

Science of The Soul: Evaluating Dualism and Naturalism

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Announcer:

Greetings, and welcome to Mind Matters News. We're back this week with our final part with Pat Flynn, Stewart Goetz, and Charles Taliaferro, wrapping up their discussion on the nature of the soul and substance dualism. This is the third of three parts, so if you've not listened to the first two, we'd encourage you to do so. Enjoy.

Pat Flynn:

So, this is actually, I think a good setup for where I want to go now is because, I can't obviously speak for Rosenberg, so I'll speak more generally. But I think the primary motivation, and this would I guess be a motivation for sort of a naturalism, not of the more exotic sort, but of the more traditional reductive sort, sort of hardball physicalism, is some sort of claim to an epistemic or explanatory superiority with fewer commitments, ontological or theoretical, right? I think this is the general idea. And actually, mentioned Dr. Moreland, he does a great job of spelling this out in a lot of his work. And the idea is like, "Hey guys, we can just science it all," right?

So, I think that Rosenberg's primary motivation with many others is this sort of commitment to a broad scientism that we can, through some sort of combinatorial method of explanation, through atomic and evolutionary theory, we can explain everything that all you guys, all you religious folks or people who believe in God or the soul, think you can explain. But we can do it without all the extra commitments, right? And we can do it entirely through the proven, reliable, predictable enterprise of science, right?

And then, I think this sets up a pretty interesting problem. Aside from, of course, just how do you get the commitment of scientism off the ground with all the issues that faces independently? But, okay, just granted, right? Then I think you kind of have one, and I want to get both of your thoughts on this, one of two ways that you can go. You can either kind of keep with the hardball physicalism and try and hit those virtues that are supposedly in favor of your worldview, but it's ultimately going to be fantastically absurd, right? You're going to have these eliminated as positions. You're not going to really explain things, you're just going to eliminate them, right? Ah, this doesn't really fit, it doesn't really reduce to what anything that's remotely resembling what physics or chemistry is telling us about, so it must not really exist. It must not really be real, right?

So you really don't explain anything, if I'm being frank, right? And you have this long string of reductions to the absurd. Or, you're forced with putting things into your worldview that clearly don't fit with the scientific epistemology, right? Or appeals to strong emergence or all this other stuff, and then you start having all these other commitments that, at the end of the day, when you take the time to actually analyze them, you guys are in no better of a position than the dualists or the theists here. In fact, it seems it's a lot worse of a position because these components seem entirely ad hoc, right? They're not at all predicted by the theory.

And in fact, you guys have a sort of line like this even in your article, how the dualist has effective two "Q responses" to property dualists and materialists and stuff like that. So sorry, I just put a lot of stuff on the table there, but I'd like for either of you to just take it in any, if you agree, disagree, or develop it in any direction that you think it might be useful.

Stewart Goetz:

Well, I'll just, very briefly. You have to agree on what the data are that need explaining. And so, that just to say something's a simpler view isn't, that's just an inadequate position to espouse, in a way. We want to know what the data are that'd have to be accounted for, and maybe we're going to want the simpler explanation, the simplest explanation of which we're aware to account for those data. But you got to put the data on the table. And the people you described, Pat, are generally people who just deny the data. And so, you're not going to get very far in a discussion with these people because you can't even agree on the data. Charles, I'll leave it there. You have a go at it.

Charles Taliaferro:

Yeah, I think that's a good point. And so, maybe moving in between what Stew observes and what Pat's observing is, I agree 100% with Stew on, it's so good that people like Alex Rosenberg are writing what they're writing. I would say, I've engaged his work somewhat. Someone I've engaged more is Daniel Dennett, simply because it's, well, he wants both. And *Consciousness Explained*, I do think that was one of his more clear books. But he's done many, many afterwards. But he does say, "I believe that there's a way that grapefruit tastes." I mean, and sometimes he says, "I believe we're zombies, or I don't believe in qualia." But he appears to think that we think, that we have reasons for doing things. Now, at the end of the day, he argues, from Bacteria to Bach, for example, that there can be reason without reasoners. And so, he is working with this.

Ultimately, illusory understanding of the cell as the center for gravitational narratives. And so... But the reason why I enjoy engaging in his work, as well as Rosenberg, but especially for me, Dennett is, I think he is very much onto what Stew was saying, that if the data or datum or data, singular or plural, of subjectivity, self-awareness is really on board, on first base, let's admit, this exists, it comes a very short road from there to dualism, and I would say substance dualism. So, when he writes, the problem with mind is when you look in the brain, there's no one home. And I think, yeah, you see, if there's someone home, in other words, there's a real subject there and you don't see the subject, you're just looking in, you're seeing a hundred billion neurons and synapses and so on, but there's no thought there.

