

Book Reviews

that include additional rationale for his thesis. He then closes the work with a nod to some of the philosophical and religious discussions on genetic determinism. In this chapter, he also provides an interesting contrast between two current worldviews (Christianity and Transhumanism) as they relate to genetic determinism, free-will, morality, and human purpose. The chapter is logically constructed and provides additional compelling rationale against genetic determinism, especially for a non-Christian reader.

Anyone who dives in to *Are We Slaves to Our Genes?* will find it an engaging and thought-provoking read. Alexander summarizes and synthesizes an immense amount of current scientific research into a clear, concise, and palatable narrative. His chapter on genes and sexual orientation is one of the best and well-balanced compilations of current genetic research on the topic around. The chapter includes some current psychological research as well. For those with interest in this topic, the book is worth picking up just for that chapter. Whether the reader is a scientific novice with an interest in pop culture and genetic determinism or an expert in the field, Alexander does a masterful job walking the reader through the current genetic arguments to show that we are more complex than nature versus nurture.

Note

¹Alex Carchidi, “23andMe Is Going Public via a SPAC. Here’s What You Need to Know,” *The Motley Fool*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.fool.com/investing/2021/02/09/23andme-is-going-public-via-a-spac-heres-what-you/>.

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IN SEARCH OF THE SOUL: A Philosophical Essay by John Cottingham. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. 174 pages. Hardcover; \$22.95. ISBN: 9780691174426.

There is a longing in the human soul for meaning, fullness, God. That is what philosopher John Cottingham claims in his marvelous philosophical essay, *In Search of the Soul*. The book historically traces speculation on the soul and its nature from Plato to Descartes to Daniel Dennett, but it is also an impassioned summons to heed the soul’s native orientation to the transcendent. It is noteworthy for its philosophical acumen, accessibility, and appreciation of literature’s contribution to the conversation. In the opening chapter alone, he alludes to Philip Pullman, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and T.S. Eliot. For the purposes of this brief review, I shall concentrate on the philosophical heart of the book, chapter three, and end with a summary overview of the last two chapters.

In chapter three, Cottingham confronts two tendencies in contemporary discussion about the soul and its nature.

Today, discussion of the soul centers on the nature of consciousness. Consciousness poses a challenge to the impersonal, mechanistic, materialist consensus of science. So, while neurobiology may be adept at telling us what parts of the brain “light up” in experimental settings, there is an enormous explanatory gap between the registration of stimuli in hemispheres of the brain by an fMRI and the first-person experience of *qualia* such as the taste of cinnamon, the feel of corduroy, or the deep satisfaction in knowing that you are known. How do we integrate the elusive nature of consciousness within the impersonal, mechanistic picture of reality of the sciences? For some, such as Daniel Dennett, we don’t, and so we must belittle and discount it. Consciousness is, to use Dennett’s analogy, a “user-illusion” like the “click and drag icons” on our computers which bear no relation to its complicated micro-circuitry. The illusion (replete with audio accompaniment) is there only to “humor” our perceptual and cognitive apparatus and pertains to nothing real in the computer. Our “subjective qualitative awareness” is our user-illusion, the click and drag icon that is consciousness.

Cottingham’s response to Dennett is an ancient one. Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, once employed something like it when discussing the moral reasons for which he died. First, Dennett ontologically privileges the micro properties of the computer’s circuitry over the macro properties. That is, the printed circuit board is real, the icon is not. But, says Cottingham, this is utterly arbitrary and unjustified. Why not say that both micro and macro properties are equally real? The icon may be dependent upon the micro properties of the computer (like the soul in relation to the body), but that doesn’t mean it is ontologically dubious. The rich, meaning-laden world to which the icon appeals is just as real, though it can be accessed and understood only within the realm of the conceptual (p. 79). For Cottingham, Dennett’s materialist bias is showing: it is only real if it’s caught in my net. Therefore, he rejects the attempt to eliminate consciousness from the status of the real by reducing it to an illusory side-effect of the workings of the brain.

In addition to Dennett’s materialist reduction, there is another take on consciousness that Cottingham finds unsatisfactory: panpsychism. Panpsychism is, philosophically, at the opposite pole of the Darwinian account of consciousness in which it comes at the end of the process of evolutionary development (p. 80). Instead, panpsychism claims that consciousness is present, inchoately, from the very beginning in the simplest parts/particles. Following the insights of William James, Cottingham holds that panpsychism is “a kind of category mistake” in which properties more plausibly attributed to wholes (like persons) are implausibly ascribed to parts. In addition, though he may agree with panpsychism that consciousness is, somehow, intrinsic to matter – though a latecomer in evolutionary

history—he takes issue with the contention that consciousness is ultimately unintelligible, “a brute fact we cannot deny, but which we cannot ever hope to incorporate into any wider picture of reality” (p. 83).

