

A Review of Steven K. Jungkeit, *SPACES OF MODERN THEOLOGY, GEOGRAPHY AND POWER IN SCHLEIERMACHER'S WORLD*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 244+ pp.

Reviewed by *Ruth Elizabeth Jackson*.

Steven Jungkeit's involving and illuminating book points readers to an insight which, although never forgotten in modernity is becoming ever-more prominent in present-day scholarship, following the work of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Edward Casey, and other writers interested in philosophies of space and place. The insight in question is simple, uncontroversial, and amounts to this: it is prudent to understand an author's work as arising out of his or her particular historical, ideological, and socio-economic context. To put it another way, critical readers are invited to examine a piece of work in terms of how it can be read out of the network of social, political and cultural conditions in which the author was embedded at the time of its genesis.

It was with this insight in mind that Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1832) famously stated that an interpreter or theorist occupies a position whereby they are able to know the author's work better than the author knew it themselves. Jungkeit himself does not explicitly ascribe to this maxim. Nevertheless, in his investigation of geography and power in Schleiermacher's world, his suggestion is that historical and critical distance enables readers in the twenty-first century to judge how Schleiermacher's portrayal of Christian faith and life was enmeshed in, as well as communicated through, a set of harmful imaginative patterns, which encouraged spatial extension and political control, and which were prevalent among the established and educated Prussian elite.

In his introductory chapter, Jungkeit sketches out a picture of the young Schleiermacher's Enlightenment-era Prussia in terms of a narrative of human

displacement. We read how the late-eighteenth century was a period of rapid industrialisation, where the rising production of speed and the possibility of global travel, coupled with both the objectifying methods of science and the enthusiasm of scientists, helped to cultivate among educated Germans a sense of the world as plottable, conquerable, and decipherable. And yet—just like the protagonist in Adelbert von Chamisso’s 1814 novel ‘The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl’—the price paid by those European colonialists and botanists who represented the plotters and conquerors of modernity’s spaces, is that the “knowledge” of the world they garner by proceeding this way, is not knowledge that will enable them to inhabit it any better. Indeed, as Jungkeit makes clear, the eighteenth-century heroes who, through new scientific techniques and a colonialist imaginary, were inspired to draw up the most intricate and accurate maps of the world were, at the same time, men who had lost the ability to *dwell in it*.

Over the course of his work—and using Lefebvre’s typology of space as his critical apparatus—Jungkeit maintains that Schleiermacher is implicated in the transmission and perpetuation of this set of imperialistic imaginative patterns, whereby the world is experienced as an array of shrinking global spaces which can be surveyed and later controlled. Implicit in his account is the sense that Schleiermacher was too close to—too caught up in—this shared Prussian vision to be able to critique it effectively. And yet, Jungkeit asserts, it would also be wrong to conclude that Schleiermacher *capitulated* to modernity, or that he was too accommodating to its notions of abstract, mappable, spaces. Instead, defining Schleiermacher’s theological writing as a “performative ethics”, Jungkeit describes how these religious texts – with their vision of a world created and sustained through divine love – are able to encourage a fruitful way of dwelling theologically rather than imperialistically, in an increasingly global community.

Here, then, Jungkeit’s readers are treated to a set of innovative new readings. He unpacks the spatial imagery which operates in Schleiermacher’s best known works *On Religion* and *The Christian Faith* through reference to modern critical apparatus developed by thinkers such as Benedict Anderson (in his seminal book, *Imagined Communities*) and the post-Marxist thinkers Michael Hardt and

Antonio Negri. Furthermore, Jungkeit also grounds these two texts – which, through familiarity, have in a certain sense arguably become timeless to us – by evaluating them alongside a pair of Schleiermacher's lesser-known, and more obscure projects.

In chapter two, for instance, we learn that as Schleiermacher was preparing the manuscript for *On Religion*, he was also writing an essay on the history of the penal colony which the English had planted in Australia in the late 1780s. Schleiermacher eventually abandoned the latter project, which incorporated a translation of a travel manuscript by David Collins, entitled *The English Colony in New South Wales*. Nevertheless, Jungkeit's clever analysis of these contemporary texts flows from his perception that it is possible to locate a shared spatial imaginary between them. In Schleiermacher's report on the colony – which represented the British government's radical response to serious overcrowding in the nation's prisons – the reader can glean what Jungkeit has depicted as the dominant European vision of global spaces: homogenous, empty, regions which can be assessed and subsequently appropriated for new uses. In turn, explains Jungkeit, this way of imagining space is matched in *On Religion*, by Schleiermacher's sense of an "infinite gaze". Here, he explains, Schleiermacher describes a believer's encounter with the divine in terms of an intuition as to the enormity of the world, or cosmos, and the desire for complete freedom to roam—whether imaginatively, visually, or actually—over this universal space.