And that becomes where the fulcrum of either, well, let's pull back and go dualist, or let's go eliminative. And where he is good, I think in many ways, is trying to nudge the non-reductive materialist into either, well, dualism or eliminativism. So, non-reductive materialists who say, "Well, I think there's still a point of view that we persons have." And he goes, "Oh, so you believe in a Cartesian theater?" And that's obviously supposed to be grading, and he has pictures of them. So, you believe the person is behind the eyes somewhere. And actually, that picture, even though misleading in the caricature, as bad as his early caricatures of the Casper the Friendly Ghost and so on, but it's still, actually, I would prefer that than believing there's no one there.

In other words, if, as someone once said, if you believe the mind is a ghost and the machine and you no longer believe in a mind, then you just believe in a machine with no ghost. It's just a machine, and we're back with Hobbes almost, matter in motion. So, I think the strong views press us on matters of whether there is a middle ground. As one philosopher, Farmerton said, "In these matters, there's no Switzerland. You're with the allies or you're with the other side. But going completely neutral becomes very problematic." And so, a neutral position now is called liberal naturalism. And some of them say, "Oh, we believe in mind, we believe in values, normativity of reason. Some even say free will, libertarian free will. Non-deterministic, free will. And For those on the sidelines, we go, "Oh, great."

But you're filling it up so much that eventually you go, "Is it still naturalism?" Or aren't we getting either theistic or near enough? Like Thomas Nagel, he hasn't published for almost 10 years, but *Time and Consciousness*, I think a great book, but he says, "Well, I'm not going to go with theism, but I'm obviously getting close to Aristotle or maybe a sort of Hegelian idealism which views mind as somehow

intended or purpose." And I'd say, "Great." But what we're seeing, I think in 2023, end of the year, is a move towards broadening the naturalist picture, and then wondering, can we all still be naturalists?

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, yeah. That's a great question, Charles, and I have many thoughts on that. I won't bore listeners with it now, except for that when I encounter naturalists that are effectively Aristotelians or Platonists, I always want to invite the question of, "Okay, well, what was motivating naturalism in the first place?" Again, it was supposed to be this epistemic or explanatory superiority, right? Kind of in connection with a broadly scientific epistemology. And it seems like we've just exploded all that, right?

So, what is the motivation anymore? Because now you have a lot of bloat in terms of theoretical or ontological commitments, and you don't seem to have that deep, fundamentally unifying and absolutely simple basement of reality that the classical theist has, which I think is the advantage of that worldview. So now, you just got kind of this big fat thing with even more brute facts floating around, and the question marks have just kind of been moved to a different level. So, my invitation is always, well, why don't we just take that extra step and just adopt what has always traditionally been posited as the ultimate explanation of things, which of course is God, traditionally understood.

Charles Taliaferro:

Yeah, I was on a retreat with Stephen Stich, a philosophy retreat, St. Olaf's philosophy's departments from St. Olaf's Carleton. And honest to God, his book *Beyond Belief* just came out. He actually, this is a true story. He recalled the book cover because the book cover, it says, "Stephen Stich believes there are no such things as beliefs." And he said, "No, I don't want to say that," which would be a flagrant contradiction. But he, and people like Patricia and Paul Churchill, and when they say they want to get rid of folk psychology, they'll say, "Well, we want to not theoretically accept beliefs and desires, not that we don't desire desires or believe there are no beliefs." In any case, Stich literally said to me that, in California, somebody who just read his book said, "I realize the moral implications of your views, that it really doesn't matter on any first order," or to use your term, Pat, hardball way, morally, what our ethics amounts to.

Because when we're doing, Peter van Inwagen says, "Serious metaphysics, we're not allowing the psychological in." And David Papineau has said something like that, "I can't imagine the fundamental levels of physics ever allowing psychological properties." Well, if that's... And so, Stich actually changed. And so, what he said, "Well, I'm going to allow in ethics, but I'm going to allow them in pragmatically." So he winds up with a form of dualism himself.

He goes, "In terms of serious metaphysics, okay, ethics is part of the manifest image. It's not going to be part of the scientific image. It's not there. But we can't live that way. And so, I'm going to accept the manifest image, the world of appearances. No, you shouldn't cheat on your taxes and murder, but it's going to be in the social world." So that, again, is another way of setting up another kind of dualism.