In a manner similar to consciousness, many philosophers and scientists also regard moral truths as anomalous, out of step with the neutral, quantitative take on the world of the sciences. In his brief survey, moral truths/values are viewed as human projections or groundless “irreducible normative truths” (p. 86). Both of these positions, for Cottingham, fail to do justice to the nature of our experience of the good.

Cottingham maintains that theism is the most congenial framework for consciousness. For not only is it perfectly compatible with the “models and mechanisms of the modern physical sciences” (p. 90), but in this setting consciousness need no longer be dismissed as illusion or anomalous outlier. Theism is congenial to the first-person, qualitative character of consciousness because God is a person and if, as the great theistic traditions affirm, a human being is made in the “image and likeness of God,” then it makes sense that matter has the potential to evolve into awareness and self-awareness. Life’s evolutionary orientation could be seen as God’s way of seeking to be in relation to God’s creation. In a Trinitarian context, God is not only a person but a communion of persons rooted in love. So, not only is our personhood grounded, but our social nature is affirmed as an echo of God’s interpersonal communion. In addition, our ineradicable sense of normative value loses its anomalous character by finding its natural source and ground in a God of infinite goodness. Finally, theism helps us correct for a tendency in nontheistic conceptions of consciousness to hold that we are the creators of the consciousness we find so captivating, the good we find so compelling. But this, Cottingham maintains, fails to do justice to the profundity of our experience of marveling at the “magical mystery show” of consciousness (p. 92) or the experience of being confronted by what the good demands. So ends my review of chapter three.

In chapter four, Cottingham defends the compatibility of modern psychoanalysis with theism. Here, the depths and opacity of personhood are acknowledged and explored. The dynamics of psychoanalysis are seen to mirror the struggles toward self-knowledge and self-donation found in spiritual direction. The winding corridors and duplicities attendant upon our search for authentic selfhood in psychoanalysis may be a condition of our sinfulness. Finally, chapter five recapitulates the theme adumbrated in chapter one, the natural longing of the human person for God. It is an old theme, but Cottingham has made it new: we were made for God and our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

This is an engaging and inspiring work. Cottingham does not pretend to have all the answers or to have

proved what is beyond proof. This is one of the great strengths of his book. He is alert to the questions and to the native orientation of our souls.

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TECHNOLOGY

NIETZSCHEAN MEDITATIONS: Untimely Thoughts at the Dawn of the Transhuman Era by Steve Fuller. *Posthuman Studies 1*, ed. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner. Basel, Switzerland: Schwabe Verlagsgruppe, 2019. 240 pages. Hardcover; \$146.00. ISBN: 9783796539466. Paperback; \$41.00. ISBN: 9783796540608.

Christians turning to Nietzsche for support may be counterintuitive, but that can be the case with regard to radical human enhancement technology. As addressed in the June 2020 theme issue of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, transhumanism presents a treacherous landscape that calls for a thoughtful response from theologians and faith communities. The therapies and technologies already impacting the structure—physical, cognitive, affective, and other aspects—of our lives are growing in precision and potency. And, as indicated in the name of this series, “Posthuman Studies,” discussions are underway about the replacement of *Homo sapiens* with *techno sapiens*. Whether our technological future is heavenly or hellish depends on the values embedded in the technology and how that technology is used, so we who are alive now have a moral imperative to do our part to ensure that technologies of human enhancement unfold responsibly.

All the religions are far behind where they need to be in understanding and making critical assessment of radical human enhancement technology and its champion, a movement called transhumanism. Judaism and Christianity are ahead of other religions in this regard, but even they have much work to do and quickly, given the fast pace of the developing technologies in areas such as genetic engineering, tissue engineering, robotics, and artificial intelligence.

Steve Fuller is well qualified to critique the transhumanist agenda. Auguste Comte Professor of Social Epistemology at the University of Warwick, UK, and co-editor of the relatively new series, *Palgrave Studies in the Future of Humanity and Its Successors*, he has written twenty-five books about many subjects, including intelligent design, philosophy of science, and social epistemology, an interdisciplinary field he helped develop.

The three sections of *Nietzschean Meditations* address the philosophical and theological history of transhumanism, the politics of transhumanism, and the role of death in transhumanism. There is a lot about transhumanism in