The Christian Liberal Arts Scholar: A View from the Psychological Sciences

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Introduction: A Holistic View

The goal of the Christian liberal arts enterprise is to cultivate a community of people who love the Lord with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength, who love their neighbors as themselves, and who are committed to the pursuit of truth through academic excellence. The members of such communities are committed to a view of the person as an integrated whole, and therefore share the goal of nurturing each other in a wide variety of ways (spiritually, socially, physically, and otherwise in addition to intellectually). They are committed to a similarly holistic view of the academic enterprise, with the idea that true and good knowledge emerges from a dialogue shared broadly across the various areas of specialization that might compose the academy at any point in history. At the risk of sounding antiquated, I’ll refer to members of such a community as “Christian scholars,” regardless of whether they find or intend to find their primary vocations in academia. It is my goal in this paper to provide a rough sketch of what such people might look like.

I’ll finish this essay by fleshing out my sketch in terms of my own domain of specialization in psychology and the brain sciences. My hope, though, is that the characterization applies more broadly. This is true in two senses. First, I hope that the characteristics I describe apply to scholars in academic disciplines across the college. The details will change, of course, but the essence remains the same. If such a generic sketch can’t be made, one wonders whether there is any utility or truth to the label of “Christian liberal arts,” which claims at its heart that we share something in common. Second, I hope that the characteristics I describe apply to the members of the community who might not choose the term “scholar” as one of their primary descriptors. The most obvious group in this respect is the students, who may be tempted to think of themselves as enduring the scholars in order to “finish their degree” and move on to “the real world.” My hope is that students would see themselves as junior scholars, as apprentices, as people who – like their mentors – are struggling to figure out what it means to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, to be Christian scholars of the liberal arts in whatever vocations they might find themselves.

In fact, I find it difficult to write this essay with any audience other than my students in mind. If my more senior colleagues – the administrators, staff, and faculty at the Christian liberal arts college – find this of interest, that’s fine. The purpose I have in mind as I write, though, is to engage my more junior colleagues in an earnest dialog about why we’re here, and about how we can make the most out of the opportunity given to us in this unique setting. Because of space constraints, I make a number of presuppositions about the members of this dialogue. These really should be justified or developed, but that will have to wait for another time. I assume, for example, that we all value a liberal education (whatever that might turn out to mean) and that we have a common and even deeper commitment to the Christian religion (even if we aren’t in complete agreement about what that looks like).

My thesis is simple: the Christian liberal arts enterprise is distinguished by a shared vision of the sort of people we want to become, a vision of integrated, whole people operating in an

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1 This paper was written as a part of the Summer 2002 Workshop in the Liberal Arts at Westmont College. I thank Chris Hoeckley for his careful editing and thoughtful comments.
integrated, whole academy. This wholeness has to do with the ways in which our various pieces are connected to each other – how for example, our hearts and minds are mutually dependent, or how literature and chemistry might have more than merely superficial connections. Indeed, we may raise the question of whether such divisions of the person or the academy might be socially constructed and arbitrary, if useful, rather than somehow “given” in the fabric of the universe. The liberal arts ideal, however it is defined in its specifics, has a lot to do with resisting the tendency towards fragmentation. But the ideal of the Christian liberal arts scholar moves beyond this notion of wholeness and toward a picture of centeredness: each of the various pieces must not only cohere with each other, but must be grounded and centered in Christ himself.

A Centered View

Christ is the center, the innermost point in the Christian’s life, the organizing principle and goal that grounds everything else. This is easy to say, of course, but hard to define and harder still to put into practice. Let me make four observations to flesh this out.

