

Koperski correctly defines the “no miracles” argument as not meaning that God has not dabbled in his own creation but rather that “it would be a miracle if science could be as successful as it has been and not more or less true.”

Like an excellent teacher, Koperski gives examples which are accessible to the average reader. Here’s one on free will:

If the behavior of all things, including the atoms in our own bodies, is wholly determined by the laws of physics, then there doesn’t appear to be any room left for free will. In such a world, a kicker doesn’t choose to kick a field goal any more than the football chooses to go through the goal posts. It’s all just a matter of the laws of physics working themselves out.

One last quote shows the practical orientation of the author:

The Boltzmann brain story is a *reductio ad absurdum*. If one’s physical theory indicates that the best explanation for my own subjective experience, including memories, is that I am a disembodied brain temporarily hallucinating in the void (rather than a real person currently sitting at my desk), that’s a problem for one’s theory. A set of beliefs known to be grounded on an illusion contains its own defeater. Any theory that leads to radical skepticism about one’s experience would invalidate whatever evidence one had for the theory itself. In other words, once you believe it, you probably shouldn’t. (p. 92)

The book is worthy of recommendation as an accessible text for undergraduates studying the philosophy of science. Many, perhaps most, of the perennially controversial topics are covered within the text. A worthy effort indeed.

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## RELIGION & SCIENCE

**THE SOUL OF THE WORLD** by Roger Scruton. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014. 216 pages. Hardcover; \$27.95. ISBN: 9780691161570.

“We live in an age of debunking explanations ...” So begins Roger Scruton in his fine book which aims to rebut reductionist (ultra-Darwinist, neurobiological) accounts of religion, the person, and the arts, and to clear a space for a search for the sacred. Scruton demonstrates the corrosive effects of scientism and offers a powerful challenge to this sort of thinking. Seeking to preserve the integrity of these three areas of meaning, he argues that they occupy a different

cognitive sphere, distinct, if not separate from, the impersonal, cause-effect realm occupied by the sciences. Borrowing a term from Husserl, he calls this sphere peculiar to humans, the *Lebenswelt*, “life-world,” a term which marks the space of first-person expressions of symbolic meaning. Here, the third-person perspective of the sciences is out of place, while reductionist claims are positively violent in what they ignore.

Central to his project of rehabilitating the *Lebenswelt* is his insistence that human beings are not only objects in the world (the province of science) but also subjects. As subjects, they enjoy the unique, first-person perspective of self-conscious agency. Through this first-person perspective, persons enjoy the privilege of making statements about themselves that are immune to challenge by others (p. 63). This privileged standpoint, says Scruton, is necessary for the possibility of dialogue with each other, since if we did not enjoy this privilege, “we would be always describing ourselves as though we were someone else” (p. 63). The first-person perspective simply does not exist in science since its project is to place all things under the rubric of impersonal, universal laws. Against scientism’s explanatory imperialism, Scruton seeks to retrieve the reality, integrity, and causal legitimacy of the *Lebenswelt*. This is especially present in his concern to appreciate the significance of the “I-You encounter” in which two subjects meet and the possibility of interpersonal dialogue opens up (p. 49). Such a meeting, says Scruton, implies the notion of accountability as each person struggles to know and be known, to give an account of what they lived for and why. While neuroscience is a powerful framework for exploring brain function, it is ill equipped to understand the nature or meaning of this first-person, qualitative exchange.

The ultra-Darwinist assumption that natural selection is the all-sufficient explanation applied, without distinction, to all living creatures is flawed, since, with *Homo sapiens*, there is “something new under the sun.” Here, a way of being has emerged from nature that eludes a purely biological category of explanation. To signal the nature of this new emergent, Scruton proposes what he calls “cognitive dualism.” He is not hearkening back to a Cartesian split between body and soul, fact and value. There is only one reality, says Scruton, but it is capable of being understood under two aspects: the impersonal, cause-effect mode of science; and the intentional, interpersonal mode of human beings. These are two orders of explanation. The two worlds are ontologically *continuous*, in the sense that the *Lebenswelt* emerges from the material world which the sciences

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investigate, and so has ontological priority (p. 67). However, the two orders are explanatorily *discontinuous* since “we cannot derive from one of them a description of the world as seen from the other. Nor can we understand how one and the same object can be apprehended from both perspectives” (p. 36).

