

Dr. Jonathan Loose on Personal Identity and the Life Scientific <https://mindmatters.ai/podcast/ep298>

Robert J Marks:

Greetings and welcome to Mind Matters news. I'm your scientifically-aware co-host Robert J marks. We're interviewing with authors featured in the book Minding the Brain. It's edited by Angus Menuge, Brian Krouse, and yours truly. The book delves into the age-old question is the mind more than the brain? This debate spans centuries with Descartes famously equating the mind to the soul. Is the soul greater than the brain?

The book Minding the Brain has brought together well-credentialed experts from a spectrum of specialties and I'm really proud of the diversity. People talk about diversity today. We have diversity of specialists contributing to the book Minding the Brain. We have chapters from people in philosophy, neurosurgery, biology, computer science, cognitive science, physics, neurology psychology, and computer engineering. So you can see that we bring a broad spectrum of expertise to focus on this idea of the mind-brain problem. For more information about this book visit mindingthebrain.org, that's mindingthebrain.org.

So Angus Menuge is a co-editor of Minding the Brain and is my co-host today. Angus is chair of the philosophy department at Concordia University. He has a PhD in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is a very prolific author and is past president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society. Welcome back, Angus. It's good to work with you again.

Angus Menuge:

Thanks to having me on the show, Bob.

Robert J Marks:

Okay. Angus and I today interview Dr. Jonathan Loose. Jonathan is the author of the chapter The Simple Theory of Personal Identity and The Life Scientific. It's a chapter in the book Minding the Brain. Dr. Loose was senior lecturer in philosophy and psychology at the University of London until 2018. Dr. Loose holds a PhD in cognitive science from Exeter University in the United Kingdom. His recent interest have been in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of religion. He is the co-editor with the co-host Angus Menuge and the esteemed philosopher J. P. Moreland of a book entitled The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism. Loose also has contributed to numerous volumes including the discovery, I'm sorry, including the Dictionary of Christianity and Science published by Zondervan, which is a really, really great publishing house. Jonathan, welcome to Mind Matters news.

Jonathan Loose:

Thank you so much. Great to be here.

Robert J Marks:

It is great. Let's start, if you will, with an abstract of your chapter. Again, the title of your chapter in Minding the Brain is The Simple Theory of Personal Identity and The Life Scientific. Before we dig deeper, can you give us a broad overview of your chapter to let us know what's coming and then we'll dig deeper?

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah, sure. Thanks so much. Fascinating chapter to write and I was delighted to be able to contribute to the book. The chapter reflects some of the work that I've done over a number of years around the whole issue of personal identity. But here we're applying it to questions that are specific to what I describe as the life scientific. If you want to summarize the argument in a sentence, you might say that respect for science should lead us to consider all the evidence. And when we do consider all the evidence, that can lead us away from the view that all reality is physical reality. And I think that's really the centerpiece, if you like, of the chapter.

Now, of course there's a whole structure to that and what I really do here is to look at this issue of personal identity, which is the question of what it is that we are as persons, as human persons, as the philosophers like to say, and what does our conscious experience, what does our first personal experience of the world have to contribute to that question of what it is that we are? Because I sense that or I see that in the life scientific, we've seen 500 years of spectacular discovery, haven't we, through the application of certain kinds of experimental procedures and the development of complex theories expressed mathematically and so on.

This whole process applied to the world that we see, the publicly observable world that we see. And that whole process has been spectacularly productive. And so it's really easy if it is that spectacularly productive simply to say, and I think a lot of people do this, and I don't think it's a deliberate kind of theoretical decision, but I think people do it. You look and you say, "Surely everything's like that. Science has been so productive that surely every question is a scientific question and every answer is an answer that needs to be given in terms of the observation of publicly available phenomena using an experimental process and theoretical development expressed in mathematics."

And of course there's a bit of a fly in that ointment. And the fly in that ointment is the reality of our first personal experience. The scientist is part of reality just as much as the scientific phenomenon that the scientist wants to investigate. And so our view of the world has to accommodate not just the objects that are out there for us to look at, but also ourselves as the ones who are doing the looking and that first personal perspective that we have. So in my chapter what I'm trying to do is to say, "Look, if we're going to be really rigorous and committed to a spirit of scientific endeavor and achievement, then we have to be thinking about all of the evidence and all of reality," and some of that evidence and some of that reality isn't conveniently third personal, it's first personal. And so that actually has a really big impact on how we see the world.

