

the way for what may come.” For Maia “the recognition of suffering as the condition of possibility of a liberating hope is Alves’s most meaningful contribution to the shaping of liberation theology” (pp. 112, 119). Centrally, in Alves, “The inadequacy of the present is bodily felt, not superimposed from an external promise. Alves firmly argues that the human consciousness of the future is born out of the *inadequatio* of the inhumanity of the reality of suffering” (p. 117). For Maia, Alves’s exuberant, poetic aesthetics—his “politics of beauty” (p. 126)—exceed both the confines of the present moment imposed by capitalist realism, and even strain the boundaries of theology itself.

Maia’s readings of Hinkelammert and Alves tell a persuasive story about the figuration of a hope within the development of Liberation Theologies that frames the future as unknowable and unmasterable, and therefore disrupts the present with a potentially emancipatory force. Brief overtures aligning Maia’s argument with currents in queer theory, disability studies, and Black studies in its introduction and conclusion notwithstanding, this is the core argument presented in *Trading Futures*: a Christian eschatological imagination inflected by twentieth century Liberation Theology as “a critical reflection on hope” that can provide the resources necessary for creating an alternative to financialized capitalism (p. 10). Maia develops a lucid picture of the domineering temporality of finance, and contrasts that with subtle renderings of alternatives drawn from the tradition of Liberation Theology in constructing that argument. *Trading Futures* effectively shows that agents of financial capitalism and theologians of liberation can differ profoundly in their orientations toward the future.

Whether or not such a theology provides a counter to the discourse of finance, however, is another question. *Trading Futures* seems to deliver both less and more than promised by its subtitle, “a theological critique of financialized capitalism”—less insofar as the liberation traditions Maia draws on predate the specific valences of the current era of finance he details; less insofar as his readings of theology are free-standing rather than woven into the account of financialized capitalism with any great specificity; less again insofar as the mechanism by which this theology might challenge the hegemony of financial future-talk is unclear. The hope for a future “not—yet” described by Maia would seem as reasonably well-suited to any and perhaps every political moment (rather than being specifically attuned to our own), and as remote. But at the same time, the argument seems to be more than an iteration of a specifically Christian theology.

In concluding his reading of Rubem Alves, Maia writes that “the poetico-metaphorical overabundance of Alves’s writings speaks to his commitment to the naming of absences as the proper name for Christian hope” (p. 128). And yet just pages before, Maia is much more capacious and improper in allowing that Alves “divides his

life into three periods. ‘In the first phase we only spoke of things as big as the universe: God. Then God died, and we stepped back a little and searched for political heroes. We left theology for politics, then politics failed us, and we went to our backyards to play with spinning tops’”, nevertheless continuing to argue that Alves’s “mature writings demonstrate a disciplinary eclecticism and a religious incredulity that distanced him from theological circles” (p. 125). If *Trading Futures* is not the kind of book whose argument necessarily compels its readers, and if it is less than a critique in that sense, in its eclecticism it also seems to be a bit more than theology, offering a series of provocative formulations, penetrating engagements, and diverse food for thought for readers who—like Alves—might be interested in generating “other senses, other directions, other meanings, other affects” in response to our moment (p. 129). Theological or not. Dominated by finance or otherwise.

Self-Control: Individual Differences and What They Mean for Personal Responsibility and Public Policy. By

W. L. Tiemeijer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 354p. \$39.99 cloth.

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The message of this intriguing but frustrating book is that self-control is not just a matter of willpower: instead, it is a personality trait that is largely inherited but is strongly influenced by early upbringing. In this respect it is like intelligence. The ability to practice self-control changes little over the course of a lifetime, and none of us possesses an infinite supply. Everyone will fail at self-control during periods of stress and exhaustion. The author never defines self-control precisely but treats it as roughly equivalent to willpower, the ability to delay gratification.

That differences in self-control are inherited and to a considerable degree, fixed is a bold claim. Whatever objections one might have to this thesis, W. L. Tiemeijer is clear that these differences have nothing to do with race, sex, or ethnicity. Instead, they have a lot to do with socioeconomic status, which the author treats as one of the variables subject to change. Children brought up in poverty are less likely to receive the warm, constant, and loving support that contributes to self-control. Change that, and one can change society. If it helps the reader to categorize the book, then behavioral economics is probably the best place to locate it, though the author has a better appreciation of social theory than most who write in this field.

The book falls into two parts. First, it reviews recent social scientific and neurobiological research on trait and state self-control, as they are called. Second, it considers the social theoretical relevance of this research. The subtitle captures accurately the book’s intellectual range.

Tiemeijer grasps the theoretical relevance of some fairly technical literature and does get lost in the weeds. The trouble is that his conclusion does not require that we know anything about recent research on individual differences in self-control.

