In What Sense is Consciousness a Property?
https://mindmatters.ai/podcast/ep311

Robert J. Marks:

Greetings and welcome to Mind Matters News. I'm your conscious co-host, Robert J. Marks. To me, consciousness is a weird thing to talk about. Consciousness is a hard thing to define. In fact, the authority in all things, ChatGPT in the response of defining consciousness says philosophically and scientifically, consciousness is one of the most challenging and debated topics with questions about its nature, how it arises from the brain and its relationship to the physical body, still unresolved. Again, that's from ChatGPT, the authority of all things. But we do have an idea what consciousness is and that allows us to talk about it, and that's what we're going to talk about today with our guest, Mihretu Guta.

Robert J. Marks:

Mind Matters News in this podcast is a product of the Walter Bradley Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence at Discovery Institute. A new podcast of Mind Matters News is posted every Thursday except the last Thursday of each month. We then post what we call a binge cast where multiple episode interviews from the past are fused into a single podcast. So welcome and thanks for listening. My co-host today is Dr. Angus Menuge. Angus is chair of the philosophy Department at Concordia University in Wisconsin. Angus has a PhD in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He's a really prolific author and is past president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society. Hey Angus.

Angus Menuge:

Yeah, thanks for having me on. Bob

Robert J. Marks:

At Mind Matters News, we've been interviewing authors featured in the book Minding the Brain. It's edited by Angus Menuge, Brian Krauss and yours truly. The book delves into the age-old question is the mind more than the brain? This debate spans centuries. What was once solely a philosophical and metaphysical discussion has now attracted the attention of science. For more information about the book, visit mindingthebrain.org that's mindingthebrain.org, our guest today is Dr. Mihretu Guta who wrote the chapter in Minding, the Brain entitled, in What Sense is Consciousness A Property? Dr. Guta teaches analytical philosophy at Biola University and Azusa Pacific University. He's an associate fellow of the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity at Trinity International University. He earned his PhD in philosophy from Durham University and he is the co-editor of the book Cell Foot Autism and Thought Insertion. And as the editor of Consciousness and the Ontology of Properties, we're going to make links to these books available on the podcast notes. So Dr. Guta welcome.

Mihretu Guta:

Thank you.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay, I've been talking a long time. So let me turn over the floor to my co-host, Angus Menuge, Angus.

Angus Menuge:

All right, so welcome Mihretu and your fascinating chapter. In what sense is consciousness a property really makes us rethink the nature of consciousness? Maybe we should just begin by defining a few of the basic terms to help listeners understand the topic. First of all, let's think about what we mean by consciousness. For example, suppose one's lying asleep next to a tree and wakes up and becomes aware of the tree's shape, its branches and leaves and birds moving around and singing. Well, what just happened? What is it that consciousness adds that wasn't there before when one was asleep?

Mihretu Guta:

I think this is a very good question and it has got actually many aspects to it. When someone wakes up from a sleep and all of a sudden became aware of the things around him or her, what just happened is, what philosophers call that intransitive consciousness. In one sense, the person is awake so it's just a rudimentary form of consciousness in the sense that yeah, "Trees are around me, people are wheezing by and there are cars and so on and so forth." But the person is also engaged in what philosophers call transitive consciousness. That means that you are aware of objects around you. You're not simply conscious of things without paying attention to what kinds of things those things are that you're conscious of, but you are conscious of let's say, "Oh, this object is a tree and there is a car over there, or someone is coming toward me," and something like that.

Mihretu Guta:

But here there are two things that we can talk about. So a person is aware of birds singing and so on, and that is, there's a visual experience and a tactile experience as well. Maybe the person can go ahead and reach out and touch things around that environment and so on. But the person basically is engaged in what we call phenomenal consciousness. That is what it's like for that person to hear birds chirping and singing. It's a very unique phenomenological experience-based, personal and person-relative experience. So I think the question is pregnant with all sorts of things like, well, there is a transitive consciousness to it, intransitive consciousness to it, phenomenal consciousness to it, and all of the above. So it is not simply a rudimentary form of being conscious, if that makes sense.

Angus Menuge:

Yeah, that's very helpful that it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon consciousness. And so your focus is interesting because what you want to know is, what kind of property consciousness is. So for the non-philosophers in the audience, how do philosophers understand the general idea of property and what would be examples that anyone could relate to?