Robert J Marks:

That's really interesting. So scientists not only look at things external to themselves, but they should also turn that inwards and look at themselves as part of that process. Yeah, very interesting. Angus, what do you think?

Angus Menuge:

Yeah, no, I think that's a very important point because of course so many philosophers and scientists do think that a scientific worldview somehow requires materialism, that you have to believe that the only kind of object are the sorts of objects studied by physical sciences. And of course, Jonathan takes his title from a BBC radio series, *The Life Scientific*, which featured an interview with Daniel Dennett who just last week and he was a prominent defender of materialism and who thought that the scientific perspective is the only perspective. So yeah, what Jonathan is doing is saying that if you look at the mental life of scientists themselves, rather than what scientists are studying, you start to see evidence that materialism actually is not compatible with the practice of science. And maybe just to expand on

what you said so far, John, what are some of the characteristics of the mental life of scientists, which really are not a good fit with the materialistic worldview? Put simply, what is it that Dennett is missing?

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah. So in short, what Dennett is missing is a certain understanding or a certain aspect of consciousness. I'm just thinking specifically about Dennett and his commitments for a moment. Clearly a spectacular thinker and huge influence in the world, a person to whom many have looked I think in areas like cognitive science and AI and other areas as a champion of physicalism. But his book, I think it was 1990, wasn't it? He published his book, *Consciousness Explained*, and there was a strong sense of when he published that from a lot of people, that that book might've been better titled *Consciousness Explained Away* because the way that Dennett dealt with what really seems most important to us about consciousness is he effectively denied it or excluded it from the conversation, you might say eliminated it.

And I think that this is the issue, that there's something here, something which we see in consciousness and the self and some of the ways in which we think, which is incredibly hard to accommodate on a physicalistic understanding of the world and Dennett's way, certainly the response of a lot of people was to say Dennett's way of doing that was effectively to eliminate it, and this is why he was both a very prominent and impressive figure, but also a highly, highly controversial one.

So when it comes to science, the things I try and address in the chapter, the applications, as it were, of these more general issues about consciousness come to things like observation and reasoning. And they also come to some things that are really related to the life scientific, the life, which is the aspirations and hopes that scientists might have for their future achievements. And indeed looking back and being justifiably proud of the scientific achievements which are quite clearly worthy of great esteem. Those are very much features of a human life. But that also actually comes into this.

It's about what scientists are doing when they're doing science, by which I mean observation and reasoning, theorizing, and it's about the lives of those people themselves. As, in fact, an example of all human personhood and all human lives, science is a special activity, but actually these arguments apply to everybody.

Angus Menuge:

All right, that's very helpful. And that shows why you connect this specifically to the issue of personal identity, including the identity of the scientists. And there are some technical distinctions that you make that will probably help listeners to understand the argument.

Jonathan Loose:

Sure.

Angus Menuge:

Early on in the chapter, you make a couple of really critical distinctions. One is between what it means to be identical at a time, what is identity at a time, versus identity over time. And then the other one is between what you call and is standardly called the simple and complex views of personal identity. So first of all, what exactly do we mean by personal identity at a time and personal identity over time?

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah, no, great questions. That's helpful, Angus. Thank you. I think one of the things...personal identity, first of all, you've got to ask the question of what do philosophers mean? What do we mean when we talk about personal identity? Because we often these days do talk about the identity of persons. And when we do it, we're normally talking about somebody's roles in life, the things that gives them the life they have. I might say I'm a philosopher or that I'm British or that Jacob Collier fan or whatever it is. And those are the sorts of things we talk about. Who are you, what are you like, and what roles do you play? But when we're talking about personal identity here, we have a much more fundamental question that we are addressing. Not that question at all, though I just illustrated, but in fact the question we might ask is what sorts of things are human persons? And I think one way that's helpful to get a grip on that question so that we know what we're talking about is the question is what needs to exist if I am to exist? That could be a chunk of matter that my body is made of. Maybe it's that needs to continue to exist. There's plenty of it. Should be less.

