextualizing note.

One of Zanchi's (1516–1590) longest and most important treatises, published posthumously in 1593, was his De Incarnatione Filii Dei (On the Incarnation of the Son of God). With its dense philosophical argumentation and sometimes tedious rehearsal of Patristic authorities, it would hardly make for easy reading even if it were available in English, but it deserves to be more widely known. The work, originally penned in the early 1580s in response to increasingly-heated Christological disputes with many Lutherans, is a masterpiece of Reformed Christology.

The debate with the Lutherans (or rather with the so-called “Gnesio-Lutherans,” the hardliners, since the followers of Melancthon were more sympathetic to the Reformed) had first arisen from disagreements over the nature of Christ's eucharistic presence. Many Lutherans insisted on a true bodily presence of Christ in the elements, which required some account of how Jesus's human body could be physically present everywhere (or at any rate, in many places at once). The Reformed objected that such a notion of the “ubiquity” of Christ would destroy his true humanity, and the debate quickly escalated to one about the foundation of the Christian faith—the relationship of the divine and human natures in Christ.

Although the Lutherans then (and indeed now) charged that the Reformed taught that we can only metaphorically speak of a sharing of divine and human attributes in Christ, this was simply false. The Reformed heartily confessed, as we see Zanchi doing in this passage, that when it came to the one person of Christ, there was a “real communication” of both divine and human attributes. What they denied was that such a real communication happened from one nature to the other, such that the divine nature became human or vice versa—since this would violate the Chalcedonian Definition.

While there was plenty of bad blood on both sides of the controversy, the Reformed tended to try to emphasize wherever possible the points of agreement, and then seek to use logic to discern the precise nature of the disagree-

ment. The Lutherans retorted that it was simply a matter of taking the Bible seriously or not, and refused to compromise. In this passage, we see Zanchi's relatively irenic method in action, as he seeks to carefully establish the points of agreement and be as precise as possible about the point of difference.

This is the nub of the controversy: are the essential properties of God the Logos really communicated to the human nature assumed by Christ considered in himself? In other words, is Christ's human soul made wise and powerful by that same infinite and uncreated wisdom and power by which the Logos, or Christ himself is made wise and powerful? And does the human soul of Christ, gifted with such power, then bring forth the same actions which the Logos and his divinity also bring forth?

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This is how it stands. To be sure, our opponents add various glosses by which they seek to avoid, or rather run away from, the absurd consequences which follow from their assertion of this proposition. But these vain escape routes still do not take away the absurdities. Thus, in short, many contend that these uncreated properties are really communicated, and we utterly deny it. This is enough to consider at present. If anything besides is added, it constitutes a new question. We must first dispute concerning this first point.

To make it clearer whether this is in fact the state of the present questions, we must consider again briefly which issues concerning the consequences of the hypostatic union are agreed upon between us beyond controversy, and which are not—and this in few words.

First, we all agree that something is the nature, something else the person, and that the one nature cannot be predicated of the other unless each is represented in the *concrete name* which always denotes the person. For it is not right to say, “Divinity is humanity, or a man,” nor the other way around: “Humanity is Divinity, or God.” Rather, “God is man,” and, “This man is God.” Therefore, there is no question whether the essential properties of God can be really predicated of



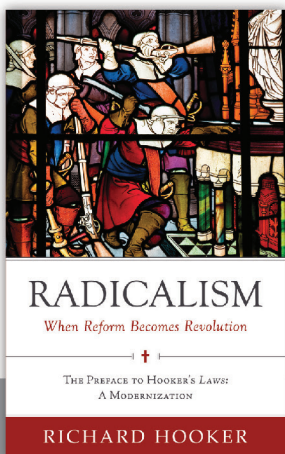
the person (whether named “God” or “man”), using personal terms or those of the other concrete nature. It is only a question of whether each nature, considered in itself, may be rightly deemed united to the other.

Second, we agree that there is a difference between the essential properties of God, and the created gifts, which are the effects of those properties. It is not, therefore, a question whether the created gifts and effects, the pure, highest created powers, are really communicated to the soul and body of Christ, but whether an uncreated omnipotence is so communicated.

