
That much of the world we live in—the part of our world that’s rather unsuccessfully fighting a bad oil addiction—faces immanent crisis is hardly news. Beyond death, and taxes, the only stable truth in this highly complex and ambiguous world seems to be that the energy resources on which we currently rely are finite in nature. What this means, in concrete and practical terms, is much less certain. Long-term crises in energy will affect the way we eat, the way we dress, perhaps even the way we walk and talk. They will affect the postures of reverence (and irreverence) that we adopt in relation to this wild cosmos that we slyly manipulate (as it, in turn, manipulates us).

This new volume of ten essays is especially concerned with the cosmological and spiritual fallout from this great energy crisis. The particular locus of concern is the relationship between *divinity* (that cosmological behemoth) and energy itself. Perhaps you can already prefigure some of the questions this raises: can energy itself be *divinized*? Does the divine, somehow, *provide* energy? If so, what *sort* of energy might be considered divine? How can an energy that’s divine do anything for (or with) us *now*, in this time of earthly need?

Although each of the essays in this collection approaches the divine-energetic relation via its own complex schematic, by my read, the essays in this volume might be usefully grouped into one of three categories. Most of these essays, that is, seem to approach the divine-energetic thematic by: (1) Contemplating divine logics (theology) as, itself, a source of *alternative energy* (2) Exploring some form of energy (or some energetic mode) as a *model* for thinking or rethinking the divine (3) Extending uncertainties and anxieties about the energy crises into theologics. Each approach, in turn, generates its own set of questions and its own potential effects.

One set of essays clearly seeks to engage the figure of an immanent energy crisis by turning toward theologics as something like a source of *alternative energy*. T. Wilson Dickson gestures towards the patristic Gregory of Nyssa’s theophany as a kind of “slippery sunbeam” (59) that serves as a “theopoetic call” (59) from this other (divine) world that breaks, energetically, into our own. Jay McDaniel’s essay looks to religion for forms of alternative energy to develop “ecological civilizations”—future communities that might cultivate harmony between people and with the earth. The divine, here, emerges as a “trustworthy energy” that “provides a kind of guidance for how to approach the other kinds” (99). Oz Lorentzen’s essay seeks to turn *away* from Western utilitarian perspectives that consider energy a kind of tool that we depend upon or a form of work that we must engage in. Instead, Lorentzen makes biblical gestures toward the restiveness of the Sabbath and the particular sort of power that can be found in the weakness of Christ.

The strength of these contributions, it seems to me, is that they clearly advance theology and religious thought as a resource that might contribute to ecological change. But questions about theology’s *efficacy* as an alternative energy source...
hovers over these essays as well. Although some authors (such as Lorentzen) make it clear that they want to resist any traditional Western split between spiritual and material forms of energy, there remains a subtle (and, I would argue, dubious) suggestion that theology may be better poised to address our energy crises than technology.

The second approach, working to re-cast theologics in the light of some form of energy or energetic engagement, more clearly resists such branching of disciplines. Catherine Keller’s essay urges us to turn our thoughts (if only momentarily) away from the energy that we appropriate (the energy resources that we drill for) and toward the energy that comprises us—something like the moving pulse, the active breath, of creation, “the pulsation of life” (12). Keller (a process theologian, who tends to think of divinity panentheistically) does not name this energy itself divine. But she does suggest we think of divinity as something like the energy within the pulsing throbs of this life energy—energizing “our interactivities” (25). Whitney Bauman looks (for an energetic model) to open systems and the science of non-equilibrium. Crucially, when it comes to biological organisms, “the more complex the organism, the more effective that organism is at taking in energy and exporting entropy” (70). The more adept the organism is, in other words, at existing energetically in an unstable state of uncertainty. Bauman takes this very state as the inspiration for an “agnostic theology,” steeped in the indeterminate state of mystery. Donna Bowman looks, for theological inspiration, to the fledgling craft economics of the twenty-first century—exploding online via social network commercial sites like etsy.com. Bowman sees, in this mechanics of material production, a model to energize our thinking about divinity. This form of Internet engagement, bringing small-scale, individual producers together in space time speaks, says Bowman, to a potentially divine “power of relatedness beyond the boundaries of our embodiment” (120).

Divinity, in this approach, seems not to be offered as a solution to our energy crises. Rather, the problem of energy (more often considered an issue that belongs to the worlds of science or commerce) and the problem of divinity resist separation or division—they are interdisciplinarily entangled. There is, however, a tone of optimism in each of these essays—due, perhaps, to the prospect that a world in which knowledge and spirituality is more ecologically oriented will mark ecological advances in other quarters as well.

The third approach is similarly interdisciplinary but, perhaps, marked less by a spirit of optimism and more with a kind of uncertainty, anxiety, or even a mood of critique. Mary Jane Rubenstein writes of parallel uncertainties in both religion and science—apophatic thought and the phenomenon of dark energy. What these parallel disciplinary uncertainties mark, she suggests, is that “our universe is haunted: what we know is there won’t quite show itself” (41). Clayton Crockett, interpreting theology as a kind of “ultimate concern” that’s engaged with questioning reality, wonders whether we aren’t misconceiving the concept of energy entirely—approaching it like animals (who metabolize energy, to make heat) rather than plants (who use energy electromagnetically). Luke Higgins turns to the work of Alfred North Whitehead to suggest that our approach to energy (in science