First, the fact that the Christian scholar’s world of ideas is centered on Christ distinguishes him not from other Christians, but from other sorts of scholars and other modes of thought at other sorts of institutions of higher learning. This observation has two corollaries. On the one hand, Christian liberal arts scholars aren’t more Christian than those outside the academy. Christ does the saving, the real transforming, not the liberal arts. We in the liberal arts setting are merely called to a particular way of living out the Christian life. On the other hand, the idea of a non-Christian liberal arts college is not oxymoronic. I can easily picture Buddhist, or Muslim, or Jewish liberal arts colleges, or “secular” colleges centered on non-religious foundations, and I can picture these sorts of colleges doing a fine job of accomplishing the aims of a liberal education. Each of these enterprises, however, would have its own distinctive center. I won’t pretend to know what those would or should be, but for the Christian college, that central point must be Christ.

Second, having Christ as the center doesn’t mean that Christ is the only thought we have, or that we don’t spend our energies thinking about “non-Christian” things. I love the image of the 18th century romantic Johann von Goethe, who had the following to say about the importance of focus and centeredness:

To live within limits, to want one thing, or a very few things, very much and love them dearly, cling to them, survey them from every angle, become one with them – that is what makes the poet, the artist, the human being (L’Engle).

Goethe’s point was not about exclusivity of our attentions, but of our primary affection. Goethe was in fact a generalist – he devoted himself to learning about everything, not just one or a few things. The quote is a positive statement for focus, not a negative one against breadth. Goethe here doesn’t specify what that focus should be. For the Christian scholar, as for the Christian of any vocation, the answer is clear.

Third, having a center and focus is not incompatible with the goals of scholarly excellence or liberal education. Christian colleges are sometimes seen as undermining true discovery and critical thinking: if one “knows the answers” coming in, how can the academic enterprise be anything more than finding proof-texts for those answers? The Christian scholar argues that we all have preconceived notions, some of which we have no intention of giving up: there simply is no impartial, objective “view-from-nowhere.” The Christian scholar recognizes that her faith will
likely undergo some important changes, and that there are probably relatively few essential
doctrines and beliefs. The point is that those essentials are held close, and that they bind us not to
specific intellectual commitments in our disciplines, but to a larger community with a shared
view of our place in the world.

Finally, let me suggest that perhaps it matters less how we define the idea of Christ the center
and more that we simply engage the question, deeply and often. What does it mean to “take
every thought captive to the obedience of Christ?” I’m not exactly sure, but living with that
question at front of one’s mind is a good start.

An Emergent View: Transformed Scholars

The rationale behind the Christian liberal arts college is that Christian and liberal arts
interact in some important way, so that the scholar that emerges is more than the sum of the
parts. Otherwise, it would be easier to simply take one’s schooling anywhere, regardless of the
religious affiliation of the college, and to get one’s religion at church. Of course, to the extent
that it is the active work of the learner to integrate these areas of life, this could be a desirable
approach. The Christian liberal arts college provides a place for increased opportunities along
these lines, a place where this integration is a shared goal of the community. What sorts of
people do we hope to be become? What is our vision of the Christian liberal arts scholar?

I focus here on four important characteristics of the Christian liberal arts scholar: humility, faithfulness to God and scripture, an attitude of worship, and view toward God’s redemptive
purpose. There are, of course, a great number of other important, even necessary, characteristics.
I won’t elaborate on them here, but merely list them for consideration. The Christian liberal arts scholar

• finds pleasure in learning, and is committed to disciplinary and general scholarly
  excellence;
• is committed to breadth and integration, to exploring other fields working on similar
  questions or topics, and to understanding the history of the discipline;
• sees a connection between the academic enterprise and character/spiritual development;
• strives for moral, ethical, and spiritual excellence;
• holds a primary place for persons and community, over and above programs and ideas;
• cares about the meaning of a liberal arts education; and
• is comfortable with a diversity of opinions and even with strong disagreements within the
  community.

Humility and Respect

In Matthew’s record of Christ’s self-description, humility looms large: “Learn from me,” the
Lord invites, “for I am gentle and humble in heart.” In his letter to the Philippians, Paul
admonishes us to adopt Christ’s own attitude, to “do nothing from selfishness of empty conceit,
but in humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.” How does such
humility express itself in the life of the Christian scholar? In a wide variety of ways, to be sure,
many of which will be similar to Christians with no aspirations to scholarship. But consider the
following five ways in which humility might play itself uniquely out in the academy.