Ultra-Darwinists explain biological phenomena as strategies for survival and reproductive success. For them, human life is no exception to this totalizing explanation. For example, evolutionary psychologists view altruism as the most reliable strategy for the spread of one’s genetic material into the next generation. This counter-intuitive claim is explained in terms of kin selection, in which an individual (usually one who has many genetically related individuals in the populace) will sacrifice or put himself at risk for the sake of the group. Thus, what appears to be concern for others is really a kind of concern for his genetic “investment.” At any rate, an organism is said to act altruistically, “if it benefits another organism at a cost to itself” (p. 55). Scruton’s problem with this definition is that it makes no distinction between nonhuman and human acts. Nonhuman organisms, responding to biological imperatives, may unconsciously or semi-consciously, act in accord with their “selfish genes,” but is this true of human beings? Scruton thinks not. About the evolutionary psychologist’s definition of altruism, he writes,

The concept applies equally to the soldier ant that marches into the flames that threaten the anthill, and to the officer who throws himself onto the live grenade that threatens his platoon. The concept of altruism, so understood, cannot explain, or even recognize, the distinction between those two cases. Yet surely there is all the difference in the world between the ant that marches instinctively toward the flames, unable either to understand what it is doing or to fear the results of it, and the officer who consciously lays down his life for his troops. (p. 55)

As free beings existing in the “‘space of reasons,’ not in the ‘space of law’” (p. 36), humans can be motivated by any number of reasons other than biological imperatives. They can choose to die for the sake of honor, love, or freedom. Evolutionary psychologists may counter that we only *think* we are acting for the sake of these noble abstractions, but in truth, are tethered to our genes and dance to their tune. But this is mere assertion based upon a faith that the third-person perspective of science alone does explanatory work. Such a position arbitrarily denies by *fiat* the first-person claim that we are personal agents freely intending certain desirable goals.

Along with fellow philosopher Mary Midgley, Scruton is opposed to what she famously called “nothing buttery” (p.39). “Nothing buttery” is the reductionist habit of mind which insists that parts are more real and more important than the whole, and the whole is really “nothing but” its constituent parts, usually, physics and chemistry. For Scruton, reality is a multilayered affair, a nested hierarchy where higher order functions and powers emerge from their material matrix. An emergent reality is not “nothing but” the collection of things of which it is composed but a new and unexpected whole, inexplicable in terms of its constituent parts.

There is a widespread habit of declaring emergent realities to be “nothing but” the things in which we perceive them. The human person is “nothing but” the human animal; law is “nothing but” relations of social power; sexual love is “nothing but” the urge to procreation; altruism is “nothing but” the dominant genetic strategy described by Maynard Smith; the *Mona Lisa* is “nothing but” a spread of pigments on a canvas, the Ninth Symphony is “nothing but” a sequence of pitched sounds of varying timbre. And so on. Getting rid of this habit is, to my mind, the true goal of philosophy ... [it] is the first step in the search for God. (pp. 39–40)

Of course, if persons and human culture are reducible to the interplay of physics and chemistry, then there is really nothing to discuss beyond what the sciences have to say. Human persons are just gene machines. Culturally speaking, there would be nothing to *interpret* artistically since no deeper meaning could be accorded to things than what is uncovered by the sciences. For Scruton, artistic creations are the work of persons and, as such, embody acts of meaning, and are capable of exploring the nature of the human condition or the search for God. Thus, if the *Lebenswelt* is real, music is more than a “series of pitched sounds, one after the other, each identified by frequency” (p. 37). The third-person perspective, while necessary—there can be no music without pitch and frequency—is not a sufficient explanation of what music *is*. Concerning the theme of the opening of Beethoven’s Third Piano Concerto, Scruton says,

... you cannot describe what is going on in this theme without speaking of movement in musical space, of gravitational forces, of answering phrases and symmetries, of tension and release, and so on. (p. 37)

A little later, he ties his discussion of music into his larger themes:

