

justifying the—inevitably racialized, sexualized, and nationalized—production of poverty and lack, and the attendant brutalizing tactics of correction” (p. 126). Nonetheless, Charen effusively praises Sarah Hrdy’s studies of alloparenting in early humans, suggesting that they definitively demonstrate that “there is no biological-evolutionary, natural, or pragmatic basis for the nuclear family” (p. 77). It may well be that Hrdy’s social science is more rigorous in some way than that of the other anthropologists or social scientists he condemns, but Charen does not explain how, and the reader is unfortunately left to question whether the significant difference is that Hrdy’s research supports his political conclusions while other social science does not.

The primary new contribution of the book to this old debate over the justice of the family is in Charen’s positing of kinship as a substitute for the conventional conception of the family. Charen argues that the family as we understand it—traditional, nuclear, monogamous, state-sanctioned—insupportably narrows the possible human forms of mutuality and collective life, but that a breaking down of the family’s traditional boundaries can restore these collective possibilities. Indeed, such restoration is our only choice, since the “political ontologies” which are both supported by and support the traditional family are collapsing from their own contradictions. Kinship, as Hegel recognized, arises from impulses not naturally hospitable to the logic of the state and so contains the potential for “resisting the coercive structure of the modern state and the atomistic economic rationale it relies on” (p. 154). This potential can be recovered by detaching the practices of kinship from the enclosing force of the family. Such detachment ought to be guided by an understanding of our relation to death, since it is our bodily fragility and ultimately our mortality that impels us to interdependence and into kinship relations in the first place. Charen proposes that we turn to “indigenous ontologies,” according to which “kinship is not limited to human relations,” for our model (p. 164).

One might wish for a clearer picture of what such a kinship-based society might look like, and how these practices would be more than reflexive negations of every existing Western family practice. But Charen’s book opens a door to the imagination of such alternatives.

Apocalypse without God: Apocalyptic Thought, Ideal Politics, and the Limits of Utopian Hope. By Ben Jones.

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ISIS, QAnon, Putin: as Ben Jones remarks at the beginning of his fascinating and intrepid study, “[a]pocalypse, it seems,

is everywhere” (p. xi). A political theorist’s natural response to apocalypticism might be to dismiss it—as an eruption of the irrational, a response to inequality, or a coping mechanism for social change. Jones takes a laudably different path. Even beliefs as outlandish as end-times prophecies should be taken seriously. They speak to something deep in our nature. We might even learn from them.

One reason is historical: key figures in the history of political thought, Jones reveals through original readings of Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Engels, engaged closely with eschatology. They recognized its psychological potency, rhetorical appeal, and destructive—and sometimes creative—potential. A second, more surprising reason, is normative. Supporters of liberal democracy should grapple with apocalypticism for its insights, not only its dangers (see Alison McQueen, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times*, 2017). In particular, ideal theory—the branch of contemporary political philosophy that seeks to outline the best society—can find in apocalyptic thought “resources to navigate persistent challenges” (p. 17).

This is an ambitious and inventive book. Jones tackles an impressive range of subjects; he demonstrates dexterity at several methodologies, including the historical-contextual and philosophical-analytical; and, notably, he seeks to integrate the two, applying insights drawn from past thinkers to contemporary problems. This latter effort is especially praiseworthy given the unfortunate trend toward scholarly siloing. Combined with Jones’s striking thesis about the relevance of religious ideas, what emerges is a rare and courageous effort at doing a genuinely interdisciplinary political theory.

Commendable, too, is Jones’s care in analyzing religion’s influence on political ideas. Wisely taking caution from Shklar and Blumenberg (pp. 25–27), Jones notes that labeling an idea “apocalyptic” or “secularized”—arguing, for example, that Marxism is a reimagined Christian eschatology—can serve as a rhetorical cudgel, a way of dismissing it as irrational without judging its merits (pp. 137–40). Jones responds with a rigorous methodology: if we want to argue that a thinker was inspired by apocalyptic texts, we need clear evidence of influence, not only structural parallels or linguistic echoes (pp. 36–38, cf. Voegelin, Löwith, Cohen).

Jones marshals his methodology in three “historical case studies” which are also the book’s strongest chapters. He offers a nuanced reading of how Machiavelli both criticized and admired the friar Girolamo Savonarola’s blend of Christian apocalypticism and pagan views of an “Eternal City” (pp. 68–70). He argues that Hobbes sought to retain some version of apocalypticism in a diminished form—“an ideal that keeps hell at bay” (p. 117). And he uncovers Engels’s interest in the preacher and revolutionary Thomas Müntzer, revealing that Engels saw history, in its cunning, as playing out behind Müntzer’s back: even as he sought to realize God’s kingdom, Müntzer was

“actually pursuing a communist ideal that emphasizes economic rather than spiritual renewal” (p. 120).