Third, we agree that there is a communication through the *grace of union* which is only nominal, by predication or dialectic, and another that is a real communication. For we can rightly say that that the human passions are communicated to the divinity (nevertheless expressed by a concrete name) through the grace of the union. However it is not correct if it we say it is really communicated. For what would happen were you to say, “The Divine nature suffered,” or “Christ suffered according to the Divine nature”? The question therefore is not whether the essential properties of God are communicated to human nature and predicated of it according to the grace of union. Rather, is it the case that, by a real communication, the human nature became partaker in these essential properties, not in the Logos sustaining itself, but in the *true nature sustained by the Logos*? Some say this. We reject it. Later we will see with what evidence and reasons they demonstrate their own assertion. Indeed, they certainly try to prove their own notions, while at the same time permitting to us those axioms, and conceding to us those principles, by which the whole of their doctrine of a real communication of attributes is overthrown from within. One such axiom is this: that just as the natures are united, so are the properties and actions. For this axiom is most certain among the Church Fathers. I myself take it for granted. Still, the natures are not so united to one another that one is really communicated to another. This must be so or else one could say that the divinity is a partaker in humanity, and could be called humanity or a man, or the other hand, that humanity is a partaker in divinity and could be called divinity or God. Therefore, these properties are not really communicated.

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DIALECTICAL THEOLOGY AND JACQUES ELLUL: AN INTRODUCTORY EXPOSITION BY

JACOB E. VAN VLEET

FORTRESS PRESS, 2014. 239 PP. PB.

REVIEW BY JONATHAN TOMES

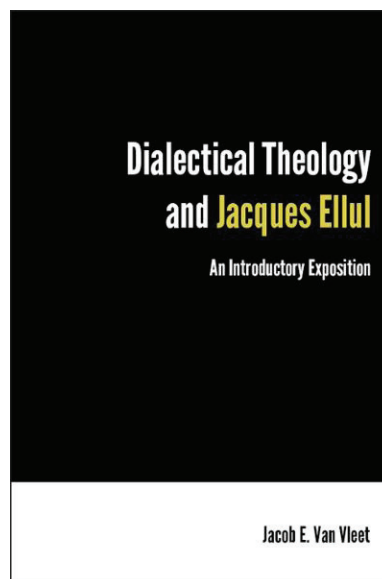
Jacques Ellul is not really an evangelical. He holds several positions that would send many evangelicals in search of a safe space. But Ellul is a modern-day prophet in both his sociological observation and spiritual direction. This is why he has been unusually popular with evangelicals, a group which is also perhaps of all his readers the least equipped to read him as he demands to be read. And so a guide is needed; that guide, Jacob Van Vleet has undertaken to write.

Van Vleet has made Ellul accessible for the dialectically impaired. He lays out Ellul's thought logically and systematically in six concise chapters: 1) primary influences, 2) dialectical worldview, 3) God, salvation, and freedom, 4) technique, necessity, and consequences, 5) propaganda and politics, and 6) hope, non-violence, and Christian anarchism. Each of these chapters merit sustained and personal reflection, but we will focus briefly on Ellul's methodology, a reflection on the political illusion, some difficulties with analogy, and a final appeal.

What are the stakes of misunderstanding? Van Vleet gives the example of Ted Kaczynski, the so-called "Unabomber," an enthusiast of the sociological aspect of Ellul's work, as a shocking methodological failure in appropriating Ellul's thought. His sociological and phenomenological observations will be misunderstood, Van Vleet tells us, if we fail to take account of the theological aspect of his work. For every criticism of the technological society, Ellul provides a theological response. The difficulty inheres in that the response exists in a separate realm from the sociological work. Even those works in which he addresses the one realm are distinct from those in which he addresses the other. Ellul is a 'dialectical theologian', so this is not surprising, but that these two spheres of his thought fail to coexist in the same book is also consistent with that thought itself, in which the realm of the necessary and of the spiritual are set as two poles in contradiction. Sometimes there will be tensions and contradictions in his thought, but living in between the two poles will make us authentic Christians (and citizens) and open the way for spiritual growth.

What, precisely, does Van Vleet mean by dialectical in this context? Dialectic, for Ellul, is both worldview and methodology. Humans enter into dialogue with reality, which is both comprehensible and

incomprehensible, sensical and non-sensical. As such, 'a comprehensive philosophical or theological system must take into account both constituents of reality: rational and irrational' (27). This dialectical conception of reality affects Ellul's methodology, a method which strives to maintain this totality.