Pat Flynn:

Yes. Yeah, really interesting observation. This is great. I mean, this is fascinating. I could chat with the two of you all day about all the different issues wrapped up in this. But for the sake of returning to, I suppose what the fundamental point of this conversation is substance dualism, I'd like for us now, before we wrap up, to at least consider a few objections, other objections against substance dualism. There's some pretty famous ones, causal interaction objections, stuff like that.

So perhaps, we already mentioned one, which is do stuff to the body, affect the mind, right? We could say more about that, and sometimes those objections take on a little bit more sophisticated form from

neuroscientific perspectives. But what I'd like to do is maybe have each of you just pick one objection that you think is interesting or worth addressing. Give us a sketch of it to the audience, and if you wouldn't mind, ultimately explain why you don't find it compelling.

Stewart Goetz:

Okay, I'll jump first here. I think, for the non-specialists out there, people who don't read philosophy much, if at all, typically the opposition, the argument against dualism and God's existence, science is used as the reason why these things just aren't credible. And so, what one has to ask then from these people who want to use science as to bludgeon these views is that, well, why can't one believe in the soul, in God, and also believe in science? And I think the most powerful objection they have is, well, science is methodologically committed to what people call the causal closure of the physical world, so that when you're doing your science, you're running, doing serious experimental work, you have to assume that no spirits, spooks, souls, gods, or whatever are intervening in the scientific experiment and causing physical events to occur.

This is an area I've written a lot on. I just don't see why one can't concede to these people. Well, look at locally, for the sake of your experimental work which you're trying to discover how one physical object, let's say, affects another physical object, while you can't locally assume causal closure for the sake of your experimental work, but then go on and say, "Well, but there's no need to assume universal causal closure." You can do it in your experimental work, but local causal closure in no way establishes universal causal closure, so that what you do in science doesn't in any way preclude the mental from affecting the physical.

And so, I think they've raised a legitimate concern here. It's interesting, at least I find it interesting, this idea of methodologically to do science, you have to assume the closure of the physical world. And I should say that what they mean by that is, only the physical can explain the physical. You can't invoke a mental explanation of a physical event when you're doing science. And I don't see why we can't say to that. Yeah, you're right. When you're doing your scientific work, you assume causal closure at a local level, but that in no way requires that you assume it universally so that the mental can never affect the physical. That just seems to me to be a gigantic intellectual leap. And we want to, why not assume it locally? Concede that, but that shows us nothing about the universal causal closure. And I've never been persuaded in the least that you can't believe in science, local closure, but also believe at the broader level that the mind, the mental can still affect the physical. So, that's my interest. Charles?

Charles Taliaferro:

Yeah, I entirely agree. And I think, also with respect to the law of the conservation of energy, which might apply to closed systems, but who is to say when you have a mindful individual, this is a closed system? And there are other ways to go with conservation of energy principle, whether mind-body interaction would just simply affect the distribution rather than the amount of energy. There's also the notion is conservation of energy universal throughout physics? All things we can raise here, but I would more or less go just with Stew. The only thing I would add is that science without mental causation is inconceivable. So, when modern science began with Galileo, Kepler, Copernicus, Newton, they were concerned with mind-independent matter. So, Newton's laws of motion were not supposed to explain Romeo and Juliet and their attraction to each other. No, they're talking about mindless bodies, their acceleration and reaction and the like.

And so, what happened was the at least temporary or provisional bracketing of the mind in the study of nature eventually became, in the 1900s and later, well, through the 1900s, eventually became like, well, as J. J. C. Smart said, "Well, if we can explain everything just using the laws of physics and chemistry,

biology without going beyond it, why do we need to do that when we come to consciousness?" And so, there is this, I picture this as Robert Louis Stevenson's short story about a man who is killed by a shadow. He has a shadow, and sometimes the shadow comes alive and kills him, is we have created the sciences.

They've been created by subjective, observing, fully conscious, self-aware persons who are able to remember things, make observations, theories, raise arguments. The argument from reason holds here. And we then might move to emphasize that practical neuroscience, with respect to all the senses and thinking and reason memory, consists in a kind of implicit dualism that is, we actually wouldn't know what a subject is thinking without reports on their experiences. And this obviously can be continuous. So Peter, Paul and Mary might say one thing, and then we got George and Ringo. Well, we're going to assume Peter, Paul and Mary...