Mihretu Guta:

In our non-philosophical moments? We all are in general aware of the differences that we notice around us. So philosophers really understand the notion of property in multiple different ways, and we will have an opportunity to look at that at the latter point. But in a nutshell, properties are meant to be entities of some kind that represent different objects in a certain way. So if I have a red apple, the apple is red, it's being presented to me as red objects, but redness itself is a property of the object that we call an apple. So when I talk about the apple, I talk about the apple being red. So the redness that property presents the apple being red. So one way to understand property would be, properties simply help us to understand the way objects are. But objects in turn bear those properties. So there's a very close relationship, ontological relationship between properties and objects.

Mihretu Guta:

So everyone knows about periodic table. So from high school on. So there are different elementary elements on the periodic table. It starts with helium, it starts with hydrogen and go to the more complex elements. So we talk about atomic number, atomic mass of let's say hydrogen, helium, carbon, oxygen, iron and so on. Why are they different from each other? Why don't they simply display similar kinds of properties to us? But that's not what we notice. And people who've organized these elements on periodic table, they have automatically assumed that helium is very distinct element compared to hydrogen, hydrogen is distinct element compared to oxygen, carbon and so on. Because we can distinctly talk about the properties of carbon, which are completely, well, different even though in some ways related to the properties of oxygen.

Mihretu Guta:

And we can generalize from this saying that, properties really determine even at the more deeper ontological level, the essence of the objects in question. But in a nutshell, for everyone out there, we know these elements are different from each other. The secret is the property that each element has, our set of properties that each element has. So that's what we mean by property in a general understandable sense of the term.

Angus Menuge:

All right, very good. And so the heart of your argument is that consciousness is a unique property. It's very odd, it's not like the redness of an apple or the roundness of an apple or something like that. Just in very basic terms, because we'll get into this later, what is it at its heart that is so odd about the property of consciousness?

Mihretu Guta:

In my view, what is odd about this property is, it is deeply familiar to all of us. We know what it's like to be a conscious being. We live in our own universe called this conscious universe. Constantly in our mind things are happening, we're thinking, we're analyzing things and lots of things are happening. So look, I have no way of knowing, for example, and guess what's happening in your mind and you have no way of knowing what's happening in my mind unless I am willing to share that with you and so on. So consciousness is very, very unique because it's inextricably completely linked, attached to its bearer. So it's deeply subjective, person relative and that makes it extremely difficult for us to be able to, for example, scientifically, study consciousness. I'm not saying that scientists do not study consciousness, they do study consciousness, but they do study consciousness in a way that wouldn't automatically reveal to us what it's nature is. And we can get into this at some point during the course of our discussion.

Mihretu Guta:

So this relativized nature of consciousness is really one of the unique features of it, aspects of it. When I talk about relativized aspect of consciousness, I'm not implying this relativism as it is understood in moral philosophy. I'm not saying that what is true to you is true to you, what is not true for me is not true for me, not in that sense. In relativized sense means that every single one of us has our own subjective experiences that are imprints, well, that are not shareable with any other person. If someone is having, in your family headache, there's no such thing as sharing that headache, a bit of that headache to distribute it to your family members, the sum of that headache will fizzle out. You'll have one third of the headache and someone will have one fourth of the headache, such a thing.

Mihretu Guta:

You have a complete headache that's unique to you, you suffer from it, other people simply express their sympathy with you, but that's it. How it feels like for you to have that headache experience is absolutely, it's a black hole, it's just only known by you. We can't plug in an electric cord and just see what happens or read how it feels like on a bigger screen or something like that. So there's an accessibility and a necessary sense of the term. So you have that subjective experience and in my view, that is the most interesting aspect of consciousness. So because of that, it's just hard for us to be able to manage it in a way we always wish to manage it, but it's not that simple.

Angus Menuge:

All right, that really helps. And maybe we can use that example of a headache. Because you say that when we're looking at consciousness or for example, a consciousness of a headache, you say there's a difference between a first order analysis and a second order analysis. What are you trying to get at there? And why is it that you think just focusing on a first order analysis is not really adequate?