In chapter three, Jungkeit then introduces us to a series of letters that Schleiermacher wrote anonymously, on the subject of Berlin's Jewish population and their access to civil rights. He reads these alongside Schleiermacher's account of the divine attributes of eternity, omnipresence and omniscience in *The Christian Faith*, and once more is able to draw out a complementarity to the spatial imaginary displayed in these documents. Indeed, Jungkeit argues, it is Schleiermacher's understanding of his Sovereign Christian God as a Being abstracted from time and space (as showcased in the latter text) which enables him room to develop a pluralistic account of inter-religious relations. Schleiermacher can support the case for Jewish citizenship in Prussia, so long as the Jews in question retain the status of a *different*, minority, and foreign people,

in a Christian state whose borders and composition are maintained to assist the flourishing of the Christian community.

As an aside here—and in relation to the book’s attention to those shared ideological and political networks out of which an author’s work arises—it is to Jungkeit’s credit that he does not linger on the tired and insoluble debate about the mature Schleiermacher’s use of the term ‘feeling’ (*Gefühl*) to indicate Christian faith. Rather, Jungkeit is able to tackle longstanding critiques of Schleiermacher as an individualist, interiorised, theologian of private experience, by foregrounding his constant attention to the inherently social nature of a lived and practiced Christianity. Jungkeit rightly impresses upon us that Schleiermacher understood his faith to arise in and through linguistic communication (we remember for instance his vocation as a preacher), and to flourish in community. A key message of *On Religion* was that to be human is to be in dialogue with others, and that the development of a particular human soul depends on its interplay—its mutual and reciprocal discourse—with those other souls around it, which are themselves too in a process of *becoming*. In *The Christian Faith*, this message was then compounded and extended in Schleiermacher’s use of the word *Beeslung*, or “soul-bestowal,” to describe a person’s call to be incorporated into the Christian communion. At all points in Jungkeit’s work, Schleiermacher is rightly assumed to be a socially-engaged thinker, making the book a refreshing, and exceptional read.

In tune with the above analysis, then, Jungkeit’s book is a perceptive and engaging study which inducts readers into an original portrayal of Schleiermacher as a man invested in, but resistant to, the spatial imaginary of his time. And yet, there are a number of aspects to Jungkeit’s work that I am apprehensive about. Some of these comprise particular issues I have with his exegesis of Schleiermacher’s theology, and I will mention these shortly. More broadly however, I share the misgivings that Graham Ward brings up in his otherwise approving foreword to the text, concerning Jungkeit’s proposal to use Schleiermacher’s writings about the nature of Christian faith and life as the inspiration for a set of new liberal theological projects.

Indeed, as he reaches his final chapter, Jungkeit's work is consciously *constructive*, and programmatic, rather than merely exegetical, or suggestive. He speaks confidently about the task of transforming the content of Schleiermacher's legacy to present-day liberal theologians, so that the latter's participation in the modern, imperialistic spatial imaginary might be something to learn from, before it is something which can be over-written, or reconfigured. We are told, for instance, how Schleiermacher's work lends itself to countenancing a type of 'polytheism', where Christians admit that their own religion relies on the existence of others for its identity, and where Schleiermacher's famous notion of absolute dependence is thus understood foremost as a statement of intellectual, political, and perceptual *humility*. Moreover, Jungkeit elsewhere contends that Schleiermacher's constant references to organic parts and wholes—his allusions to interconnection in nature, throughout history and among humanity—can and should be read anew, and fruitfully so, in relation to the current fascination among philosophers and theorists with networks and interrelationality. In his fifth chapter, he brings in Gilles Deleuze's notion of rhizomatic spaces to make this point.