Maybe it's not the chunk, maybe it's the biological system, this human organism, maybe it's that. If that continues to exist, then whatever else is going on, I continue to exist. Or maybe, as we often talk about these days and the title of the book refers to, maybe it's my brain, maybe that's the thing. If that continues, then I continue. Or it could be quite different. It could be something like my memories or my mind. So if I can remember what this person did last week and that person can remember what they did the week before. There's this chain of memory and actually that chain of memory is what is me. And so long as that continues, I continue.

Those are some possible answers. It's not all of the possible answers. I don't think any of those are right, actually, but it illustrates the question. It's a really fundamental question, this question of personal identity. What are we most fundamentally? Another word that philosophers use about this is the word essential. What am I essentially? And that's the existence question. So if a thing has a property that is essential, then it's a property the thing must have if it's going to continue to exist.

And so that's what we mean when we ask about personal identity. It's the question of what it is that I am in the most fundamental sense of what must exist in order for me to exist. So it has nothing to do with other things. I think even that obviously, Angus, but I just think it's important to make that distinction because this idea of identity is so common and we talk about it in different ways. And I think actually even scholars can get confused about that in various disciplines that are related to what's most important about being human. We'll talk about personal identity in terms of what helps us to flourish, what we need for a flourishing life rather than the conversation here, which is about essentially what needs exist in order that we exist at all, whether that is a good life, a bad life, or any other kind. So that's personal identity.

And then yeah, you made the distinction. So within that, there's then a distinction. That distinction is actually less important than the question itself. But there are two ways we can think about what it is that we are, two sources of... Two questions that help us to think about it. And one of them is to say, at any moment in time, what are the characteristics that I have that tell me something about what it is that I must be? So just in an instant, if you like, what are the things that help me to answer that question? The other question is if you think about an extended period of time, you can articulate this question about personal identity in a really interesting and helpful way.

And Angus, I was thinking about this and it is lovely to chat with you today and it's been a while. You were here in the UK with us a few years ago, and I hope you might tell me in this conversation that I'll be seeing you again in November in San Diego because we may both be at a conference together. I hope so.

Angus Menuge:

I sure hope so.

Jonathan Loose:

I sure hope so. I'm planning, I'm booking my tickets, so it'll be good to see you then. And so here's the question, here's why this is relevant, because the question is what is it that makes the person who visited me here in the UK three or four years ago the same person as the person that I'll be meeting in San Diego in say six months time? And when you think so many things have changed biologically and physically and psychologically for you in that period of time. So what is it that is making those persons, if you will, at those two different times actually the same person, Angus Menuge? And that's the question of personal identity over time and that's really... I find that the most engaging of the two questions, but both are important and both help us to shed light on what it is that we must be if we are to do the things in a moment that we do and if we're to be the people that we are across time.

Angus Menuge:

That's excellent. That's very helpful. And as you say in your chapter, where philosophers divide on answering this question is on whether they think that there is something which is simple that accounts for our identity over time or whether it's complex. Can you unpack that for us a little bit?

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah, sure. So these are the possible answers to that question of personal identity to the question of what it is that we are fundamentally. The first thing to say is that the simple and complex views are not the easy and difficult views. That's not the distinction. This distinction between simple and complex was made by Derek Parfit, a very important thinker in this whole area. And the distinction is between theories of personal identity that suggest that we are or that we consist in, as people like to say, some sort of physical or mental continuity and those that don't. So a complex theory is a theory that views human beings as things that are made of parts that are being replaced over time and they may be physical or they may be psychological.

So I referred earlier to this idea that you might say, "I'm an organism." And of course an organism is replacing its parts over time physically, they say we change our entire physical constitution every seven years. I don't know if that's true, but that's what's said. Certainly, we're replacing the matter that composes our body over time. So a complex theory of personal identity will be one that says that it's the continuity of that physical entity over time, that is what we are, that constitutes us. Or indeed, if we do it psychologically, that it's some sort of continuity of character or memories or some combination like that.

That's quite a common view. Those views are quite common, those complex views. And we might think there's a certain sense that they make of things. You say, "I can see that when I see you in November, Angus, I'm going to recognize you, I guess. I'm going to see this person. I'm going to see this physical thing in front of me and that's going to tell me that it's you." So it feels like physical continuity may have something to do with that. Then we'll talk about this conversation and other things and there'll be memories that come through and we'll make some of the same old jokes and probably it will feel like there's a continuity there, and this tells us, this is good evidence for who we are.

