

Body & Soul: Joshua Farris and The Creation of Self

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Announcer:

"Is the mind the same thing as the brain?" This question, known as the mind-brain problem, is the topic of the groundbreaking book *Minding the Brain* by Angus Menuge, Brian R. Krouse and Robert J. Marks. Inside, you can find chapters from Neurosurgeon Michael Egnor and Philosopher Joshua Farris. Their chapters, titled "Neuroscience and Dualism" and "Subject Unity and Subject Consciousness" examine consciousness and make a strong case based on neuroscience that the mind, indeed, is more than the brain.

Today, we have the conclusion of Dr. Egnor's three-part interview with Dr. Farris. Enjoy!

Michael Egnor:

Welcome to Mind Matters News. This is Mike Egnor. I have the pleasure and privilege to speak with my friend, Joshua Farris. Joshua is a theologian and is the humbled experienced scholar fellow at Ruhr University in Bochum in Germany. He has published or he is publishing, a new book, *The Creation of Self*, which looks to be an absolutely fascinating discussion of neo-Cartesian understanding of the soul.

And in this segment, I just wanted to ask, certainly we're facing in Western culture right now some really remarkable and quite divisive issues, such as transgenderism, abortion, the question when life begins, questions about end of life care, and whether euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide are ethical things, is there any light shed by the neo-Cartesian understanding of the human soul on these divisive cultural issues?

Joshua Farris:

Yeah, good question. Yeah, that's a big question. In my book, *The Creation of Self*, I don't deal with these sorts of questions directly. I do give some credence to a view of the mind body that would have implications for some of these issues. There's different ways to understand how the body contributes to the soul. One of the more crude ways is, and I think this has some viability or some validity to it, is that the body supplies certain controls and powers to the soul that would otherwise not be there.

Certainly it supplies certain epistemic powers, ways of knowing the world, ways of interacting socially, ways of interacting in relationships, ways of interacting and gaining knowledge in the physical world that I don't think can be overstated. Now, that crude picture lends itself to a common objection to Cartesianism given by famous philosophers like Gilbert Ryle and later philosophers like Anthony Kenny. Gilbert Ryle gives this picture and he says, "Well, Cartesianism," and he's really responding to the whole substance dualism in general.

He says, "This gives us a picture of a little man." Actually he says a ghost in a machine. That's his famous analogy. Anthony Kenny picks up on that and his criticism of substance dualism and says that, "Well, it's kind of like a man in a plane who has these various controls at his disposal." Well, I think on the one hand that is a helpful analogy for thinking about the body.

It's an overly crude analogy that doesn't get at the heart of the deep integration between the mind and the body as the mind or the soul is a functionally integrated entity with the body, even if in terms of identity the body is contingent.

Michael Egnor:

But a modern cultural critic might say, but what happens if the sole substance is female and just happened to get stuck in a male body substance? How would the neo-Cartesian perspective help us answer the questions raised by the transgender movement?

Joshua Farris:

Well, I think we have to step back here for a moment. I think the whole notion of gendered souls is confused in the first place. We don't ground gender by way of the soul. We can only ground gender by way of biological sex, it seems to me. If the soul is an emergent product of a sufficiently complex brain or body and it only comes into existence by way of having a body, then there's a deep integrated functionality between the soul and the body such that to separate the body would do deep harm to the soul in the way that death does. I mean, death does harm to the soul.

Michael Egnor:

Well, but they're separate substances. I mean, their separability is inherent to the Cartesian view. I mean, it might be a painful process or an unpleasant process, but they are inherently separate. That's the cornerstone of the Cartesian view. If they weren't inherently separate, then they would just be something like high amorphism.

Joshua Farris:

Well, I think the separation language is... I don't think they are separate in a functional sense. I don't think a soul functions properly without a body. I think they're certainly distinct in terms of the conditions that make up identity, but they're not separate and they can't be separated, and to separate them would do great harm to each substance, in particular the soul of substance. Richard Swinburne talks about this a lot in his book, *The Evolution of the Soul*, where he talks about the fact that souls have a structure to them.