First, the Christian scholar recognizes our fallen and creaturely nature, not only morally, but
cognitively as well: we simply cannot trust our intuitions or rationality, not matter how well
cultivated, to lead us unerringly to the truth. This does not mean that truth is beyond our grasp, or
that our mental abilities are not good guides in our search. It simply means that we must treat our
own feelings of certainty as suspect, no matter how compelling they are. It is not impossible to hold a belief both tentatively and with conviction.

The second manifestation of humility follows from the first: the Christian scholar values the work and opinions of others as worthy of our careful consideration, taking great care to appreciate the arguments of another from the inside before rendering judgment. And even when a judgment is rendered, we should be careful to judge with a view to our own limitations, with a gentleness that stems from our belief that all humans are made in God’s image. The Quakers have a saying that serves as a simple reminder of this fact: “that of God” in every person.

Third, the Christian scholar respects the methods of the academic disciplines, including those of one’s own disciplinary specialty as well as others’. We ought to see these as God-ordained means of seeking and finding truth, as checks and balances to our imperfect individual reason and intuition. Even so, as products of human beings, implemented by human beings, these will not always yield the right or best solutions to the problems we wish to solve, and we always run the risk of extending our methods to domains beyond their scope (science speaking on the nature or existence of God is a case in point).

The fourth expression of humility in the academy is related to the third. While respecting the time-honored traditions of his own chosen discipline, the Christian scholar avoids disciplinary arrogance. It is natural and good to push the limits of the boundaries of our disciplines, to search for ways of applying the methods of our disciplines to solve the problems of society. It is also natural and good to be optimistic about the outcome. But we must remember that we see the world through disciplinary lenses, and that there are many good ways of addressing the world’s problems. One of the important reasons for the breadth emphasis in the liberal arts curriculum is to allow us to appreciate the contributions of the various academic traditions.

Finally, the Christian scholar embraces diversity, intellectually, culturally, and otherwise. This doesn’t mean holding all opinions to be true (which of course is impossible, since some are mutually contradictory), nor does it mean refraining from holding any opinions strongly. Rather, it means recognizing that there is utility in there being a wide variety of opinions in the community, because many of those we hold dear are likely to be wrong in the end.

Theological Fidelity

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Christian religion is the dual idea that the Bible is authoritative in ultimate matters and that God’s spirit illuminates these scriptures in the minds of individual believers. This should have profound effects for how the scholarly-minded Christian lives her life.

Genuine humility, as noted above, embraces diversity. But the Christian scholar recognizes that although intellectual diversity is a valued virtue of the liberal arts (particularly, one would hope, amongst Christian scholars), not all opinions are desirable within a community of Christian scholars: there are some ideas that are simply contrary to the Christian faith. Where humility warns us to approach such a judgment cautiously, theological fidelity reminds us that these judgments must sometimes be made. The Christian scholar, for example, should be quite slow to reject Darwinian accounts of the evolution of species – convergent evidence from a wide variety of disciplines in the sciences suggests a strong core of truth in these theories. She should be quick, however, to denounce the so-called implications that are often imputed to these theories, including the idea that there is no God, that the Bible is merely fictional mythology, or that life has no purpose other than to propagate one’s genes.
The ability to discern which statements are or aren’t in conflict with scripture does not come easily or cheaply. The Christian scholar therefore seeks to be broadly and deeply grounded in scripture, theology, and church history, and devotes energy to asking how various ideas square with scripture.

Finally, the Christian scholar lives a life that allows God’s spirit to guide, striving to be sensitive to God’s leading. This must be more than merely dignifying our feelings with the statement that it’s God’s leading: we must actually live lives of prayer, immersion in scripture, and other spiritual disciplines so that we are sensitive to the subtle promptings of the Spirit.

