

## Book Reviews

He then examines the works of Sergii Bulgakov and Dumitru Stăniloae and argues that they continue the trend of viewing sin in the context of creation and deification. The final section of Louth's essay addresses the sinlessness of Mary via Bulgakov's approach to the issue. This aspect of his essay is particularly welcome since only one other essay (Oliver Crisp's) in the volume mentions Mary in relation to the doctrine of original sin. While Louth's argument that the West focuses narrowly on the Fall-redemption arc could perhaps be challenged, his essay nevertheless illuminates important differences in emphasis between Eastern and Western Christian thinking about sin and makes a crucial contribution to the conversation.

Tatha Wiley, in the so-called reconceived view, draws from the theology of Bernard Lonergan, S.J., to develop an exorcising approach to the doctrine of original sin. Wiley takes seriously the ways in which the traditional articulation of the doctrine has lost credibility in the contemporary age. She suggests that this is a result of its dissonance with modern biblical scholarship and evolutionary biology, and its history of being used to deny the goodness of humanity and sexuality. Wiley emphasizes the time-bound nature of all human understanding, and the fact that theological doctrines will inevitably reflect the historical frameworks in which they are articulated. In the current age, Wiley argues, this requires us to take seriously the scientific context in which we live, as well as our "authentic values" (p. 106). In her recasting of the doctrine, Wiley suggests via Lonergan that the "root sin" of humanity is "sustained unauthenticity" (p. 124). Wiley's contribution is compelling in its boldness. Rather than suggesting a few minor tweaks to the doctrine, she presents a rigorous rethinking of it. Wiley's essay is also valuable in that it addresses the gendered effects of the doctrine's history, and is the only essay in the volume to do so.

*Original Sin and the Fall: Five Views* is a thought-provoking treatment of one of the most debated aspects of Christian theology. On the whole, the book will likely be useful for professional theologians, students of theology at the graduate and undergraduate levels, pastoral ministers, and interested lay people. The "Responses" portion of the book was especially engaging, as the authors were quite candid in terms of assessing the lines of divergence in the group. The book provides thoughtful approaches to a difficult theological puzzle in which clear positions are established, not only from diverse points of view without apology, but also with genuine efforts to understand and accurately represent the positions of the others. Given the brevity of the volume, there were inevitably many unanswered questions evoked. Those familiar with theological discussions surrounding original sin will likely wish for more-thorough engagement with the challenges raised by evolutionary biology, as well as more reflection on recent shifts in thinking about evolution expressed in

the extended evolutionary synthesis. These developments are friendlier to theological intuitions about inherited sin.

*Reviewed by Megan Loumagne Ulishney, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Theology and Religious Studies, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK NG7 2RD.*

**EMBRACING EVOLUTION: How Understanding Science Can Strengthen Your Christian Life** by Matthew Nelson Hill. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 152 pages. Paperback; \$20.00. ISBN: 9780830852833.

This is a short and very readable book whose main purpose is to connect the average churchgoing Christian with a modern and theologically sympathetic understanding of evolution. The general perspective taken by the book is that human understanding of anything (science, art, theology, politics, and so forth) is significantly contextual. The author takes care in the first chapter to explain his perspective on science/faith issues in general, and organizes the book into three parts.

The first part is that of understanding our "biblical lens," namely, exploring the ways in which we are shaped to read scripture, and how this, in turn, influences our beliefs. Do we read the Bible for formation or for information? The two are not mutually incompatible, but neither are they equivalent, and how we balance the two is pertinent to our theological understanding of evolution. This section of the book addresses what are perhaps the two main questions emerging from the early chapters of Genesis: our understanding of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and the place of predation and death in God's creation. The latter troubles the author much more than the former, and the response presented is not wholly satisfying, even to the author himself. Overall, this section is a good presentation of hermeneutics that focuses on Genesis without bogging down the reader with too much theological weight.

The second part of the book addresses how we understand our "scientific lens." A full chapter is devoted to the basic theory of evolution (its "nuts and bolts") and a subsequent chapter to what is meant by scientific truth and its integration (or not) with faith. The author does a good job of distilling the philosophy of science for the intelligent lay reader without "dumbing it down"—not an easy task. Sometimes, however, the treatment is lacking, particularly concerning the *imago Dei* in light of evolution. Are we (as appears to be the inference on page 69) special simply because we were evolutionarily lucky to have large brains?