In describing a sequence of sounds as a melody, I am situating the sequence in the human world: the world of responses, intentions, and self-knowledge. I am lifting the sounds out of the physical realm, and repositioning them in the *Lebenswelt*, which is a world of freedom, reason, and interpersonal being ... I am describing what I hear in the sounds, when I respond to them as music. (p. 66)

Like the *Lebenswelt*, the presence of God will suffer eclipse in a culture increasingly given to scientism. Interestingly, Scruton speaks of the “real presence” of God in the midst of the early Israelites as a kind of concealment. Such divine hiddenness may be necessary, according to Scruton, since God “lies outside the space-time continuum” (p. 9) and yet this raises a pressing question concerning how God’s presence may be manifested in the empirical realm (p. 11). Chastened by this hiddenness, we must be aware that while human concepts and beliefs about God may disclose, they also conceal (p. 10). Nevertheless, scientism’s denial of the *Lebenswelt* hopes to secure a permanent silence about the sacred which this powerful book seeks to repel.

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**THE GAP: The Science of What Separates Us from Other Animals** by Thomas Suddendorf. New York: Basic Books, 2013. 358 pages. Hardcover; \$29.99. ISBN: 0465030149.

This is a book about the human mind, and how the human mind differs from that of other animals, including primates. We can envision the future (alternate realities), and we possess a mental framework to express these visions (language and culture). The author, Thomas Suddendorf, calls these “nested scenario building” and an “urge to connect.” Suddendorf makes a case for these two facets of humanity as constituting the gap between the capacities of the human mind and those of other animals.

Suddendorf frames this book in the evolutionary context of what happened along the way from primitive ape to modern human being. As there are no Neanderthals around anymore, and we know little about them and our other forebears, he redirects his focus to our nearest extant relatives: apes. He then proceeds to discuss how we study the minds of apes and humans and highlights the limits of such inquiry. Suddendorf is very good in this respect. Throughout the course of the book, he continues to highlight the limits of scientific inquiry. He also does not shy away from contrasting the two opposing paradigms in which the observations are interpreted: a roman-

tic paradigm that is poised to imagine human-mind likeness where there is none; and a killjoy paradigm ready to strip away humanness in favor of behaviorist explanations. Suddendorf tries hard to walk the middle of the road between the two paradigms while keeping the reader’s options open.

Suddendorf focuses on six spheres of the human condition: language, mental time travel, mindreading (the ability to read body language and infer the subject’s thinking), theorizing (the ability to conceive of abstract ideas and examine them), culture (the ability to learn and retain learning across generations), and morality. These he contrasts with the animal faculties of communication, memory, social reasoning, physical reasoning, tradition (yes! animals learn and that learning does seem to spread and be preserved in populations over time), and empathy. I will preserve for you the joy of reading the book by not elaborating much further on these points. Suffice it to say, the gap between these six qualities are, in Suddendorf’s opinion, bridged by nested scenario building and an urge to connect.

The nested scenario building is, as Suddendorf explains it, the ability not only to retain memories and learning but to reimagine those memories and learning into new ideas. In doing so, we can project ourselves into the future (we can, for example, anticipate consequences from actions and so derive a sense of ethical accountability from empathy) as well as imagine new things and invent. These abilities, Suddendorf argues, are not visible in other animals. While apes may be able to “ape” humanness, their impression is, in his opinion, only skin deep.

Apes, and many other organisms, are social but humanity takes it further. We seek society; we want to make contact with others and share our experiences. I give, as an example, my hobbies of tropical fish keeping and orchid growing. Visit a society meeting and the average age is well over 60 years of age. This is not a particularly tech-savvy demographic, but if you visit the internet, there is no shortage of webpages, forums, and groups discussing these topics. We (whether we are 19 or 90) seek each other out to share our experience. What is more, we spontaneously organize to share information with like-minded people. With communication, we create culture where there previously was none. In part, the reason why young people cannot be separated from their phones is because there is a deep, inexorable desire to connect with others. Suddendorf discusses what makes us human and reveals our carnal nature that, left untempered by morality, can backfire into social self-destructive culture.