Another example of dialectical misunderstanding, which brings Van Vleet's case closer to home for those evangelicals who do not perhaps feel drawn to the cultural analysis and solutions of Ted Kaczynski, but which perhaps emphasizes even more strongly the need for a guide, is found in Al Wolters's *Creation Regained* (p. 61). Wolters accuses Ellul of singling out technology and management techniques as the arch-villain to human life, a charge which is patently false. Contrary to Wolters, Ellul does not solely blame technique for human sin and alienation. Yet, the centrality of technique has introduced dire consequences for sin and alienation. According to Ellul, blindness towards technique and its consequences will make spiritual growth and true freedom impossible. Wolters's misunderstanding, I believe, stems from a failure to read Ellul dialectically. He must now maintain the naïve and false position that, as sin flows from the

heart, therefore the technical phenomenon of society is neutral, as if the use or misuse of technique were the only cause of harmful consequence, or that technical goods do not also carry a dark shadow. Thankfully, the choice between the biblical account of sin and alienation and the sociological observations of Ellul are not set at odds. Contrary to Wolters, Van Vleet shows that what we find in Ellul is not a 'Gnostic streak in human thinking' but rigorous Christian reflection on nature and society.

The political is, according to Ellul, an illusion. Propaganda, the goal of which is homogenization, is present at all levels of our technological society, and its consequence is 'false consciousness.' The political is an illusion because it has made freedom an illusion. According to Van Vleet, 'propaganda is totalitarian in its very being.' This election cycle has demonstrated with clarity the false freedom of propaganda. After all, there really are only two choices: Republican or Democrat. These are the choices most represented in 'the media.' According to Van Vleet, "Of course, we occasionally hear about other options. However,

in the same breath that they are mentioned, we are virtually always told that endorsing one of these ‘nontraditional’ parties is only for extremists or kooks, or that voting for them will do nothing but take away votes from one of the ‘real’ parties. The media establishment only provides its audience with limited options, ensuring a calculated outcome while providing the appearance of free choice (voting).” If you don’t vote for Trump, then you necessarily vote for Hillary, but if you don’t vote for Hillary, then you necessarily vote for Trump. This oft-repeated and nauseous line is an example of the closed system of the necessary. Both candidates must favor the technological State, otherwise they would not be cast in the show. If this sounds far-fetched and kooky, consider how it might be that the public outcry, though it occurs among so many individuals, sounds the same when any one person breaks from the judgment of the status quo, whether we are considering anthems and flags, or voting. Against the illusion of electoral choice, for Ellul, the true revolution is prayer, fellowship, and local action grounded in dynamic hope.

Now for the slight pushback, and it will also reveal something of the reviewer’s own dialectic. Van Vleet states, ‘Aquinas argued that a sustained reflection on nature would lead one to systematically deduce, by way of analogy, certain aspects of God’s nature.’ The impression then is given that this ‘analogy of being’ seeks to positively know God and in a comprehensive and clear manner, whereupon Van Vleet gives the solution of the *analogia fide*, which states that ‘humans can know nothing about God’s being if using their own natural reason alone (47).’ But it does seem likely that Thomas would either agree or be sympathetic with much of Ellul’s objections. After all, for Thomas, the articles of faith cannot be demonstrated by nature and reason,

merely defended. Those things which can be said of God from nature are all emphatically negative, and, he would claim, often overlap with sacred doctrine. For Thomas, the *analogia entis* is the stripping of false images and concepts that would seek to contain God, a concern he shares with Ellul. The knowing here is more of an unknowing. Thomas’s so-called natural theology says more about the radical poverty of creation - why is there something rather than nothing? - than it does about the divine essence. From the Thomistic standpoint, the definitions between Thomas and Ellul are not yet agreed upon, so they are likely not having the same conversation: “The most important thing we can know about the first cause is that it surpasses all our knowledge and power of expression. For that one knows God most perfectly who holds that whatever one can think or say about him is less than what God is” (Thomas Aquinas, *Super De causis*, prop. 9).

For various reasons, sometimes exegetical and hermeneutical and sometimes philosophical, modern Reformed thought is often weak on dealing with the phenomena of nature and society. Jacques Ellul is an important source for correcting this misstep. But the successful retrieval of Ellul’s thought will be unlikely apart from the direction of a skilled guide. Van Vleet has provided the needed direction for this retrieval to begin.

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