So, it can be cumulative, but fundamentally, we know about correlations and the visual cortex, how we smell and hear and so on, through correlations, and correlations are not identities. And unfortunately, that needs to be repeated with Nancy Murphy and others. We say, "Yes, we have these wonderful correlations, but have you in a single case established in identity of the mental and physical? And I would say no. So, cases like the Paul Churchland comes up, we know that heat is mean kinetic energy, and it goes through the other senses. And the same thing holds is that, yes, mind independent heat, if you're talking about the sun, yeah, mean kinetic energy. But if you're talking about the experience of warmth, is that mean kinetic energy maybe the cause along with the central state nervous system and the pain centers of the brain and so on?

Yes. That's the cause of the, I think Stew introduced in our book, the ouchiness of pain. I'm not sure that's going to win a Nobel Prize for literature, but I agree. Pain is ouchy. And it's these cases where they'll say, "Well, we've established that sound is these sound waves essentially. Well, no, it hasn't established that the experience of sound, like the auditions were back to, does a tree fall in the forest make a sound? Well, if you mean by auditions, and there's no hearing being anywhere, no, there's no sound, actual sound. But if you just mean sound waves, yes. And so, anyway, I think Stew was 100% correct in what he was saying, and I just think it can be forced a little more in an interlocutory situation, friendly and so on. But is that science itself relies on mental causation,

Stewart Goetz:

Yeah, and scientists themselves conduct their experimental work for purposes, and purposes are mental. And so, you wouldn't even have science if it weren't done for a purpose. And to explain the existence of science, you have to invoke a mental explanation.

Charles Taliaferro:

Yeah. The philosopher Whitehead said, "A scientist who has the purpose of showing there are no such things as purpose, makes a very interesting object of studying."

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, it's always, we talked about attaching costs to different positions, and of course one of the, perhaps the most useful thing to do is offer the cost of having to give the very thing up that was motivating your position in the first place, right? With that, that's sort of the, and I think you've made a very strong case for that here today. And of course, we're just scratching the surface, and I want to invite people, if they haven't already, to make sure they get a copy of that wonderful volume *Minding the Brain*. We will have a link to that in the show notes. And of course, they can read your full article there along with many other quite excellent contributions.

But before we go, I'd love to hear from both of you just a little bit about what you're working on next and maybe where people can keep up with you and your work, if you wouldn't mind?

Stewart Goetz:

You can go first, Charles.

Charles Taliaferro:

Well, I just finished a contribution to this St. Andrews Encyclopedia Philosophy, which I tried to make as good as Stuart's. He did one on substance dualism, and Christian theology is really excellently done. I highly recommend it. So, I did one on mind and consciousness, which was a little broader, and it maintained that mind and consciousness is fundamental to, it's a theological encyclopedia, so I said religious worldviews globally. And then, I discussed the revolt against dualism, something that Stu covers, and I referenced him to do some of the work I...

Like on Nancy Murphy, I said, "See the important work of Stewart Goetz." But then, I go through the revolt against eliminativism, the revolt against all these people that are going, "Well, that's going too far." And I suggest, "Yeah, you can believe in mind and consciousness without substance dualism." But it's a little bit of a, sure, be my guest. But it's an invitation where it strikes me that, we'll have you coming home, I hope, before you finish the article.

Pat Flynn:

Oh, that's fascinating. I can't wait to read that. Thank you for sharing, Charles. And Stewart, how about you? What are you working on next?

Stewart Goetz:

Yeah, well, I just finished an article on the soul and science and the Bible, basically. Just had a book come out on C.S. Lewis' view of Higher Education, and higher ed is a huge topic right now. And I've become very interested in Lewis in the last, oh, 15, 20 years of my life. Never read much C.S. Lewis, truthfully, until I went on a fall break one year. So, I just had a book come out on Lewis and his take on higher ed. And right now, for the first time in probably thirty-some years, I haven't got anything on the burner right now. It's kind of a nice position to be in for just for a while, hopefully. But so, yeah, that's where I am right now.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. Well, great. Thank you both for your wonderful contributions. Again, the volume that we've been discussing today is called Minding the Brain. I hope people pick it up. We'll, of course, put the link in the show notes to do so. And wherever you're listening to this podcast, whether it's on Mind Philosophy For the People or Mind Matters, we sort of teamed up for some of these interviews, very happy to be doing that with them. Please be sure to subscribe and share it with anybody that you think might be interested. So, thank you both so much for taking the time today. It's been an absolute blast.

Announcer:

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