Mihretu Guta:

Yeah, I think the first order analysis of anything is necessarily partial because it's not going to get to the heart of the matter of the issues in question. For example, in my chapter, I talk about, I've actually called a philosopher of physics whose textbooks actually I used at Biola when I taught philosophy of physics. His name is Tim Maudlin and he is a fantastic philosopher of physics, and he says, "That these days, education and physics is shut up and calculate. Don't ask the nature of it, don't ask the nature of, I don't know, mass or charge or spin or any major issues." Let's say in physics, you can do a marvelous job, you can do a fantastic job. You can even win Nobel Prize on the basis of simply tackling first order issues without ever actually touching second order issues.

Mihretu Guta:

For example, if you take a thermodynamic phenomenon, heat, yeah, you can mathematically, there are equations, you can show how molecules behave and so on and bond and unbond and so on. But what exactly is the nature of heat? What is it? That's not a straightforward, a scientific question. Science has got an aspect that can claim to be in its own territory. Of course thermodynamic phenomenon, okay? That's what scientists do, the empirical aspect of it. But no amount of exhaustive knowledge about the empirical aspect of that question is going to give you a complete picture of what the nature of heat is. In fact, let me even add the nature of gravity, for example. If you take a simple gravitational equation, force equals G, which is constant, M1, M2 over R squared. Is this equation literally tells us what gravity is? Or is this equation is meant to tell us the phenomenon that we witness? When we throw a big rock up into the air, it gets pulled down. When we do the same thing, we'll get pulled down to the ground.

Mihretu Guta:

Look, the equation I just mentioned doesn't tell you about the nature of gravity. It tells you the phenomenon that you witness about what we say gravity. So you can be excellent physicist in manipulating this equation and relating it to the phenomenon that you witness in your environment without ever having a different knowledge of the nature of gravity. So as we speak, we still are scrambling what gravity is. Is it a force? Well, modern physics actually does that. So how should we understand about that? So the second order approach to first order issues is always focusing on a fundamental bedrock, foundational, metaphysical, ontological assumptions that are being made by people who actually engage in first order investigation of those things. So as a philosopher, that's what

you do. So you appreciate physicists, you appreciate chemists, you appreciate biologists, but you don't really leave your research there.

Mihretu Guta:

You go deeper and say, well, if a biologist tells you what life is, well, okay, a biologist might say life, metabolism, reproduction, blah, blah, these are features, it doesn't tell me anything substantial about what life is. So what life is, is a different kind of question compared to what the features of life are. So in a nutshell, second order approach is always digging out this metaphysical buried assumptions, ontological buried assumptions which cannot be eradicated, cannot be avoided. No matter what people say verbally, they can deny verbally, they're always there and they do their magic. And therefore I can argue that, for any given discipline, P, there is the philosophy of that discipline called P, economics, theology, physics, chemistry, history, you mention any first order discipline, there is a philosophy of that discipline. Therefore, we can never complete our investigation if we don't bring these two approaches to help us understand at a deeper level, whatever that we're investigating. That's exactly I why I'm in in nutshell.

Angus Menuge:

That's very, very helpful. And could you apply that directly to a conscious experience like the consciousness of pain? What's the difference there, between the first order and the second order approach when we're talking about pain?

Mihretu Guta:

So neuroscientists often engage in the investigation of pain, and the way they do that is let's say they might like pierce into your brain, let's say using the functional magnetic resonance imaging or other techniques which are too many in neuroscience. They might not actually ask questions like what is painfulness? What makes pain pain? What is the connection between pain and its painfulness? When I talk about the painfulness of pain, I'm talking about the quality of pain. So I can't talk about pain without ever engaging in as nature such as its quality, painfulness. So if you take most philosophers who are working on philosophy of mind, their entire attempt is to get rid of this quality aspect, the painfulness aspect, because the painfulness aspect is squarely grounded in first-person perspective. You are the only person who can tell us how painful it's to you when you experience certain, let's say a token pain.

Mihretu Guta:

So you can't talk about pain without ever investigating painfulness. If you do not investigate painfulness, you're living out the quality of pain. So your understanding of the nature of pain is not only fragmented, it's truncated, it's half-baked and it will never be complete. The reason is this, if pain doesn't have painfulness, if pain doesn't have a quality that we call painfulness, literally I'll have no way of literally telling you how painful a certain pain experience that I'm having is, how terrible my headache experience is. I tell you my headache is awful, I hate it, I do not want to have it ever again. It's stupid, and I always remember and I cringe. Why? Because it's already recorded in my mind. I know the quality of that kind of pain. Let's say people who suffer from migraine, for instance, they tell you that it's excruciating in a different sense at a different level, at a different depth.