And so that's a... A complex view of personal identity would say that that good evidence of who we are is actually... That is who we are. That is what makes us the people that we are. A simple view by contrast is one that... It doesn't actually specify what it is that we are, but we're not that. So Parfit uses the phrase that there is some further fact that explains what I consist in. So if you take a view that there's some significant immaterial aspect to who we are or part to what we are, then you are taking a simple

view because you are grounding what it is that we are in something which is not part of that physical or psychological continuity that's out there in the world for everyone to see.

Angus Menuge:

Yeah, that's very helpful. And of course one of the issues is whether we privilege what you might call the outside view. People impressed with science are always wanting to say it's the impersonal publicly observable data. Or the inside view, introspection, which you mentioned is very important that... Why is it that some just don't take the evidence of introspection seriously? Because it's obviously very relevant to our intuitions about things like personal identity.

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah, I think it's an interesting one, isn't it? It's what I was alluding to at the start when we were talking about Dennett and so on. People sometimes use the term scientism. I don't use that term in the chapter. It suggests that people have taken a cold, hard look at what kind of evidence is important and have made some sort of decision to eschew first-person experience and simply to focus on third-person data. And I don't think it's quite like that, I think it's much more... And I understand this, that there's a mood that gets created by the success of the scientific method when it's applied to the things that science has explored so productively. And that massive success over five centuries has been so staggering, and scientific activity normally looks a certain way and investigates a certain type of things.

And so it's understandable that folks will quite easily get into a mood, as it were, in which we think that not only does our understanding of the world of publicly observable objects benefit enormously from experimental method and theorizing and so on, but that the acquisition of any and all knowledge about the world or reality has got to come that way. And the inquiry has got to have that sort of look and feel to it. So anything that doesn't utilize that method or any conversation about things which are not publicly observable objects, which are first personal in nature, it just doesn't seem to fit this success story and therefore it gets pushed out. But the inconvenient truth, of course, is that we do have first-person perspectives that somehow our conscious experience and our inner lives are a part of reality, so we have to take them seriously.

I have great sympathy, not in a patronizing sense, but great understanding for those who struggle to want to incorporate first-person experience. But of course, it's there. We know that, we know for ourselves better than we know anything else, that we have first-person experience of the world. And so we can't have a view of the world that excludes it. I think it's a scientific spirit that tells us that we can't ignore or eliminate aspects of reality that don't suit the way that we've been gathering information to date. We have to start with all the data, see what sorts of answers are adequate to fit all the data, and yeah, if we want to know, we've got to do that.

And so in that sense, we do need to include introspective data. I do hesitate a little bit on the word introspection just because introspection has been used historically for all sorts of things that didn't work out. So you can look at the 19th century psychologists and their introspective psychology and sitting in a chair and thinking, "Now I'm thinking, so how am I doing that?" And trying to work out what's going on when I'm thinking just introspectively. I don't think that's not what we're talking about here. But certainly the fact that we have a first-person perspective and the broad characteristics of our thinking are really important to make sense of in terms of our grasp of reality.

Angus Menuge:

Yeah. And interestingly, you say following Charles Taliaferro you point out that even in science itself, you can't really pit scientific data against introspection when you think about what the scientist is actually doing. Could you explain that point? It's a very interesting one.

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah. Yeah, so of course the point is that we are coming at the world from a first-person perspective, and so therefore the observations we make, the reasoning we do, we only know that world through our own first-person perspective on that world. So even in doing anything, in doing science, we are reliant on that perspective and what comes to us that way.

Angus Menuge:

Yeah, that's very helpful. And let's maybe start looking at the first part of personal identity with the identity at a time. And you refer to some very distinguished work by Tim Bayne on the unity of consciousness. And he talks specifically, there's many kinds of unity and we can't get into all of those, but just the phenomenal unity and why that seems at least to require a simple subject.