If they come into the world with this fundamental structure, these general properties that supply not just the control room, but actually actually a whole psychological structure, that psychological structure is not something that is so functionally disconnected from the soul like a hat is that I could take on and off without incurring any problems or penalties. The body provides much more fundamental structures and powers of the soul in such a way that it cannot be separated from the soul without doing harm to that soul.

Michael Egnor:

What sort of harm would it do?

Joshua Farris:

Well, I think the most egregious harm would be death. Physical death would be a harm to the soul, and that the soul could not operate or function in the way that it normally does.

Michael Egnor:

Well, I mean, one could imagine a person who's racked with cancer in excruciating pain and suffering who dies. It would seem to me that in the Cartesian view, that wouldn't be a harm. Dying would actually be a relief. The soul is liberated from a body that is not really a nice place to live in anymore.

Joshua Farris:

I don't think that a view that takes seriously the compound nature of being a human being if we take it that souls are naturally embodied. I don't think that it leads to that conclusion, because I don't think that the soul would function properly anymore without the body or the normal ways in which we operate as in soul beings, the normal ways in which we operate, the normal ways in which we gain knowledge about the world.

I don't think it entails that picture that even Plato suggests that the soul separated from the body is this prison, the soul is conjoined to that is a traumatic place of existence. It needs to get to a Platonic heaven. I don't think it entails that picture.

Michael Egnor:

I feel that the best argument for substance dualism, at least in a scientific sense, is near-death experiences, which actually I have a great deal of problem reconciling to Thomistic dualism. But near-death experiences really just are very clear echoes of the Platonic, Cartesian understanding of the soul and the body as separate substances.

The almost universal description of people who have near-death experiences, at least the positive experiences, is that it really is a release from suffering, that is that they pop out of their body, they look down at this broken body or this dead body, and they're so happy to be out of it. Now, whether these experiences are veridical or not is a whole nother question, but if one accepts them as being real experiences of real metaphysical events, it would seem that getting out of the body, at least at the time of death, is not such a bad thing.

Joshua Farris:

Well, yeah. I think we need to make a distinction between the good that the body provides and a body that is in a state of severe decay to the point of death. You might say that the natural state or habitat of the soul is a body and that the body supplies certain goods to the soul. Certainly it's a context in which virtues can be developed in a way that virtues could not be developed outside the body, but that would be distinct from the decaying body that is nearly a dead body, a corpse.

You might say that it would be better to be released in some way, but that's certainly not the final state of the soul. That would be a severely diminished state without the body. It might be a temporary relief from a severely decaying body, but it wouldn't be the ideal state of the soul itself. If the soul itself is naturally designed to be embodied and to have certain goods in light of the body, to develop certain virtues in the body through the body, then it wouldn't be the ideal state. In fact, in Christian theology, it's not ideal or final state.

The embodied state is the final state. I think there's a distinction between the goods that the body supplies in this world and the bads that a decaying body supplies to the soul as it's approaching death. But given the goods that the body supplies, I think that gives us a different picture of this Platonic picture that it's better and always better to be disembodied.

Michael Egnor:

Right, right. If a transgender activist made the argument that Cartesianism supported the transgender perspective in the sense that you could imagine this scrum of bodies being attached to souls and things like that, that once in a while somebody would get the wrong body. It would seem to be that the Cartesian perspective opens up the transgender perspective. It kind of says, "Oh yeah, maybe that could happen." Whereas, for example, from an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective of essentialism, that really wouldn't work.

That is that we are who we are, that we're born male or we're born female and that's our essence. Any dysphoria one experiences with that essence is mental illness. It's not a metaphysical reality. Would you agree with the hypothetical transgender activists that the Cartesian view could be interpreted as supportive in some situations of the notion that a trans man is a man and a trans woman is a woman?

Joshua Farris:

I think answering this question is a little bit more delicate on Cartesianism because of the modal conditions of body swapping possibilities. But given the deep imprint structure that the body supplies to the soul at origination, I think the Cartesian picture that I am portraying that any contemporary Cartesian is defending today, most contemporary Cartesians I should say, lends itself to a much closer picture like polymorphism given the integration of the body and soul.

