Book Reviews

Ourselves? Curiosities and Marvels of the Human Mind provides this. In Myers's open, honest, and self-effacing style, he is able to illuminate hard data and scientific inquiry; he allows us to consider questions of real human and social significance from a disciplinary perspective.

The text is thoughtfully crafted and has an easy, accessible narrative flow, which introduces the reader to significant social psychological research, concepts, and theory. The style is conversational, and the author has chosen not to include exhaustive citations in the body of the text; there is, however, an extremely useful Notes section at the back of the book which provides detailed reference information to all sources used. This inclusion is particularly welcome given the short length of each of the separate chapters that manage, nonetheless, to introduce many pertinent sources that call for further exploration after piquing one's interest. Although *How Do We Know Ourselves?* is accessible and conversational, one would be mistaken to think that it lacks a certain depth. David G. Myers offers in this book the culmination of five decades of working in the field of social psychology; it is insightful, apposite, at times moving, and profound.

For people of faith, there is much to appreciate and reflect upon in *How Do We Know Ourselves?* Myers's own religious frame of reference is evident in subtle ways throughout the text. He seamlessly introduces, for example, the theological insights of such figures as C.S. Lewis (chaps. 13, 19, 21, 35), Reinhold Niebuhr (chap. 12), Pope Francis (chap. 26), and Saint Paul the Apostle (chap. 36). Myers does this, not in a didactic or preachy manner, but in ways that gently elevate the significance of faith for human flourishing and ethical mindfulness in our relationships.

How Do We Know Ourselves? Curiosities and Marvels of the Human Mind will appeal to a wide audience. For the casual reader interested in gaining social psychological insight on a range of pertinent subjects, this book will serve as a useful primer and steppingstone to the discipline. For educators wanting to add a text to an existing reading list which would serve to provide compelling examples of how course material could be applied, this book would be a useful addition. Lastly, Myers's work could serve as a guide to one's own self-reflection; on our own understanding of ourselves as we navigate the world.

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T<small>ECHNOLOGY</small>

SEX, TECH, AND FAITH: Ethics for a Digital Age by Kate Ott. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022. 207 pages. Paperback; $22.99. ISBN: 9780802878465.

I have to admit that I approached the task of reviewing Kate Ott's latest book *Sex, Tech, and Faith: Ethics for a Digital Age* with a certain amount of trepidation. As an engineer by training and a faculty member at a Christian university by experience, I have some confidence in my ability to evaluate technology developments from a Christian perspective. However, I can claim very little expertise in the scientific analysis or ethical evaluation of human sexual behavior (beyond my own personal experience of being married for almost 35 years). As the product of a traditional Christian upbringing in which sex was rarely discussed openly, I admit a certain amount of squeamishness (although I hope not prudishness) in addressing the subject in the public sphere. The controversies in the church surrounding issues of human sexuality add additional complexity to this topic.

Ultimately, the courage to overcome these concerns stems from agreement with the author about the value of bringing these topics out into the open, as well as from the author's candid invitation to open dialogue. Ott's book-cover promise of "a values-based, shame-free, pleasure-positive discussion of Christian sexual ethics in response to a range of pressing issues in the digital age" is compelling. I suspect some Christians might be unaware of what's out there in the digital realm that could nourish or pervert our sexual desires. On the other hand, it's clear from the research presented in this book that many readers might be engaging with some of the digital topics and technologies uncritically, and in ways that are antithetical to Christian commitments.

The introduction sets the stage by noting the need for better understanding in two areas which might in the past have been viewed as non-overlapping: sexuality and digital literacy. Ott is aiming for a more nuanced understanding and integration of both. The approach to sexual ethics promoted in the book recognizes that, although Christians have traditionally focused their attention on sexual behaviors, relationships and values should also be centered as inputs in sexual decision making. Ott presents a list of values that attempt to capture the holistic aspects of human sexuality and provide guidance toward sexual flourishing (as opposed to focusing on boundaries). The goal to live out the call to love our neighbors and ourselves in the sexual realm is captured in the concept of "erotic attunement," which consists of an attentiveness to our sexual desires, the capabilities of our bodies, and the needs of others to cultivate healthy intimate relationships. With respect to digital literacy, the author emphasizes that experiences online and in the virtual world are still embodied experiences. This is a helpful corrective to the common assumption that interactions with software involve only our minds.

The book includes five chapters, each of which focuses on a particular sex-related digital technology topic. In each of these chapters, readers will find examples of available apps and products, along with analyses of some of the benefits and dangers associated with adoption of these technologies at the personal and societal level. Ott also provides some concrete case studies that help to illuminate the questions and assumptions surrounding sex-tech use.