It is not necessary to go into detail about Jungkeit's proposals in order to touch upon the core concern that I have about his constructive theological plans: namely, that it is actually the work of critical theorists and postmodern philosophers which directs and motivates them. Here, in Jungkeit's case, the task of reading and investigating *The Christian Faith* using interpretive pincers developed by Deleuze, Guattari, Anderson et al., is an original move. Yet it is important to question whether it is fruitful, having made such readings of Schleiermacher's dogmatic work, to then undertake the task of transforming and re-transmitting his *theological* insights seemingly in abstraction from the particular ecclesiastical tradition, the scriptural language, and the confessional framework in which the nineteenth-century theologian was embedded. Schleiermacher professed to be describing the nature of the faith held to and practiced in the Prussian congregation in his day (where Calvinists and Lutherans were unified). Addressing only existing members of this Church communion, he was adamant that his work was neither apologetic, nor an

argument to persuade individuals to join the faith community. He works in regard to the creeds, in reference to existing doctrinal formulations, the history of church tradition and the works of the Western Christian Fathers. In Jungkeit's work—with its theological agenda—none of this is, I venture, made clear.

It is with this question about Jungkeit's approach in mind, that I would also like to suggest a few specific points where we might take issue his reading of both Schleiermacher's religious philosophy, and his dogmatic work. Firstly, it is worth turning to the analysis of *On Religion* which Jungkeit makes in his second chapter. He begins here with the admission that specialists conventionally interpret Schleiermacher's references to the 'universe' in this text as referring to something other than, or beyond, material space. And indeed, it is true that for those who acknowledge the young Schleiermacher's roots in Early German Romantic philosophy—a movement which was indebted to the philosophy of Plato, and which upheld the reality of the world and of nature as independent from the human subject—when Schleiermacher's alludes to the 'universe' that religious believers inhabit, he does not mean to describe a global, plottable, analysable space. Rather, for such interpreters, this term universe refers to an ever-unfolding Whole which is inexhaustible, and which cannot be grasped by finite minds, or eyes, or hearts. In light of such conventions and such established interpretive frameworks, it is significant that Jungkeit proceeds by cutting across them, and suggests instead that we read Schleiermacher's universe in terms of *spatial extension*. In his analysis, the event of intuiting, or tasting the infinite (as Schleiermacher puts it) becomes the desire to tour the world as an individual, crossing a universal global space.

Secondly, it is also prudent to highlight the way that Jungkeit incorporates spatial terminology into his treatment of Schleiermacher's system of Christian doctrine by defining *The Christian Faith*, in his final chapter, as an instrument through which Schleiermacher invites readers to 'map' the world as a global community. Part of the way in which Schleiermacher does this, Jungkeit argues, is to give an account of the divine attributes of eternity, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, which presents to his readers a God entirely *abstracted* from time and space. In Jungkeit's view, Schleiermacher generates a

Christian imaginary whereby the globe appears as a homogenous, measurable, spatial grid, within which the divine never acts directly. According to this schema, the feeling of absolute dependence is therefore rendered much like the Kantian sublime—as a sense of awe that one experiences when one realises one's finitude in respect to the immensity of the world as a whole. And yet, attentive readers of *The Christian Faith* will at this point find Jungkeit's reading—which seems to distance Schleiermacher's God from the world, and to define Him, problematically, in some sort of opposition to the human categories of time and space—frustrating, and lacking in important ways. In response to Jungkeit, we might point out, for instance, that Schleiermacher intends his account of these 'general' divine attributes to be read as part of the greater whole of his system of doctrine, and that he expects them to be apprehended through the lens of this teaching: that Jesus Christ, in whom was a veritable existence of God (§94), is the Redeemer of humanity, and the one through whom, and in whom, Christians can be themselves reconciled to the divine. The Christocentric nature of Schleiermacher's system of doctrine is important here, because it shifts the focus of his presentation of the God-world relationship away from descriptions given by abstract, formal categories, and towards the sense of a personal relationship between humanity and the divine, enabled through grace. On this point, is also useful to note that is in fact love and wisdom, and not eternity, omnipresence and omniscience, which for Schleiermacher comprise the pre-eminent divine attributes in *The Christian Faith*. Indeed, in the final part of his system, Schleiermacher unsettles Jungkeit's claims about the manner in which his doctrine of God relates to the way that Christians should imagine global space and time, when he stresses that "it can only be incorrectly, and under the name of quantitative standards of measurement, that we name God omnipotence."¹ By contrast, Schleiermacher asserts that it is only love and wisdom that can claim to express the very essence of God (§167). And since for him love is the desire to unite oneself with another, and to be in that other, whilst the divine wisdom should be conceived as the perfect way in which God

¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 731.

realises His love, then once more, as Schleiermacher privileges these two divine attributes above all others, the impression is that he means to portray a personal God, infinitely invested in, and dynamic within, the history of the people that he has created and continues to sustain in their becoming.