**Beauty and Worship**

A third characteristic of the Christian scholar is that he sees God’s beauty in all of creation—in divine creation (in the lawful regularities and chaotic capriciousness of nature, in the carefully balanced ecosystems, in the diversity of life) and in human creation, as well (in literature, in the visual arts and music, in the theories of social and natural sciences). As in the lives of other Christians, beauty should evoke in us an attitude of worship.

Worship is often spontaneous, but the Christian scholar recognizes that this is not always so: we choose to live our lives in a worshipful manner, whether we feel like it or not. In part, this means worship in the face of adversity, even when we don’t feel like it. In part, though, it means that we learn to see God’s beauty in places that might have otherwise seemed adverse. The Christian scholar cultivates an attitude of worship, not only in “worship services,” but also in every aspect of life.

We can speak of sensitizing ourselves to the beauty of the world around us, learning to appreciate the redeeming aspects of those things that might not appeal to us. Of course, we may also find that some things which appealed to us begin to lose their charm on closer inspection—that we become more discerning in our tastes, according to the academic disciplines and cultures that we become a part of, or according to some fundamental moral or aesthetic absolutes. My point here is that most of what is studied in the academy has some redeeming value and inherent beauty, that it has these qualities because it somehow bears the mark of God’s hand, and that it takes intention and discipline to learn to recognize this mark.

**Telos and Redemptive Purpose**

For all their utility and inherent beauty, the modern sciences have managed to persuade us that things happen because they are caused, not because they are filling some larger purpose. During the renaissance and early modern periods, the pendulum swung from an Aristotelian understanding of motion to a Newtonian one, from a teleological understanding of the universe to one based primarily on proximal causes (these are similar to Aristotle’s efficient causes, the immediate precedents of an effect; such causes are so central to the modern notion of science that they have become synonymous with cause itself). Asking why (i.e., for what purpose) something happens isn’t always allowed. The Christian scholar has the task of reconciling the world of proximal causes with an understanding of the world as a purposeful place: not only do our own lives have the potential for purpose and meaning, but creation itself is tending toward God’s ends.

With respect to each of us individually, God’s glory is our ultimate goal, our telos. “What,” begins the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” The Christian scholar allows this telos to be a part of everything he does. He recognizes that this will be completed in a new heavens and a new earth (Isaiah 65, 66), when
Christ returns, when the dead in Christ are raised to live with him forever, and when all of creation is redeemed to enjoy the integrated wholeness and harmony that the Hebrew scriptures refer to as shalom. He also recognizes that in the mean time, it is the responsibility and privilege of Christians in every vocation to act as God’s agents of redemption.

For the Christian scholar, this view of God’s will and sovereignty permeates our scholarly work – social and political change, individual transformation and self-actualization, performance and creation of beauty, practical application of science technology toward alleviating human suffering and preserving our planet, and basic research that allows these things to occur – all these things are done with a view toward God’s glory, toward the redemption of all creation.

**A View from the Psychological Sciences**

As an example of how these characteristics might play themselves out in a particular academic discipline, consider some of the following issues that have figured prominently in the history of the neural and psychological sciences. How might work on these problems, or how might our thinking about more applied research questions that are intertwined with these issues, look different in the lives of Christian scholars?

The sections that follow briefly probe four issues that form major threads through the history of the neural and psychological sciences. These are not so much problems that are addressed by the methods of science. Rather, they are problems that have emerged as the sciences of mind, brain, and behavior have progressed. The liberal arts scholar concerns herself with them because they place the discipline in a broader context of understanding ourselves and our place in the world, and because how we think about these issues might have some subtle repercussions in our science. The Christian scholar engages these issues because they are central to understanding how the truths of the sciences square with the truths of the Christian religion.

