

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Science and faith: Are we more than just our DNA?

By Kelly James Clark

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Many claim that science and religion are in conflict I have argued against this position in my book, "Religion and the Sciences of Origins".

What has escaped our notice are the many recent claims that science and humanity are in conflict.

Some scientists have claimed recently that just about everything that makes us distinctly human can be explained or, better, explained away by science.

Some of the great contemporary high priests of science have proclaimed that science has undermined such fundamental identity-shaping concepts as free will and human morality.

Biologist and author Richard Dawkins, for example, contends

we are simply machines created by and for the perpetuation of our genes. He writes: "We are survival mechanisms — robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes."

While many have thought humans are unique because of their moral capabilities, science philosopher Michael Ruse says morality is a trick played on us by our genes. Biologist Jerry Coyne denies we have free will — all of our choices are the products of our genes and environment.

He argues, "Our brains are simply meat computers that, like real computers, are programmed by our genes and experiences to convert an array of inputs into a predetermined output."

The denial of a human self, human morality and human freedom, in the name of science, is an all-out assault on traditional understandings of the nature of humanity. And, since science has

a uniquely authoritative status in contemporary society, must we concede that science shows we are simply gene machines, meat computers or evolutionary puppets?

HUMAN AND RELIGIOUS

These problems are deeply human and deeply religious. Since the Abrahamic religions widely assume that humans are free, rational, moral agents capable of meaningful relationships with one another and with God, these denials of human uniqueness are likewise assaults on traditional religious understandings of the nature of humanity.

These thinkers are keenly aware that their scientific explaining-away of human nature is part and parcel of their explaining-away of God. They claim the universe discovered by science was not created by God for the human drama. Dawkins claims that the world science discovers has "no design, no pur-

IF YOU GO

'WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?'

Who: Praveen Sethupathy, assistant professor in the Department of Genetics at the University of North Carolina

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday

Where: Loosemore Auditorium in Grand Valley State University's DeVos Center in Grand Rapids

Information: bit.ly/SciRel2016

pose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference." In short, no free will — no God. Case closed.

Can we, then, rescue human nature from the claims of these scientists?

The question could not be more timely or important: Are we nothing but our genes?

We will explore these issues in an interfaith context at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Loosemore Auditorium in Grand Valley

State University's DeVos Center in Grand Rapids. The event is co-sponsored by the Kaufman Interfaith Institute and the national organization BioLogos.

Praveen Sethupathy, assistant professor in the Department of Genetics at the University of North Carolina, will deliver the keynote address, "What Does It Mean to Be Human?" Praveen, a professing Christian, recently was selected by Genome Technology as one of the nation's top 25 rising young investigators in genomics.

Praveen's talk will be followed by reflections from Grand Rapids locals, Drs. Shel Kopperl and Aly Abdel-Mageed. Kopperl, professor of Biomedical Sciences at GVSU, will bring Jewish and scientific perspectives to bear on the question. Abdel-Mageed, pediatric hematologist-oncologist at Helen DeVos Children's Hospital, will discuss these issues from his Muslim perspective.

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