In *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past*, David Hogue challenges conventional thinking on mind/body dualism. Drawing upon recent research on the functions of the brain, Hogue posits the need for an embodied notion of soul. He draws on neuropsychologist Warren S. Brown, whose suggestion is that the soul is not a separate essence, but the net sum of all the encounters in which humans relate to God or one another in ways that reach deeply into our historical, communal, and embodied selves. Hogue guides us to understand this “net sum” and continues with concepts from Brown, “… soul arises out of our capacity for personal relatedness and depends on distinct human abilities such as language, theory of mind, episodic memory, conscious top-down agency, future orientation, and emotional modulation. Our bodies, and particularly the brains accountable for their survival and well-being, are centers of meaning making. We observe our world and ourselves in that world. We relate to ourselves, to each other, and to God through the matrix of capabilities built into our brains” (p. 19). The approach Hogue takes in examining this very broad definition of soul is to unravel the mystery surrounding perception, memory, and imagination. “The task in this volume is not so much to undermine our trust in our memories or in what we are seeing as it is to blur the distinctions between memory and imagination, to appreciate the deep ways in which perception and memory and imagination belong to each other. In so doing, it should become clear that our care for each other and our experience of God are expressions of that same meaning-making brain” (p. 18). While clearly describing our embodied human experience, Hogue allows mystery for that consciousness which may dwell with the Eternal. For those who desire the physiological underpinning of his discussion, the section on brain function is presented in a readily-comprehensible way. An excellent glossary of terms is included.

Hogue guides the reader through the functions of perception, memory, and imagination, in a way which practitioners of transpersonal counseling modalities will find particularly useful. These functions are the means of meaning making in which we engage moment to moment as living human beings. Hogue describes the fluid nature of these core human functions, with clear physiological referents in the brain, as they relate to the human task of story making, of ritual, and of pastoral counseling. In these sections, readers will discover rich theory for the practice of recovery of memories, healing of memories, and impermanence of self through the fluidity of memory and imagination. Hogue uses the image of liminality for the process of entering this internal arena of meaning making. Good ritual, as well as good pastoral counseling or transpersonal psychotherapy, should invite us into a liminal arena of the self, in which our personal stories, reinforced by particular constellations of memory or of imagining our future, can be re-entered. Each time we “remember,” Hogue states, we are literally, “re-membering.” There is no such thing as permanent memory. Instead, the brain reconstitutes the memory afresh each
time. This notion can be either terrifying to us or very liberating. Hogue opts for liberation! We are not bound by a particular version of a past trauma or self-description. Instead, the potential for bringing new realities to those traumatic aspects of self is embodied in the very nature of our brain function. Good ritual provides the same kind of process of re-membering our personal story over and against and through collective story. As a pastoral theologian, Hogue offers a Christian perspective on the significance of ritual and worship.

A discussion of the communal nature of this perception/memory/imagination process is one of Hogue’s most significant contributions. He points to this memory-making/imagination process as offering the capacity, when linked with our emotional response, to make us creatures capable of true empathy. We can “imagine” ourselves in another person’s story. And, in fact, isn’t this the most trustworthy aspect of the therapeutic relationship—that the client perceives that she or he is understood? We could not experience such empathy, without the capacity for deep memory/imagination.

One of the most helpful discoveries for me is Hogue’s discussion of the function of the hippocampus. This part of the brain functions to encode our perceptions and short-term memory into our long-term memory processes. In patients in whom it has been injured, there is a loss of memory for the preceding three years. I found this discussion fascinating as one who has worked for over twenty years with adults in “mid-life” transition. Whether through a degree program, the undertaking of a serious spiritual practice, deep therapeutic process, or working through a grief process, it seems to take 2–3 years to make a shift in the core self-perception of individuals. This time-frame correlates to the hippocampus’ work of continuously encoding our perceptions into memory—an on-going three year process.

Hogue’s book will be quite valuable to spiritual directors, pastoral counselors, and transpersonal therapists.

My only criticism is that I was left wanting more! I hope David Hogue will create a companion volume, presenting more of the implications for therapeutic process and spiritual life to which he points in Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past: Story, Ritual, and the Human Brain.

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