**Determinism and Freedom**

One historically important historical question surrounds the issues of freedom and determinism. Are our actions determined (genetically, physiologically, or environmentally), unfolding in an entirely predictable and unalterable manner? Or are we entirely free to choose each of our actions?

The Christian scholar is committed to the idea that humans have a unique capacity for controlling their worlds and themselves, and are therefore uniquely accountable for their actions. In this sense we are not determined: we are not “mere machines.” Nevertheless, humans are lawful organisms, and the behavioral scientist must account for the many proximal causes of our behaviors, including genetic predispositions, physiological mechanisms, and behavioral regularities that we share with other biological organisms. Moreover, the neural sciences give us an increasingly “mechanistic” picture of the brain – a more organic and complex view of machine than that held by the renaissance scientists – and increasingly strong evidence that the brain is the organ of mind.

It may be that these are increasingly difficult times to be a Christian scholar in these fields. On the other hand, it may be that these are ideal times, offering opportunities for integration that weren’t previously available. There seems to be widespread interest in questions of emergence, supervenience, and complexity: some lawful, organic “machines” may operate according to (1) purely deterministic proximal laws (undoubtedly with probabilistic inputs – think of a probabilistic dynamical system, described by a differential equation with a small “noise” term in the equation) but with (2) sufficient complexity that they self-organize in meaningful ways,
gaining some control over their own future behavior and maintaining genuine goal-directed behavior. In such cases, we speak of *emergent properties* (such as freedom of choice, morality, etc.) arising from the interaction of simpler mechanisms. In cases where these properties exert a “downward causation,” the properties are said to *supervene* on their lower level mechanisms. In either case, the emergent or *supervenient properties* cannot be wholly accounted for in terms of the laws in operation at the lower levels.

On the other hand, it may turn out to be the case that a separate, immaterial “free” soul interacts with a lawful, deterministic body. Such accounts are plentiful in the historical philosophical literature, but as far as I know, none have been developed that account for developments in the contemporary brain and behavioral sciences. Either way, the Christian scholar in psychology and the related sciences has the responsibility to reconcile the essential lawfulness of the human organism that forms the central core of the discipline with the essential freedom reflected in scripture.

*Nature and Nurture*

The rise of Darwinian evolution and Mendelian genetics at the end of the 19th century coincided with the development of psychology as a separate scientific discipline. It is therefore not surprising that the question of the inheritance of psychological traits has occupied a central role in the discipline throughout its history. Today, with the rapid rise in popularity of evolutionary psychology, the issue is enjoying renewed interest.

How much of our behavior is instinctive, passed down genetically from our parents? How much is learned, shaped by the cultural and personal environments? Twin studies, comparing similarities between genetically identical (monozygotic) with similarities between genetically nonidentical (dizygotic) twins, suggest that a good deal of our behavioral and psychological predispositions are genetically based. Measures of personality, cognitive ability, and abnormality are typically much more highly correlated in genetically identical twins (regardless of whether they were raised together or apart) than they are in genetically non-identical twins. On the other hand, one of our most salient human traits is the ability to learn, to adapt ourselves to a changing environment. Such adaptation, supported by research in a host of basic and applied settings, indicates that much of who we are is who we have become through our unique cultures, families, and choices. The success of behavioral therapies in treating phobias and in other “behavior modification” situations provides one line of evidence in this regard.

Today, most researchers in the psychological and neural sciences agree that the nature/nurture question has too often been framed as a false dichotomy, that even asking the question biases us to answer in an either/or fashion. Of course, any interesting, complex psychological phenomenon will almost always involve both genetic and environmental “causes.” Nevertheless, we should care about the nature/nurture issue. For one thing, it shapes the way in which we ask questions about freedom and determinism (both extremes of the debate are deterministic, but both approaches offer unique opportunities for exploring the meaning of human freedom). We should also care about the issue because, even when we eschew the dichotomy, biases toward environmental or genetic causes of behavior express themselves implicitly in our understanding of personhood. Such implicit, perhaps unexamined biases can have unwanted social consequences. For example, a simplistic view of genetic determinism can fuel racism, as seen in the “eugenics” movement of the early 20th century USA. This movement, endorsed broadly by prominent behavioral scientists who should have known better, recommended that breeding should be prohibited amongst the “feebleminded.” It is no
coincidence that this movement was closely followed by the Nazi movement of Germany a few years later.