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah, so much has been written about consciousness. We can't, as you say, delve into the breadth of it. But it's important to say that when we're talking about consciousness, what we're interested in here is what is typically captured in that phrase, there's something that it's like to be in a conscious state. And it's that something that it is like that is what we're talking about here when it comes to consciousness, which is what's termed phenomenal consciousness. So yeah, that's why we talk about the phenomenal unity of consciousness, the unity of consciousness in its phenomenal aspect.

Angus Menuge:

And of course, one would think that if there's this unified conscious field that we have, we have this total awareness of things. It's not that we have lots of different subjects, one for each experience, but it seems as if there's one subject of all of these experiences. And yet people like Bayne follow Dennett and make this remarkable claim that the self is a fictional object and that somehow that's what unifies the conscious field. What on earth are they saying? Because it's not a... I would warrant that the ordinary person on the street doesn't believe this. So what are they saying?

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? I think what Bayne wants to do more than anything is to... He has this understanding of the unity of consciousness, and perhaps I should say a bit more about that and what that means. And then that leads him to a particular view of what it is that we are. So it's that process that I was talking about earlier where you say, "What are the characteristics of our conscious life at a particular moment, and what does that then mean for who it is that we are?" The characteristic we're talking about here is the sense in which when we are having a particular experience, there'd be many, many components, as it were, to that. Many different things.

When I wrote the chapter, I was sitting in our lounge at home and I just looked around. And in our little garden, I could see a bird flying over the lawn and I could in the kitchen that lunch was being prepared. I could hear this bird and see it and so on flying across and I was thinking about the chapter. And all of that, all those different types of experience were being had simultaneously. And you can think about the different parts of that and think about just the bird for a minute, this bird that's flying, I can see it and I

can hear it. But I don't have one experience of bird song, another experience of a patch of color moving across the visual scene.

What I have is an experience a bird, and the aspects of that experience include the sound and the vision. And you can even extend that because there wasn't... There's a little group of homunculi in my head each having different experiences, one of the garden and one of the kitchen and one of the book. There's one self and there's one experience. What it seems very powerfully to be to us and what Bayne wants to argue for is that our phenomenal consciousness, that's something that it is like to be in that mental state, is unified in the sense that all of these different parts are aspects of a single experience that I'm apprehending the world in a moment. So if that's true, if consciousness is unified in that way, then that has some interesting consequences.

And one of the things that I think Bayne would like to be the case, but ultimately rejects, is the idea that the unity of this conscious field is such a striking and important aspect of our experience that it must mean, it would hopefully mean, that we just are this conscious field. That's what we are, because if we are unified in that way, then we're the right kinds of subjects for all of this experience. So there's a real importance being placed on the conscious field itself. But Bayne rejects that because he says, no, there are moments, for example, if you're in a dreamless sleep or something like that, where you're not conscious. And to say that I am my consciousness would mean that in those moments, I simply don't exist.

He doesn't want to say that, existence isn't gappy in that way. We know we exist when we're asleep. We are just not conscious. So therefore that means we are not same, we can't be identified with the conscious field. He toys with some other possible answers, but ultimately comes to this view that he describes as virtual phenomenalism, which I guess we want to dig into that Angus, is that right?

Angus Menuge:

Yeah, yeah. The self in some sense is a fiction, it's an intentional object, and you do two things. You explain this strange view and then point out that it has a whole number of very counterintuitive implications. You say it's a, quote, "An astonishing position." Can you help us understand that?

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah, I think it is pretty astonishing. I have to say, I think what Bane writes about the unity of consciousness is really, really helpful. And this notion that we have a single conscious state that subsumes all of the different aspects of the experience we're having, that seems to me intuitively to be right and therefore to be important in telling us about what it is that we are. But no, Bane goes for this virtual phenomenalism view. That's the idea that... He talks about the cognitive architecture that underlies a stream of consciousness. If you like, the cognitive machinery that is producing our experience, that is responsible for our experience.

And he takes a view which is not dissimilar as he points out to a view that Daniel Dennett took, to go back to him, which is that there's a sense in which the self is a kind of center of gravity within this stream of consciousness that is created by the cognitive architecture. So in order to integrate all of these experiences, the system, as it were... This is my inference from reading what Bane has to say. The system has to create a focal point for all of this experience to come together and it's that focal point that is me. So what I am there for is I'm a construction of the cognitive system. I don't exist in any way beyond that.