But let me say this, I think there's a confusion here that's hard to articulate that's conflating objectivity and subjectivity. The Cartesian view does not lend itself to solipsism, and it doesn't lend itself to a view that gender is something that is autonomous, that it's rooted in an autonomous ethic, that you can just simply slip on and off at your volition. Okay, let's understand that. Some are actually arguing that souls are engendered and that they have access. Obviously they're the only ones who have access to that because their access is private.

That does sound very Cartesian. They're saying that they have access to a gendered soul that is incompatible with their body. Well, I think if gender is something that is rooted biologically and only biologically, then the objective sense in which we can make sense of gender is something that is publicly discernible, it's objective, and it's rooted in the biological. If it is rooted in something else, I'm not sure what sufficient designation anyone's giving to that gender to make determinant that that gender is what it is.

It seems to be a wholly socially constructed designation. In that case, I think there's a conflation of the biological sex with a socially constructed gender that has no grounding in objective reality. One thing I don't think cartesians are doing is they're not... Even if they take seriously the notion of subjectivity, which is really important right now, I think in these discussions, they're not disentangling subjectivity from any sort of objectivity or any objective metaphysical framework.

But I think what you see happening in gender dysphoria and this notion that skews the gender binary is it has no objective basis. It has no metaphysical grounding. I don't think that's what Cartesians are doing. In the way that they're suggesting, I don't think you can take....

If souls are truly non-gendered, I don't think you can conflate the non-gendered soul with a social construction that has been fabricated, and then without any damage, take it outside of its original body and place it into a wholly distinct body without doing damage to the soul. Does that make sense? I think I gave a more complicated answer to the question.

Michael Egnor:

Right, no, no, because it's a complicated question. It's a very difficult question. My concern in all of this again is it's not so much that I have an issue specifically with substance dualism, I have an issue with the metaphysical framework in which substance dualism exists. I think the metaphysics gets pretty sticky. If I were a transgender activist, I'd be glomming on to substance dualism. I'm not a transgender activist. I think it's a sign of cultural insanity at least and demonic possession at most.

But substance dualism does seem to lend itself to understanding bodies and souls as things that can be switched out. You can always say, "Well, no, but the soul is designed for the body and the body for the

soul," but that's kind of a case of special pleading. If they're separate substances, you can imagine situations where you can switch them.

Joshua Farris:

We can imagine cases. At one level, it points to a positive contribution of substance dualism as a metaphysics that makes sense of possibilities, but we can't point to any actual cases in which that is the case where there's been a successful transference of a soul to a distinct body, nor can we point to a case where there's been a disconnect from a soul from its body that didn't actually do harm to the soul itself.

Michael Egnor:

When does ensoulment occur in human development?

Joshua Farris:

I think in some ways there's a metaphysical case to be made that ensoulment occurs at conception. I think there's a case to be made for that. Now, I think that epistemically fallible case on either Cartesianism, a sort of integrated Cartesian view or a hylomorphic view, but I think you can make the case that it does occur at conception and some dualists have made that case. I don't think the objection is as strong as is often made. The trickier case with substance dualism is that there is no empirical way to make determinative that the immaterial substance is present.

I would point to the empirical evidence as probabilistic, and I think we can do that. As a Christian, I would point to Revelation. I do deal with this in my Introduction to Theological Anthropology book. This is directed more at Christians because I think these sorts of definitive cases I think require Revelation to make determinative or epistemic understanding of the situations. I think if we take Christology seriously, then I think at every moment of human life, including embryonic life, the divine Logos assumes a human soul from the very beginning.

For him not to do that would yield a kind of heresy, the heresy that's often called Apollinarianism that he did not assume a full human nature. On that basis, reasoning backwards, we can say that all humans are ensouled from the very beginning of conception. If in fact what it means to be human is to have a soul, then I think we can reason quite definitively that, in fact, from the very beginning we are ensouled beings and that we have a soul from the beginning of conception.

Our embryos have souls. Even if the empirical or the capacities of souls are not exhibited until later on in development, it doesn't mean that the soul is not present.