Reductionism, Emergence, and Transcendence

The freedom/determinism and nature/nurture issues share a common core concern with reductionism: are we “nothing but” the sum of the proximal causes in our genes, nervous systems, or environments? Science happens to be very good at uncovering proximal causes; not surprisingly, as time goes on, we therefore become more and more informed about the proximal causes of events in the universe, including our own behavior. How are we to reconcile these reductionistic explanations with a belief that the universe has purpose, that our own lives have meaning, that there is “something more?”

However we reconcile the truths of reductionist science with our commitments to meaning and purpose, the endeavor requires a deep familiarity with both the lower-level sciences and the higher-level disciplines (including, for the Christian scholar, theology and biblical studies). One intriguing approach involves the concepts of emergence, supervenience, and complexity mentioned previously. These concepts present an opportunity for the psychologist to network with other disciplines, contributing to the processes of discovery in those disciplines and learning from them, as well. Biology has a longstanding interest in emergence, and the ideas of self-organization have recently been explored as complements to natural selection in evolution. Mathematics has recently made great progress in understanding “chaotic” and self-organizational systems through the field of non-linear dynamics. And the movement in psychology known as Gestalt (which literally means “whole form”) that began in the early 20th century, and from which contemporary social psychology and the perceptual sciences arose, has been explicitly about offering non-reductionistic accounts of psychological phenomena.

The reductionist problem, then, is much broader than psychology. For the Christian scholar, the question is even broader, extending to the relationship between divine action and natural law – how does a sovereign God accomplish his purposes in a world that seems to operate autonomously? Nancy Murphy, a theologian and philosopher at Fuller Seminary has suggested three alternative modes in which God interacts with creation. In the extraordinary mode, God actually intervenes, changing the course of what otherwise would have happened according to natural law. Resurrection seems to me to be prime example, but other miracles figure here as well. In the special mode, God works more subtly, “cooperating” with the laws of nature he established in order to bring about some particular end. Petitionary prayer and the inspiration of scripture are good examples here. But these two modes are not sufficient: they both assume a third sort of phenomena in which things behave according to their own nature, according to the proximal causes that are the bread and butter of the sciences. The scientist has good reason to think of these things as lawful, determined; the Christian with a strong view of God’s sovereignty has good reason to think that God is involved in these things every bit as much as in the miraculous and special. In this normal mode, Murphy suggests, God even more subtly works his will, perhaps “inhabiting” the world at the quantum level (what looks like chance to us, and what can rightly be treated as chance in the science lab and math blackboard, is in fact God cooperating with matter in a way that insures his ultimate purposes without violating the natural laws he has established). This taxonomy is admittedly speculative, but it is just such speculation that allows us to appreciate the reductionist progress of sciences from within a Christian worldview.
One way to frame the question here has to do with transcendence, the idea that God is wholly other and separate (or separable) from creation. God’s transcendence is assumed in the extraordinary mode – he is a separate agent. Transcendence is also assumed in the special mode, but so is the agency of creation – there must be something for God to cooperate with, some created thing that has the capacity to act by its own nature. The normal mode, on the other hand, assumes a sort of immanence, a God-is-in-everything situation. What the Christian in the sciences needs is both transcendence and immanence, and a view of immanence that allows for created things to have there own nature, their own emergent properties, without recourse to “vital substances” and other non-physical components that were used to account for plant and animal life under the pre-Newtonian, Aristotelian metaphysics.