Because self-control is impossible to measure, the author concludes, we can never know whether acts that seem like the result of a failure of self-control are actually chosen freely. He calls this situation “epistemological chaos” (p. 229). The policy that makes most sense is to forget about solving this question and to provide sufficient resources for everyone to live with dignity, all the while not allowing gross concentrations of power that make democracy impossible (p. 237).

One of Tiemeijer’s most striking claims comes early in the first part: 60% of trait variability in self-control is inherited. The author cites a meta-analysis (a study of studies involving no additional empirical research) of 30,000 twins, but if one bothers to look at the 2019 study the evidence is unconvincing. Almost all the studies are based on parental reports of differences between identical and fraternal twins (there are no studies of identical twins raised in different environments). The studies reviewed reflect parental estimates and occasionally self-estimates, and the reports range from 0% difference to 90% difference. This is just not good social science—certainly not good enough to support the premise of the book. The biggest problem is not the difference in estimates, but that what counts as self-control varies considerably among the studies (Y. E. Willems et al., 2019, “The Heritability of Self-Control: A Meta-Analysis,” *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 100).

About the neuroscientific research relied on by Tiemeijer, the simplest thing to say is that the author uses studies that posit the localization of function, such as stress causes the amygdala to light up in a functional magnetic resonance imaging machine (fMRI, my example). The most current studies assume distributed function. I doubt if this would make much difference to the author’s conclusions: it is just another example of the difficulty of using slightly dated neuroscience by nonexperts to tell a story. Fortunately, the story Tiemeijer ends up telling does not rely on this research. It relies on liberal democratic common sense or, at least, one version of it that is sometimes called “luck egalitarianism” and is “mostly associated with the philosophers Ronald Dworkin and Gerald Cohen” (p. 218).

How else might he have told the story? Tiemeijer might have considered the problem of self-control and alcohol abuse as exemplary of another way of thinking about self-control. He mentions the problem of alcoholism a lot (20 times, although alcohol is not in the index), but always as a problem of the isolated individual confronting the temptation of drink—as a consumer’s problem. Yet, by far the most effective solution to the problem of alcoholism is the group-based approach of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Although one might say that AA reinforces the individual

decision not to drink, one might equally well say it creates a community of nondrinkers. It is the community that refrains from drinking, the individual decisions creating and maintaining the group. Of course, individuals fall off the wagon, but AA has a ritual of rehabilitation. Characterized by a thin religious veneer, AA teaches its members that, without a higher power, the alcoholic is powerless before alcohol. As Emile Durkheim (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1995) taught, the community *is* the higher power.

Tiemeijer is aware that his story applies primarily to WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) societies (p. 21). He suggests that this is so because it is only these societies that value personal responsibility or, at least, they value it the most. One might just as well say that only these societies leave self-control to the individual. If that sounds tautological, I do not believe it is—not if the self is anything like AA presumes, an entity maintained by the group. Individuals do not create themselves in “weird” societies. Rather, they belong to so many groups that the influence of any one is attenuated and their values are confused.

The world has changed in the last 100 years, demanding more self-control than ever before, from those working at call centers to the planning and deferral of gratification necessary for a secure retirement. Many people simply lack the self-control for such a world, and their failure is written in their genes. It is not their fault. Nevertheless, we must hold people responsible, because “citizens who fail at self-control ultimately fail their fellow citizens” (p. 167). Society is less productive and more chaotic than need be. This, roughly, is Tiemeijer’s conclusion.

Yet, a decent society recognizes the limits of many people, and it practices what Aristotle called *epieikeia* (equity), which Tiemeijer understands as taking circumstances into account—above all, the inability of so many to control themselves in stressful situations (p. 250). In fact, Aristotle is mentioned frequently by Tiemeijer (11 times), but he never seems to grasp how similar Aristotle’s main point is to his own. *Arete*, or human excellence, *is* self-mastery, a concept often referred to (but not by Aristotle) as the golden mean. It is easy to miss the mark and hard to hit it, whether the mark is generosity or bravery or a dozen other virtues (*N. Ethics*, bk 2). Learning to hit the mark requires years of instruction, which implies leisure and instruction by gentlemen, who themselves model virtue. Only a few will achieve self-mastery.

Today we are more democratic and less misogynistic, and that is all to the good. But this does not mean that everyone is capable of self-mastery or that anyone can do it without effort and instruction. Tiemeijer reminds us of this ancient insight. If contemporary psychological research into self-control is a more persuasive and less overtly elitist language with which to make this point, then so be it. From this perspective, at least, it is probably best to understand the psychological research as rhetoric.