Jones’s multimethod approach carries rewards but also risks. The project has a lot of moving parts; and while Jones succeeds at many of these parts, they are not always well integrated. For example, Jones is inconsistent about what “secular apocalyptic thought” means. At times he gestures toward what Schmitt (who goes unmentioned) called “political theology”: how certain religious ideas were adopted by secular political thinkers to build their theories. Jones thus indicates that his historical cases will “illustrate how apocalyptic thought makes its way into politics and takes secular form” (p. 38). Upon reaching these cases, however, we find that none of the thinkers actually fit this description. Engels seems to come closest, “transforming” Müntzer’s understanding of the kingdom of God “into a Marxist ideal” (p. 4) serving “earthly rather than heavenly aims” (p. 141). Yet as Jones’s analysis makes clear, the causal arrow is actually reversed: Müntzer does not influence Engels; Engels reads a prefab socialist eschatology into Müntzer (p. 120). Likewise, Hobbes is sometimes described as “co-opting” Christianity’s apocalyptic ideals (p. 93). But in practice, this simply means that Hobbes made theological arguments to counter his contemporaries. Indeed Hobbes, we learn toward the end of the chapter, explicitly argued for the world’s final “Conflagration” (p. 113). This is an alternative religious eschatology, not a secular apocalypse.

Jones is on firmer ground when concluding that Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Engels “engage with” apocalyptic thought (p. 191); yet this raises the question of what these case studies were meant, normatively, to accomplish. Each of these chapters is illuminating. But they are also self-contained: There is a kind of whiplash upon reaching chapter 6, where the previous eighty pages of historical cases drop out entirely and the argument picks up the analytic-philosophical thread from chapter 2.

This thread raises questions as well. Jones’s most striking claim is that we can “understand apocalyptic thought as a form of ideal theory” (p. 45). Consequently, ideal theory’s inability to show how its utopian end-state will be reached—or even what its ultimate principles will be—speaks to a dangerous lacuna. Eric Voegelin famously referred to this danger as “immanentizing the eschaton”: attempting to bring about a utopian end through direct (and often violent) human means. In response to this worry, Jones makes two moves. First, he proposes what he calls a “principle against utopian violence” (p. 183), affirming the need for hope while rejecting our ability to envisage the ideal or force it into existence. Second, he argues that “similar to religious and apocalyptic belief, ideal theory lacks plausible grounds and ultimately rests on faith” (p. 146).

Jones’s claim that ideal theory and Christian apocalypticism draw from the same wellspring of faith assumes that

the two are analogically similar; and here his argument hits some snags. First, most Christian (though not Jewish) eschatologies assume that human efforts alone cannot realize utopia. Redemption requires God to miraculously remove the stain of original sin. What is the philosophical equivalent of “grace”? Second, it is not clear what the secular source of hope is, or should be, for Jones. There have been attempts to reinvent hope outside traditional theology, most notably in German Idealism—though just how secular such efforts were is debatable (see Michael Rosen, *The Shadow of God*, 2022). But contra Kant and Rawls, Jones is keen to deny faith *any* basis in reason (pp. 170–74). And without God’s guiding hand, it is not clear why I should prefer one utopian vision over another, or hold out hope at all. Finally, secular utopias are principally about “perfecting” political institutions (p. 3), about some version of freedom and equality. Christian eschatology is primarily about perfecting *people*, about our moral virtues and inner motivations. Analogies work until they don’t. At what point are we no longer talking about the same thing?

Jones closes his book by retelling the parable of the sheep from Matthew (25:31–46). In his interpretation, the sheep—the righteous elect—serve as a model for how we might pursue justice despite our epistemic limitations (p. 196). Given the risk of utopian-inspired violence, neither ideal theory nor apocalyptic thought should provide “guides for collective action by a society” (p. 192). Like Matthew’s sheep, we are better off just diligently doing good. Humility is undoubtedly an important democratic virtue. The wreckage of the last century’s utopian projects still lies at our feet. One might ask, though, whether in disbaring violence, or even politics, from realizing utopia, we must also exclude *all* forms of collective action—especially in our age of fracture and isolation, fragmentation and anomie. Religion, after all, gives us resources not only for formulating the “I” but the “we”—not only for ethics, but solidarity. And among the great lessons of Jones’s impressive study is that political theory has much to learn if it stops talking at religion and starts, instead, to listen.

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James Martel’s extraordinarily imaginative new book is a tour de force of disappointment, and I do not mean that as an insult. Indeed, this work actively aims to disappoint, in the idiosyncratic use of the term that Martel employs: it is written as a rich broadside against what he calls the “archist” *appointment* of power, the sovereign insistence