Mind, Body, and Soul

The word psychology literally means the study of the psyche, the soul. If the scientist is committed to the idea of a natural world that works according to its own laws, without non-physical vital substances to animate it, does that mean that humans have no souls? The progression of the neural and psychological sciences has been decidedly in the direction of humans as lawful, physical systems and away from the idea of a separate, Cartesian, immaterial soul. The Bible, on the other hand, is filled with the language of human souls and spirits, constructs that play no small part in the doctrines of the church. How is the Christian scholar, committed to disciplinary excellence and theological fidelity, to reconcile these seemingly incompatible calls?

First, let me suggest that the meaning of soul, whole person, self, and related terms are central concepts in the liberal arts, regardless of the words we use to name them. The Christian scholar in the liberal arts has every reason to retain these concepts as more than merely historically cute phrases. When we in the church and the academy talk about developing the whole person, or about loving the Lord with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength, we must have some notion of what we mean.

The question of how we are constituted, of what our parts are and what it means to be a whole person, is obviously intertwined with the questions of nature/nurture, freedom/determinism, and emergence/reductionism. As Christian scholars in the neural and psychological sciences, we are committed to a number of things.

We are committed to the idea that humans have worth and dignity, that we have certain uniquely human capacities (particularly our relational and social capacities, but also certain types of abstract thought and language). In this sense, humans have souls, and the Christian scholar would necessarily reject reductionist accounts of the person that denied these things. Consider, though, that whether these souls are constituted of purely neurophysiological processes or involve some additional, immaterial substance is a separate question.

We are also committed to the idea that human persons have continued existence as individual selves after the death of our bodies. Whether this is exclusively a matter of bodily resurrection or involving a disembodied “intermediate state” between death and resurrection is a matter of further consideration.

In addition to theologically-based commitments to the dignity and worth of human persons now and to continued life after death, we are also committed to the methods and principles of our scholarly disciplines. As participants in the “science of the soul,” psychologists must reconcile the ideas of body and mind, of the lawful physical matter of science and the free, eternal soul of theology.
One way to reconcile these concepts is called non-reductive physicalism. The essential claims are (1) that human beings are purely physical, made entirely of the same sorts of matter that the rest of nature is made from, (2) that this matter is arranged in such a way that we have uniquely human capacities, and (3) that these human capacities, although derived entirely from matter, cannot be explained merely by reductionistic accounts of that matter. Such an approach is preferred by biologically-minded psychologists because it comports well with what appears to be the trajectory of the relevant sciences, and because it also comports well with scripture and essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

There are other ways to reconcile the sciences and the soul including holistic dualism, the idea that the human person is a psychosomatic unity (body and soul are distinct, but inseparable), and more radical positions such as radical substance dualism (where the mind/soul is separable from the body). There have been few attempts to develop these various forms of dualism in such a way that they are compatible both with a Christian worldview and with the methods, principles, and findings of the brain and behavioral sciences. Although I myself am partial to the non-reductive physicalist approach, I expect that such dualist programs, undertaken in the spirit of the Christian liberal arts, would be of real and lasting benefit to both the church and to the neural and psychological sciences.

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Questions like freedom and determinism, nature vs. nurture, reductionism vs. emergence, and the mind/body problem are exemplary of the big questions that endure through the ages. The Christian liberal arts enterprise is in large part about resisting the temptation to eschew these sorts of questions for narrow disciplinary specialty, but it is also in large part about owning a disciplinary specialty enough to bring it to bear on such questions. And it is about doing so in ways that honor Christ.

The Christian liberal arts college holds up a goal of whole people, integrated in the various aspects of their individual lives, and engaged in a learning enterprise that values disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary integration. These Christian scholars of the liberal arts seek not only for integration of the self and the academy, but center themselves on the person of Christ, being transformed in both their faith and their scholarship. This transformation expresses itself in ways that include genuine humility, theological fidelity, an attitude of worship and sensitization to beauty, and an understanding of our role in God’s redemptive purpose.
Works Cited