

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

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this volume. This review addresses just a few slices relevant for Christian readers.

The *Übermensch*, the future superman (also translated “Superior Man” and “Higher Man”) Nietzsche made famous, was denigrated following World War II due to its association with the Nazis. Fuller travels back to Nietzsche’s early reception when the superior man was not a racially tinged idea. This makes it possible for Fuller to “remain interested in the early twentieth-century image of Nietzsche as someone who took literally the prospect of transcending the human condition—a futurist who was unafraid to confront the puzzlement and even suffering that it would entail” (p. 10).

As with the transhumanist agenda, a happy outcome for Nietzsche’s superman project was not guaranteed. Nietzsche’s tightrope walker, which may be understood as a metaphor for the human condition, falls to his death. For Fuller, this does not mean that Christians, committed to transformation, should not make use of these technologies or see them as a means of God’s grace. “As Nietzsche might put it—and transhumanists would recognize—we are not superior animals but failed gods” (p. 17). However, Fuller says we cannot regain our standing on our own; it is a grace-gift from God. Along the way, Fuller adeptly maps varieties of transhumanism onto theological (but not necessarily orthodox) positions, for example, Aubrey de Grey’s Pelagian-like biological superlongevity program and Ray Kurzweil’s Arian-like vision of “divine” consciousness escaping the confines of the body. For Fuller, the Arian “supposes that humans ‘always already’ possess divine capacities which may have yet to be discovered” (p. 47). And, importantly, short of making choices for transformation, “humans may freely fall into a further degraded state, which may include regarding their degradation as satisfactory if not superior to the time when they were close to God” (p. 18).

Christians can find Nietzsche a thoughtful guide for a proactionary (as opposed to a precautionary) approach to technological possibilities for human enhancement. Being proactive does not mean underestimating the risks these programs entail. While the tightrope walker can reach the other side, humility asks us to recognize that it is a “risky project of self-improvement” (p. 20). But we can face the danger and push through the fear. “However much day-to-day empirical realities remind us of our earthbound nature, we are nevertheless more than just that” (p. 34). And then, rhetorically, Fuller asks: “The question then becomes how to give that ‘transcendental’ aspect of our being its proper due: Is it just something that we release on special occasions, such as a church service, or is it integral to our ordinary being in the world, propelling us to realize our godlike potential?” (p. 34). In this context, Fuller asserts that faith can be understood as a “creative response to radical uncertainty” and a belief in providence, that is,

“that God will always provide what we need to know to improve our position—but the trick is for us to figure what that is” (p. 34).

This book, then, is not so much about Nietzsche as it is a meditation inspired by Nietzsche that provides a sober critique of transhumanism and its possibilities. The Christian religion will do well to provide a theological response to radical human enhancement, and Nietzsche, via Fuller, can provide guidance, albeit from an unlikely source.

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**THE CHARISMA MACHINE: The Life, Death, and Legacy of One Laptop per Child** by Morgan G. Ames. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019. 309 pages including appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. Paperback; \$35.00. ISBN: 9780262537445.

As with many who lead development projects, Negroponte and OLPC’s other leaders and contributors wanted to transform the world—not only for what they believed would be for the better but, as we will see, in their own image. (p. 4)

Morgan G. Ames’s book, *The Charisma Machine*, is a deeply incisive analysis of the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) project. The OLPC project, led primarily by Nicholas Negroponte, sought to provide millions of simple, robust, inexpensive laptops to children in developing countries, to allow the children to rise above societal and educational limitations. The author analyzes not only the hardware and software of the OLPC XO laptop, but also delves into the leaders’ experiences as “technically precocious boys” and “hackers” at MIT’s Media Lab, their educational philosophy of constructionism, and both their personal charisma and that of the XO laptop.

The book appears to be a reworking of the author’s PhD dissertation from Stanford University in 2013, and as such, is not an easy read. Understanding the book requires understanding a few oft-used terms, defined in the introduction. Ames repeatedly uses the term “social imaginary” defined as

a set of coherent visions by a group of people to collectively “imagine their social existence,” as philosopher Charles Taylor puts it—the ways that people imagine themselves as part of a group and the identities that this group takes on in their minds. (p. 6)

The book also emphasizes the leaders’ common life experiences as technically precocious boys—boys who grew up taking apart devices to understand them and then rebuilding them to make them better. Their experiences continued in the group at MIT’s Media Lab, where members would play with computers to learn how they worked and then would challenge each other to reprogram them and extend their capabilities. These