So you could say, as Bane wants to say, that the cognitive system creates a representation of the self. And he talks a lot about this notion of... They say representation and that the self represents itself to itself. But there's a sense overall of the whole thing trying to pull itself up by its own bootstraps and

bring into existence a self within the conscious field to account for our experience of the unity of consciousness. But this thing of course is, as it were, maybe it's helpful to say, authored by the cognitive system. So in the same sense that an author like Agatha Christie might create a character like Hercule Poirot, so the cognitive system creates this self.

And so what's really astonishing about this view, although it seems for all sorts of reasons to buy Bane things he wants to buy in terms of our understanding of ourselves, the cost of this view is that we take a step and we say that the self only exists in a virtual sense, and that of course is the problem because we're really saying on that sort of view that there's no difference in the manner of existence of Agatha Christie compared to the manner of existence of Poirot. The author is herself a fiction created by the cognitive system, and she is then creating a fiction which is a character in a book. So this seems to be really quite startling.

Angus Menuge:

And you point out as well, it does great violence to our very routine person-related sentences, like you mentioned, that I'd be the same person that you met years ago if we rejoin in San Diego, sentences like, "I'm tired," or, "I saw John five years ago." What happens to all of those ordinary sentences that people uncorrupted by philosophy routinely.

Jonathan Loose:

Yes. Indeed, people uncorrupted by philosophy. Absolutely. Yeah. If we say something about something that doesn't actually exist, then that sentence is false. Here's a silly example. I might say unicorns eat daisies for breakfast, or I might say the opposite, unicorns do not eat daisies for breakfast. They're both ridiculous sentences, I grant you that. But they're both strictly false. And the reason they're both strictly false, even though they contradict each other is of course because there are no unicorns. So it's neither true to say that they do or don't eat breakfast. If we're making statements about things whilst also holding that those things don't exist, then those sentences are strictly speaking false. And you see this in the area of moral philosophy where some philosophers famously proposed that there are no moral facts. And the consequence of that is that all moral statements become systematically false, that there may be other reasons to utter them on that view, maybe other reasons to say something is good or bad or right or wrong. But those statements, as a matter of fact, are systematically false.

And once we move to this idea that the self is a construction of the cognitive system, which has only a virtual existence and doesn't exist in any real sense, as Bayne puts it as clearly as that, we are then saying, if I say, "Yeah, I'm tired," or whatever it is, we're uttering statements that are strictly speaking false, which just doesn't seem right at all, does it?

Angus Menuge:

Right. And so what about the alternative then? What if we say, as so many philosophers and theologians have said in history, that there is an immaterial substance? What difference would that make in our understanding of phenomenal unity and the way that we talk about ourselves?

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah. So first of all, in taking that step, however we construe what it might mean to be an immaterial thing, and that's not something I address in the chapter, but let's take that thought. Of course, you're instantly saying that the self is something that exists in a very full sense. It exists as what philosophers would call a substance, as a thing. There is something which is the self, and that self is independent and separate from the stream of conscious experience. But what you're also saying, and what's historically

often been said about the idea of an immaterial self is that it's a simple, and a simple meaning a thing that is not itself composed of parts.

Now, what's interesting about that is that a thing which is itself not composed of parts would be the ideal sort of thing to be the subject of an experience that comes to us in this unified way. So if an immaterial thing is able to be complex in terms of its capacities and its properties but is simple in terms of its composition, then we can see that as being very readily the sort of thing would be the subject of the kind of unified, phenomenal experience that we find ourselves to be subject to.

And so it becomes quite an attractive view as compared with what Bane is struggling for, I think is some sort of view, which doesn't go down that route because there's a desire not to entertain the notion of immaterial substances and so on. And so trying to find another account of ourselves that comports with the unity of consciousness, but the cost of that, as I say, is the reality of the self in a very strong sense. And so this other alternative gives Bane what he wants, I think, but does so without that cost.

Angus Menuge:

Yeah, so to round out this first episode, on the next one we'll get into the identity over time, what does the unity of consciousness have to do with scientific discovery? You give the example of Arthur Eddington's discovery, that light from a distant star was bent around the sun. And another issue that's critical to science is what does the unity of consciousness have to do with logical insights such as the insight, oh, this is a prediction of my theory, it follows from my theory.