Chapter 1 focuses on digital pornography. Two key effects of digital technology advances related to online

viewing of sexual activity are highlighted: (1) the availability of increasingly realistic and explicit depictions, and (2) the increasing ease of anonymous viewing. While some Christians might argue that depictions of nudity or eroticism can express appreciation of the beauty of God's creation, the digital experience tends to promote consumption, rather than appreciation. Despite reporting results from research studies that clearly identify the tendency of online pornography use to contribute to compulsivity and sexual dysfunction, Ott concludes that "online pornography use can have positive and negative effects on our sexual embodiment" (p. 34). She includes as a positive the potential for pornography viewers to educate themselves about sexuality and promote creativity (part of the pursuit of erotic attunement). While the author emphasizes here and in other sections of the book the potential for use of digital technology to shape us in ways that are not always easy to discern, I'm not certain that she takes this potential seriously enough in making recommendations. As an engineer who has been trained to identify and manage risks, I wonder if the value of avoiding harm (to individuals and society) has been weighted appropriately in the overall evaluation.

The second chapter considers the world of online matchmaking apps. Although many believers already use these tools to find partners and might view them as innocuous, the author points out the problems with the criteria and algorithms used to sort and match people. The standards of beauty and status markers that are promoted by online dating sites may be biased against minorities. Here, Ott describes the goal of forming a lifetime marriage partnership as a "myth" that is generally not in alignment with the values that contribute to erotic attunement. She also points out that using these apps for casual "hookups" is unlikely to promote erotic attunement.

Chapter 3 lays out the dangers of digital technologies that enable individuals to threaten others and invade their privacy. Ott is correct to point out in this chapter the ways that some aspects of Christian theology and practice have been used in the past to justify intimate violence and relationship abuse. Believers should be encouraged to increase their awareness of the potential for abuse of power in the digital realm and commit to promoting privacy protections and advocating for victims of online bullying and stalking.

The fourth chapter explores sex in the virtual world. The author describes examples of online universes and suggests that our avatars in these digital domains might be ethically used for exploration of sexual identity as long as the values of love and honesty are prioritized in these interactions. She can foresee a time when virtual reality will allow humans to interact in ever more "realistic" ways with others and with artificially intelligent entities in these constructed worlds.

In chapter 5, the analysis of technologically mediated sexual activities is extended to human interactions with robots. Ott sees robot companionship as potentially having positive influences on sexual health for some people.

I would propose that the extent to which we might consider robots as participants in human sexual activities depends on whether we categorize them as tools (just more-sophisticated sex toys) or as potentially sentient persons. Either way, believers who situate sexual activity within a normative framework that directs it toward a lifelong committed relationship between two consenting human beings will be far less accepting than Ott is in this chapter. It seems inevitable that sex robots will be designed and made available to the public, and while Ott argues that this technology could be designed to encourage the development of Christian virtues in its users, I suspect most Christians will remain unconvinced.

In the end, reaction to the author's perspectives on sex-tech will depend strongly on the reader's prior personal experience and understanding of biblical norms for sex and marriage. Those who have struggled with gender identity and stereotypes, same sex attraction, and involuntary singleness, as well as those for whom the effort of trying to conform to overly constrictive expectations around sexual activity has been damaging to their mental health, will certainly be open to the progressive values championed in the book. On the other hand, those who hold that sex is intended only in the context of a lifelong covenantal marriage will be resistant to many ideas in this book. I did not find the tone of the book to be particularly conducive for convincing "traditional" Christians to be more open. Although Ott's stated goal is to avoid shaming and to honor a range of perspectives, she applies that goal unequally. She seems to assume that any Christian understanding of sexual ethics that attempts to set boundaries must be directly opposed to erotic attunement and be motivated by the desire to control the behavior of others.

Read this book to expand your horizons and stimulate reflection—both on the place of sexuality in our Christian walk and on the risks and opportunities for integrating technology into that sphere of human flourishing. But keep in mind that, ultimately, the only way to banish shame, particularly around our tech-enabled sexual behaviors, is not to banish all boundaries, but to discern God's will for this area of life and to be reminded that our Savior Jesus Christ died so that we all might be considered blameless for the things we get wrong.

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THEOLOGY

THE BEGINNING AND END OF ALL THINGS: A Biblical Theology of Creation and New Creation by Edward W. Klink III. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023. 208 pages, including discussion questions and indices. Paperback; $24.00. ISBN: 9780830855223.

Whereas many people tend to associate the doctrine of creation with the origins of the world, Edward Klink is con-