The remainder of the book—its third part—is devoted to how we might integrate an evolutionary understanding of biology with Christian faith. Many books have been written on this subject, and it is difficult for anyone these days to say what has not already been said. The theme running through this section of the book is

that an evolutionary perspective can be empowering, primarily because knowledge of fact and truth allows a Christian to better carry out the ministry of Jesus in his/her life and in the world. Knowledge of the roots of our negative genetic urges (for example, the tendency to overeat) can empower us to overcome these urges through a combination of human choice and the grace of God. The final chapter discusses how the Christian church, girded with an appropriate integration of evolutionary knowledge and scriptural foundation, is best positioned to foster the virtues of the kingdom of God through community.

I liked this book, and I think it is definitely one for discussion and use in an adult Sunday school class. It does, however, avoid a number of awkward questions and issues. For example, why does it matter if our negative/positive tendencies are evolutionarily based? Wouldn't we, as Christians, act the same if they had some other origin? There is also an assumption by the author of a transcendent morality – but where does this come from? Are our morals likewise a product of evolution? If so, how does this square with biblical (and other) forms of revelation? And as far as the problem of death is concerned, isn't this a problem of sin in the world? Doesn't it mean that sin is present at the outset of creation?

That said, this is very much a positive contribution to the ongoing evolution/creation issue. Without denying our evolutionary origins, it calls us to transcend them as followers of Jesus. I am sure it will foster interesting discussions in many a church and Sunday school class.

*Reviewed by Robert B. Mann, Professor of Physics & Applied Mathematics, University of Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1.*



## PERSONHOOD

**ARE WE SLAVES TO OUR GENES?** by Denis R. Alexander. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 275 pages. Hardcover; \$99.99. ISBN: 9781108426336. Paperback; \$29.99. ISBN: 9781108445054. Ebook; \$24.00. ISBN: 1108426336.

A few weeks ago, news broke that the genetic testing giant 23andMe was going to become a publically traded company.<sup>1</sup> With an annual revenue of \$305 million in 2020 and a database of nearly 10 million human genomes, the company has become not only a consumer favorite for inexpensive at-home genetic testing, but its wealth of genetic knowledge has become a valued commodity for drug development companies. As a part of its marketing approach, 23andMe suggests the knowledge gained from their genetic analysis will help individuals to “know what makes you, you.” While not explicitly stated, this slogan and the company's quick rise to success follow a narrative that has become central in modern society—genes completely determine who we are.

Concerned that genetic determinism has taken an unwarranted place in western culture, Denis Alexander offers *Are We Slaves to Our Genes?* as a critique of this rising epistemology. Using an enormous compilation of modern genetic research, Alexander argues that the development of most human traits and behaviors is far more complex than what genetics can account for alone. Rather, current genetic research suggests that the development of a majority of human traits and behaviors is the result of a complex interaction between genes, the environment, and developmental timing; this includes the interaction between interrelated biological systems.

Alexander begins by making a case for the prevalence of genetic determinism in the modern cultural narrative. Using multiple current examples, he highlights how genetic determinism is both implicitly and explicitly woven into the presentation of scientific research, especially in pop culture. He then spends the next three chapters acquainting the reader with basic genetic principles. Along with a basic introduction, he provides current information on how genes and the environment interact during human development. He also offers a thoughtful analysis of current research and techniques for connecting human behavior with genetics. In these chapters, Alexander is careful to be both artful and delicate as he tries to strike a balance between making the information palatable for nonscientists, while still engaging for experts in the field. For either reader, the information presented in these chapters is foundational to understanding the genetic research and analysis presented in later sections of the book. The focus then shifts to providing detailed summaries and analyses of current genetic research on a number of culturally relevant topics.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7, he explores the relationship between genes and mental health, genetics and intelligence, and genes and personality, respectively. The analysis in chapter 7 also includes a look at a few well-known personality disorders. The correlations highlighted and the analyses provided are grounded in current psychological and genetic-based research. The examples used are relevant and interesting for scientists and nonscientists alike. In chapter 9, Alexander moves his attention to the genetics of food desire, weight, and the propensity for exercise. Again, he makes a strong case to show that genetic research does not support the narrative around genetic determinism for development of these traits and behaviors.

Alexander then decides to tackle the correlation between genes and three of the most controversial issues in current American society: religion, politics, and sexual orientation. On each of these contentious issues, he provides an extremely well-researched, thoughtful, and even-handed analysis that is grounded in scientific research, not opinion. The penultimate chapter provides an exquisite summary of the previous chapters