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah.

Angus Menuge:

Can you help us see why this would do real work in science itself if we recognize some kind of substantial conscious subject?

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah, absolutely. So this comes down to what I was saying earlier about the parts of... Thinking the science relevant, if you like, to which this conversation also has something to contribute. And when we make observations, we apprehend directly, I think, the relations between things in a scene. So when I looked out at the garden, going back to that experience I talk about in the chapter, the position of the hedge and the bird and the lawn, the different things, those are things that you apprehend directly as you experience that single holistic field, conscious field. So we, as it were, can read off our observations from that. We think about direct apprehension of reality, and of course we put great weight on that because we take observation to be decisive in terms of the steps that we will take in our theorizing. We say that we know things because we observe them.

And if we do, if we're going to have this kind of direct apprehension, then given all that we've said over this episode, we see that we need to be the kinds of things that can have that sort of direct apprehension, that can make sense of what's going on in a complex conscious field, if you like, a conscious experience that's being mediated from the physical world. So you take the example of yeah, the discovery of light being bent and the comparison of the positions of the stars either in the night sky or during an eclipse. An absolutely marvelous experiment of course, which is so important in the history of physics and just beautifully designed and so on back there in 1919, I think it was, 100 years ago, but just marvelous thing.

It's just a really good example of a comparison of different observations. And in order to make that comparison, it demands that we are able to apprehend directly the experience that we're having and then to be able to say something about it. And in order to take that as authoritative, we need to have great confidence in our ability to do that. This is what an account of the person enables us to do. So that's I think what I want to say about observation. Do you want to talk about logic as well?

Angus Menuge:

Yeah, yeah. So logic in the sense... Now we're talking about at a time, so we're not talking about reasoning over time, but at the same time, what happens when you basically see, as C. S. Lewis puts it in *Miracles*, one thing implies or entails another. Why is an immaterial subject relevant to that kind of experience?

Jonathan Loose:

Yeah. I do refer to Lewis in the chapter as well, although of course this goes right the way back to Boethius, I think this distinction between intellectus and ratio and so on, and understanding of what understanding itself really is. But yes, I think that the point here is simply that if we're going to be driven by the logic of an argument, if it's going to be the premises taken together that lead us inexorably to deduce something on the basis of them together, then we have to apprehend them together. And it's in apprehending different premises simultaneously that we then are able to, as it were, sense that logical compulsion to draw a particular conclusion.

And so in our theorizing, as well as in our observation, we need to take into account multiple entities simultaneously and that holistic experience, if you like, of either an argument and the different premises that are part of that or an observation, and then different parts of that. And that's what enables us to make authoritative statements about what we observe and to be compelled by logic to take certain steps in our theorizing. So that's why being the kinds of beings that can make sense of these unified conscious experience and have these unified conscious experiences is necessary for us to be the kinds of things that can do science with all the wonderful things that flow from that.

Angus Menuge:

All right, that's excellent. Thank you, John, that really helps us to understand the importance of what it means to be a person at a time and what's at stake in comparing the simple and complex views there. And so in the next show, what we're going to be looking at is the issue of personal identity over time and what difference that makes, whether one takes a materialistic view of persons or one of the alternatives.

Robert J Marks:

That's great. I have been sitting here listening to you guys and learning a lot, and my perception of your intelligence is amplified by your British accents. Somebody has a British accent, wow, their IQ goes up. But even independent of the accent, I've learned a lot. Thank you for the dialogue back and forth. We've been talking to philosopher Dr. Jonathan Loose. He's author of the chapter *The Simple Theory of Personal Identity and The Life Scientific* in the book *Minding the Brain*. And our co-host has been Angus Menuge. He's chair of the philosophy department at Concordia University in Wisconsin. And so until next time on *Mind Matters* news, be of good cheer.

Announcer:

This has been Mind Matters news with your host Robert J Marks. Explore more at mindmatters.ai. That's mindmatters.ai. Mind Matters news is directed and edited by Austin Egbert. The opinions expressed on this program are solely those of the speakers. Mind Matters news is produced and copyrighted by the Walter Bradley Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence at Discovery Institute.