Michael Egnor:

Of course, the Aristotelian-Thomistic view, broadly speaking, would I think greatly simplify the issue is that the view would be that the soul is the form of the body. The form is the intelligible principle of the body. Any time that you have a body that's alive, you have a soul. An embryo, which is a live body, has a soul, and then the soul is just the sum of the powers that the embryo has that make it alive. That's one of the appealing aspects I think to the Thomistic view is that enormously simplifies these sticky questions. It's quite clear. If you're a live embryo, you have a soul.

A live zygote has a soul, because the soul just means that which makes it alive. There's a thought question that one could ask regarding souls in Cartesian dualism that I think is an interesting question. If you have a set of identical twins, identical and not fraternal twins, and let's say that your kids and they come into you one morning and say, "Well, our souls are fit to our bodies, but we've decided to switch

them today. I used to be Joe and he used to be Frank, but now I'm Frank and he's Joe," if the soul is fit to the body, why can't identical twins just switch bodies?

Joshua Farris:

If the soul is fit to the body, I wouldn't think they could just actually switch.

Michael Egnor:

Well, but they're identical bodies. The only distinction between the bodies is what Aristotle would call the principle of individuation rather than the principle of intelligibility. That is that they are intelligibly the same body, meaning the same shape, size, color, weight, molecular structure, everything. They're just different versions of it.

It would seem to be that in the Cartesian view if the soul is fit to the body in that sense, well, a particular body goes with a particular soul, that if you are to deny the possibility of switching souls among identical twins, then you have to accept the Aristotelian concept of individuation as a fundamental metaphysical principle, which puts you into a hylomorphic way of looking at things.

Joshua Farris:

Well, then you have to accept the individuation is in the body, then the body or the material is what's doing the individuation of each individual soul, which I think is related to the question about ensoulment and how we can make empirically determinate whether a soul is present from the beginning. I think we can test in a similar way as hylomorphs are doing and see that there is a full human nature that's present from the very beginning. I think we can do something similar on Cartesianism.

There's still something left undetected that not... It's at least not directly empirically accessible. In the same way here, I think if the Cartesian is right, which I think he is, other Cartesians are right about individuation, that individuation is something that is intelligible, not bodily, then there is something that is trickier, is harder.

Michael Egnor:

How would you know if Joe and Frank switched? How would you talk them out of it? Meaning that if the kid wearing the red shirt and the kid wearing the blue shirt said, "Hey, we just switched," how do you tell the kid wearing the red shirt that no, he's the blue shirt kid?

Joshua Farris:

Probably there are other ways that we can tell twins apart, but speaking... I mean, there's physical markers, of course. But I mean, there's hypothetical situations about identical. Okay, I think this gets really at the heart of the issue that I'm trying to develop in The Creation of Self argument, and that is that the soul is the individuate and that there's some fundamental feature that makes each individual that individual. It wouldn't be a matter of talking them out of it.

It would be a matter of making a distinction between identical selves or the possibility of two identicals, which would be an impossibility at one level, and making a distinction between perfect duplicates. You might take it that what makes them distinct is their bodies, but there would be some leftover, unexplained fact that the properties of the body or the properties of the psychology of each twin is insufficient for individuating the person itself.

You could take an instance view metaphysics of instances that it's just the brute fact that this instance is different from this instance, and it wins cases. It doesn't depend on the properties or even the body

itself, but still that would be relying on a more fundamental ontology than a hylomorphic ontology of bodily individuation. It would also require assuming a view that has no content full or sufficient designation for the instances themselves.

What is it about an instant that makes that instant distinct from another instant other than the brute fact that it is this instant and not that instant. But I still think that takes us out of the realm of individuating selves by way of the body, which I find unsatisfying if hylomorphism requires that. There may be newer versions of hylomorphism that don't require that kind of individuation.

Michael Egnor:

My sense of it, certainly there's a lot I don't know about hylomorphism and I don't speak for it anyway, so even if I did know it, I couldn't generalize necessarily, but my understanding is that the hylomorphism is generally an essentialist metaphysical perspective, which is that each human being has an essence and the essence of the human being is not his soul, nor is it his body. It's the composite of the two.

