EDITORIAL

Anna Vollema, MA | Managing Editor
F. Matthew Eppinette, PhD | Editor

The issue before you contains three articles that explore the implications of man's creation with a specific purpose, as the *imago Dei* of creation. Whether it be our basic neuroanatomy and how this reality affects moral formation, our creation as embodied creatures in relationship with neighbor and how this informs our decisions regarding technological advancements, or how our creation in the image of God should determine our decisions regarding genetic enhancement, each of these presuppose that the physical creation of humankind was purposeful, and it is therefore our prerogative to seek to live out that purpose in our physical lives. This is a fitting connection in relation to Bryan Just's summarization of CBHD's 2021 annual conference *Bioethics and the Body*, in which scholars from across the United States gathered online to explore how we "view, interact with, manipulate, and analyze our physical bodies."

Starting from an understanding of basic neuroscience, Tamim Khaliqi pens an analysis of moral formation, exploring ways in which the body is designed for religious life. While some Christians fear reductionistic conclusions from the scientific explanation of human consciousness, Khaliqi suggests that a scientifically informed theological and philosophical explanation of the human person is necessary for an understanding of how "things are supposed to be" based on God's creation of mankind in his image. Thus, he sets out to examine some of the biological processes that are involved in moral formation. Starting with an explanation of how God created a thalamocortical meshwork of specialty areas in the brain, Khaliqi suggests that these pathways establish subconscious avenues of thought and behavior until a definitive choice is necessary outside of such automation. This is where the neuroplasticity of the brain steps in such that remodeling of the brain can occur through a shift in external stimuli, including the acquisition of knowledge. Through continued practice, such neural shifts can become automated processes.

With this established, Kahliqi explicates a model for transferring facts to moral formation with a determinative process. Emotions, he states, create perceptual categories dispersed across neural groups. Learning happens through rehearsal as neural synapses between such groups become automated, and both vice and virtue develop as the pursuit of a particular end becomes habit. Once such learning occurs, knowledge is retained first as the mere organization of concepts (low-grade knowledge) and can eventually develop into the synthesis of such concepts for the use of evaluating new situations (high-grade knowledge). Continual use of high-grade knowledge leads to the ability to initiate complex, big picture application of such information (understanding), which leads finally to wisdom. Wisdom is the development of a biblical worldview which seeks to grasp the whole of reality—both the created world and one's place within it.

Using this developmental framework, Khaliqi utilizes Exemplar Moral Theory (EMT), a subdivision of virtue ethics, to propose a process to moral formation. In EMT, once a person attains a high-level understanding of the character of an admirable exemplar, admiration becomes the emotion by which the habitual process of emulation leads to wisdom. Thus, virtuous emotions, motives and actions stem from an inborn grasp of the manner in which one should be in relation to the world—wisdom.

Adding reflection on technology to our considerations of the nature of self and others, Savannah Anne Carman writes on the effects of an industrialized society, exploring the topic through the lens of Ivan Illich and his theory regarding conviviality. Conviviality, or the capacity for relationship between self and others, for Illich is actualized through personal freedom expressed within willful interdependence. Thus, Illich calls for a return to the task of provision, whether it be through psychologically or physically oriented engagement, as a responsibility of mankind; a manifestation of neighborliness through natural human capacities. Based on the work of Illich, Carman argues for the pursuit of a postindustrial balance that must be ascertained based on the answer provided to three key questions:

1. What is man made for?
2. What is man capable of?
3. How should men relate to one another?

To the first question, Carman asserts that mankind is made for an embodied relationship with God, neighbor, and nature. Thus, we must temper our pursuit of technological

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advancement so as to protect from turning man into a mere means to the end of the next innovation, relearning dependence on one another rather than on machines or "experts" as "energy slaves." Regarding the capabilities of man, the author suggests that we must reframe our understanding of power, seeing it as a means to the end of a theologically anchored anthropology of virtuous relationships. As it pertains to the final question, Carman opines that mere tools are not the problem, but rather man becoming part of the machine. Thus, those tools and systems that encourage interdependence are to be favored in a convivial society. As a final word of exhortation, she commends the reader to reflect upon the consequences of industrialism and avoid the pitfalls of desensitization and apathy.

Progressing to even more embodied technological advancements, Isabel Woodruff evaluates genetic enhancement through the lens of both scholarly perspectives and the creation-fall-redemption narrative. Highlighting the distinction between somatic gene therapy and genetic enhancement, Woodruff notes that while somatic gene therapy seeks to use genetic engineering to cure genetic diseases, genetic enhancement seeks to abnormally alter DNA with a transhumanist agenda, an act that could cause modifications for future generations. Thus, the author first evaluates genetic enhancement through the scholarly perspectives of Julian Savulescu, John Harris, and Brent Waters.

Savulescu, she states, advocates for genetic enhancement under the assumption that mankind possesses a moral obligation to promote such traits as fairness, empathy, and the betterment of physical and cognitive capacities for the coming generations. Such improvements must be permanent and transferable for Savulescu, not merely providing a temporary enhancement for the immediate generation. He further states that genetic enhancement provides increased autonomy for the individual if cognitive enhancement activates critical capacities necessary for autonomous decision-making. However, Woodruff challenges each of these assumptions in turn, first by stating that quality of life cannot be determined by universal standards and second by arguing that embryonic genetic enhancement defaces autonomy by choosing a certain kind of future for a person before an individual choice can be made.

Turning to John Harris, another genetic enhancement advocate, Woodruff states that his underlying assumption is that everyone enjoys the benefits of enhancement on an everyday basis (e.g., through natural brain development or medical treatment) and therefore no one would truly deny the goodness of enhancement itself. He sees it as odd that humanity would fear genetic enhancements. He further equates the risks involved in genetic enhancement to those incorporated in such everyday activities as eating fatty foods or receiving vaccinations and asserts that what is natural should not always be valued over what is unnatural. Woodruff contests Harris' claims by raising key points that he neglects, including equity in genetic enhancement distribution; the potential ramifications of genetic enhancement as greater than such things as eating fatty foods; and the necessity for moral evaluation in both what is natural and unnatural rather than creating a mere bifurcation between the two.

The final scholar under consideration in the article, Brent Waters, explores genetic enhancement through a Christian evaluative lens based in the incarnation and resurrection. Since God became man in the flesh, the human body is of great importance, and since Jesus rose from the dead as human, the Father vindicates the Son's humanity. This vindication of the human body extends to all elements of creation, establishing a created order that becomes determinative of certain moral structures, including creaturely finitude. Such creation-based moral structures are what afford sublimity to human existence, and yet are what proponents of genetic enhancement seek to eliminate. Therefore, Waters asserts that genetic enhancement is an area in which the Christian must refuse to participate.

Woodruff ends her analysis with a brief exploration of how the creation-fall-redemption narrative can inform our decisions regarding genetic engineering. She argues that humanity cannot be defined in reductionistic terms due to our creation in the image of God. Furthermore, the reality of the fall reveals that we will never reach that state of perfection genetic enhancement advocates seek to obtain; that is, until that point of final redemption at the end and beginning of all things, a redemption that only God can usher in.

As we continue our pursuit of extending the reach of *Dignitas* through our now open access format, we hope the research presented here will continue to spark important discussion and research regarding the implications of our creation as the *imago Dei*. If you would like to contribute to that discussion, or any others related to the field of Christian bioethics, we welcome potential contributions.