Neuroscience

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THE SOUL OF DESIRE: Discovering the Neuroscience of Longing, Beauty, and Community by Curt Thompson. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021. 238 pages. Hardcover; $27.00. ISBN: 1514002108.

The Soul of Desire sparks the reader's curiosity with the title. Often we relate desire to things we want but view as shameful or dysfunctional in life, such as sex, money and power. Although briefly addressing those things, this book takes the reader to a deeper level of understanding and applying God's definition of desire. Thompson uses art and personal narratives with the integration of theology, psychology, psychiatry and interpersonal neurobiology to help the reader see God's intent for beauty out of brokenness.

The first section of the book outlines the concept of desire. Thompson defines desires as what we want and long for. It is primal for humans to desire although we often don't understand why. It is innate but also must be cultivated and pruned. It is shaped by the practices and habits we develop: the expressions of our intention. Often our desires have less to do with what God longs for us to desire, himself, and more to do with being able to compete in the world—to be adequate and acceptable in the eyes of others (p. 13). He goes on to emphasize Jesus's interest in our desires. Jesus asks us to name our desires in John 1:38, "What do you want?" He argues that, often, we do not name our desires because we fear they may fall outside of the boundary of what God or others see as acceptable. But in not naming our desires, we become bored and depressed (p. 191). We are not living to our full potential.

God's intent is for beauty out of brokenness which we are able to see only when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable. How the brain processes interactions is based on past experiences, which often include trauma and shame. In Thompson's first book, *The Soul of Shame*, he unpacks this concept of shame and how it affects every aspect of our personal and vocational endeavors. It seeks to destroy our identity in Christ. Within this second book, he goes on to elaborate how beauty begins and ends with God, our relationship with God, and with each other. Our primal desire is not only to be known, but also to be curators and creators of beauty (p. 33). He emphasizes that in order to do this, we must learn to think of our story in a different way. God does not point out our sin merely in order to forgive us so we will go to heaven, nor does he identify our trauma and shame in order to heal them simply that we might feel better about ourselves. Instead,

> he is transforming us—creating us anew—to recommission us to do the work of new creation along with him. In this sense, God sees us not as problems to be solved or broken objects to be repaired but as beauty on the way to being formed. Sin, then, is what keeps us in a posture of resisting God's desire for creating beauty in, with, and through us. (p. 45)

Throughout a large portion of the book, Thompson is laying out how to move from trauma and shame to a new creation, by means of interpersonal neurobiology. This becomes a lived experience for participants within confessional communities. These communities are designed to enhance integration of the mind's nine domains of functional activity.

> This leads to the development of earned secure attachment, primarily through providing the opportunity for participants to be seen, soothed, safe, and secure and bolsters the social engagement system while enabling participants to widen their windows of tolerance, which prevents them from moving into stages of hyper- or hypo-arousal. These processes hinge on participation in a setting where the deep desire to be known is met. (p. 40)

In order to help the reader visualize how these communities work, he intertwines stories from various participants to demonstrate the process. The goal for each participant, in telling their story, is to name their desires and griefs and do the work of lament as a means of creating beauty in order to reach sanctification (p. 97). In order to go through these stages, participants must be willing to dwell on, to spend time with, and to contemplate these questions: "Where am I?" in reference to the mind, thoughts, and emotions; and "With whom am I living?" in reference to who else consumes our thoughts.

Thompson does an outstanding job of helping the reader process each phase that participants in the communities must go through (imagine, dwell, gaze and inquire) in order to attain their desires, all while connecting each phase back to the process of sanctification in order to move closer to the new creation. He uses the Easter story to help the reader understand. Without Easter there is no story, "… to see how beauty is coming to find you, calling to you in your grieving, traumatized, disintegrated life in order to transform the crucifixion of your soul into the beauty of resurrection" (p. 90).

The book ends with descriptive ways in which groups of people can use this process to start to move toward implementation of a confessional community within various settings. Although this was helpful, it left the reader wanting to know more about the process, to understand how to apply the process more effectively.