That essence is what determines who and what you are, so that Joe and Frank couldn't switch because Joe is essentially Joe, not because of his body and not because of his soul, but because of him as a unified person. Switching just doesn't make any sense from an essentialist viewpoint. But I fear that from a substance dualist viewpoint, it could be made to make sense. Obviously, most substance dualists I think would resist that, but you could see how a person might make some sense of that from a substance dualist standpoint.

Joshua Farris:

Yeah, I think that's right. I'm an essentialist too. In the way that I'm making the argument, I'm an essentialist. There is an essence, but it would have to be something like a haecceity that makes sense of the individuals and their particularities, not their generables, not the structures from their body that is there from the beginning, not the properties, not the psychological properties, but there's an underlying fact that makes them them.

If you take a hylomorphic direction, then it seems you have to place haecceity elsewhere from the body. If you don't do that and you say that it is a bodily property, then you have to accept this weird untoward metaphysical picture that bodies are fundamentally haecceitic in nature all the way down, and that human bodies are just larger, more complex haecceities of underlying haecceities.

And then we get into a different kind of weird question about whether or not physical particles have haecceities, which most physicists would deny, and certainly quantum physicists would deny that they do. Well, that raises a whole question about the broader macro or global hylomorphic ontology in question, which I don't deal with directly. My whole argument is that if you are going to go this direction, even if you go as a hylomorphist, then you have to place the identity.

The identity is found elsewhere. It's found in the immaterial substance, not in the physical particles or the complex arrangement of particles that are insufficient for designating the individual in question. Maybe you could do that as a hylomorphist, but you still have to say that the identity is found in the immaterial substance rather than the material substance. And that is something that seems to be...

Well, the best explanation is that it's created directly and immediately by an intelligent being that has the ability to just bring it about directly and immediately rather than through some generalizable process because the generables themselves are insufficient for designating the person in question.

Michael Egnor:

What I think is remarkable that we're experiencing here in real time is how these devilish cultural and social issues relate to esoteric metaphysical theories. It's quite interesting that there've been times in human history when the idea that a man can become a woman by wanting to be and vice versa would've just been thought of as just a sign of mental illness or demonic possession or something and were just been laughed away.

And now we're taking it very, very seriously. Underneath that I get a sense that we're taking metaphysical perspective seriously, perhaps so we didn't take in the past, maybe the rise of panpsychism and the rise of transgenderism have something in common. It's interesting stuff.

Joshua Farris:

Yeah, that is interesting. That raises other questions. We're certainly seeing more discussion about esotericism now as well. We're certainly seeing more discussion about the demonic and even more occultic activity as well that seems to be on the rise, not only in discussions. It seems to be more out in public now, maybe even practiced more widely than it was, or maybe it's just more public.

Michael Egnor:

There's a wonderful book by Jonathan Cahn I think his name is, C-A-H-N. I believe it's called Return of the Gods. I don't know if you've heard of it. It's just a fantastic book. Cahn is a Messianic Jew, and he has written several very interesting books about modern day culture. His thesis is that before the rise of Christianity, the world was dominated by paganism and the pagan gods really ruled the world.

They either ruled the world in reality in these demonic forces, which many of us believe, or they ruled it at least figuratively, that people acted in accordance with what they believe these gods wanted. They were driven out by the rise of Christianity, and they're back. That is that they're all coming back now. He points out that so much of the cultural stuff that we're experiencing, issues of homosexuality and transgenderism and sexual liberation, all of that really had echoes back in the pre-Christian pagan times.

There were pride parades back before Christ, and he goes in a great deal of detail. It's a fascinating book, Return of the Gods by Jonathan Cahn.

Joshua Farris:

Oh, that's interesting.

Michael Egnor:

Anyway, I thank you, Joshua. This has been a fascinating discussion, and we need to keep doing this. I'd love to talk with you more about this.

Joshua Farris:

Very good. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Michael Egnor:

Thank you and thank you to our audience for joining us at Mind Matters News. This is Mike Egnor, and please take a look at his superb book, The Creation of Self. Thank you, Joshua.

Announcer:

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