I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to build a sense of community within a group of people. Simply understanding the process of how humans develop a sense of belonging that can end in beauty strengthens the human and spiritual connection.

Overall, the book does an excellent job of identifying the true desires of the human soul. Thompson effectively connects the dots between science and faith through the lens of beauty and relationship. He incorporates the mind of a biblical scholar, the wisdom of a psychiatrist and researcher, and the heart of a pastor through biblical narratives, stories of the human experience and neuroscience. He encourages us; even in a broken world, God can work through authentic and vulnerable community to create beauty from places of trauma, and he can make all things new.

Reviewed by Karie Stamer, Nursing Department, Northwestern College, Orange City, IA 51041.

Ψ Philosophy

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DIVINE ACTION AND EMERGENCE: An Alternative to Panentheism by Mariusz Tabaczek. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021. xviii + 346 pages. Hardcover; $75.00. ISBN: 9780268108731.

In his classic *History of Western Philosophy,* Bertrand Russell refers to the Greek atomists, with their view of reality as consisting of atoms in a void, as a "point of view … remarkably like that of modern science …" Russell's reductionistic characterization of natural science was already showing its age when the book was published in 1946. And in the years since, those words have only become more dated with the rise of various models of emergence which offer endlessly novel ways to understand the ontological richness of nature.

While ontological emergence offers rich new ways of conceiving nature, it also brings novel challenges. Consider, for example, the problem of agent causation. Many Christian theologians throughout history have appealed to a substance dualist model of the self, but these models have generally fallen out of favor, not least because they appear to violate the principle of interdependence and the metaphysical inclusivity of ontological levels (p. 44). While ontological emergence proposes that mental states supervene on physical states, it becomes very difficult to conceive how, on this model, the mental can bring about changes in the physical. The dilemma, in short, appears to be between epiphenomenalism (i.e., mental events do not cause anything) and causal overdetermination (i.e., both prior brain states and mental intentions bring about subsequent brain states) (cf. pp. 36–37).

This strange new world of ontological emergence not only poses a challenge to, but also presents an opportunity in several fields. This includes theology where it has spurred the exploration of various novel models of divine action. Arguably, the most significant trend of note in this regard has been the rise of panentheistic models of the God/world relation. While panentheism goes back centuries, it has firmly entered the mainstream with the complex models proposed by scholars such as Arthur Peacocke and Philip Clayton.

While panentheistic models of the emergent world offer new avenues of theological exploration, they also offer a range of challenges. For example, by construing God as one agent among others, they face the problem of a causal joint at which divine action (e.g., as energy or pure information) providentially enters into and thereby guides natural processes. One way to avoid that problem is by construing ontological gaps and God's action as occurring everywhere in space and time (p. 150). On the downside, this account threatens to lose the distinctiveness of particular instances of divine action. Other challenges to panentheism include the basic question of meaning: that is, what does it even mean to say God is in the world or that the world is God's body?

Given the difficulties with panentheistic accounts of divine action in a creation rich with ontological emergence, could there by another way of conceiving of divine action? At this point, I am reminded of the famous G. K. Chesterton quote: "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried." Might it be that this is true of classical theism as well? Might classical theism in general, and Thomism in particular, offer rich resources to explore the complexity of divine action in a nature rich with ontological emergence?

Mariusz Tabaczek believes so, and in *Divine Action and Emergence* he develops a penetrating critique of the panentheistic turn while defending a return to the resources of classical theism, and specifically the work of Aquinas. Tabaczek develops his model, which seeks to repristinate an Aristotelian and Thomistic account of causation, in dialogue with Terrence Deacon's exploration of emergence, through the category of absence and creative potential. Tabaczek puts his own spin on that intriguing (if rather obscure) concept with an exploration of Aquinas's Aristotelian four-fold model of causation.

To begin with, Tabaczek argues that God should be viewed as the efficient cause of all creaturely being. However, God does not act on the same ontological plane as creatures but rather as a principal cause that empowers creatures to act as instrumental causes in accord with their created dispositions. This double