Mihretu Guta:

But if you have never experienced migraine, you have no idea what they're talking about, but you can deduce from your own mini headaches that you have experienced in the past, "Oh, it must be awful,"

and so on. But people who really suffer from migraine, they tell us that it's not an ordinary pain. So what they're seeing is that they know what the quality feels like, and the only way that we can make real genuine progress in investigating the nature of pain is absolutely engaging in second order analysis of what this painfulness is all about. Pain is first order, but painfulness is a second order approach that we take as philosophers or people who work on philosophy of mind to spell out and dig out and just explain and uncover, unravel, the very heart of this quality. I'm not implying that we have an exhaustive knowledge of this quality.

Mihretu Guta:

Even in neuroscience, there are so many gaps because neuroscientists literally do not spend much of their time in trying to ask these questions. They just focus on the surface level issue, "Oh, pain, okay, let's actually come up with a number line between zero and one. Where should we rate? What's the rate of your pain experience and so on." Those things are, they don't really explain the quality of pain, but then, you're being asked to rate the pain, which means that they are implying against their own fundamental position. They are conceding that it is you, not them who can rate actually the extent to which you are actually experiencing this pain. So it goes back to what I said, it is private, personal, grounded in first person perspective. The only way we can investigate the quality of pain is absolutely taking second order approach, not first order.

Robert J. Marks:

So Mihretu, I'm an engineer and we have a saying in engineering. And it says in theory, "Theory and reality are the same, in reality they're not." It seems to me that your first order thing is that in theory, theory and reality are the same. That's where we go into equations and simulations and such. But they never explain reality in the totality of reality, and therefore we need to get into that either through more depth or a philosophical interpretation.

Mihretu Guta:

Absolutely. I think you nailed the nail on its head. Because look, I personally don't understand why people get worked up. Look, we haven't created this universe and we're lucky actually to be here. So we've been given consciousness, a conscious mind, that's why we investigate things, that's why we invented drones and as an engineer, you guys do marvelous things and so on, it took what we call consciousness. Consciousness is extremely unique phenomenon in relation to us. We are the only species who are able to be creative in the way that we are, and I think there is not a single evidence of other species ever created, like I don't know, cars or even the simplest things that are extremely complicated. So first order approach taken in by itself is a territory where you can confuse reality with theory. Not only reality with theory, models with theory.

Mihretu Guta:

Models are not true or false, they're just toys. They're like fork insofar as they work in helping you explain or manage a certain natural phenomena, you have them with you. When they fail, toss them out the window. But the problem is, once you get confused, people die over models, as if models are like a matter of life and death. I think many scientists have a very, very convoluted understanding of the relationship between theory models and reality. Models are toys, they are just tools. They do not actually describe anything. It's your human attempt to use it as a tool to explain something independently existing out there. So the tool itself is not part of reality. The tool at times might succeed in bringing you nearer, relatively speaking and understanding how things are out there.

Mihretu Guta:

Some tools are better than others, some are awful tools, so we discarded them even in science. So I think that's the profoundest claim that I've ever heard. Because first order approach taken in and of itself, is literally, is a recipe for disaster. Because you would never never make any progress because you've already convinced yourself that theory and reality are just converged in that approach. No, reality converges between first and second order approach, but our knowledge of anything is always going to be partial, no matter, even if we combine the two, it doesn't mean that it's a piece of cake where we can be in a position to unravel them reality, but we can make a tremendous progress. So the animosity and antagonism that we're witnessing, okay, and a scientists would say, "Philosophy contributes nothing. It's just a waste of time," and blah, blah.

Mihretu Guta:

When they make even that argument, they are helping themselves doing philosophy, and the only thing that we should do on our part is help them understand that they are practicing philosophy. So by practicing philosophy, if you are against it, then you are defeating what you're saying. So it's sort of like me saying, "I'm not giving this interview in English and I'm so sorry guys," and then keep on giving this interview in English, and you would definitely be confused. You might even suspect this guy, is he having a mental breakdown or someone at Biola who can help him? And you see that defeating nature. I think that's kind of obvious for so many people.

Robert J. Marks:

You touched on this, but this is something Angus and I was talking about. We're a little bit off-topic here, but the idea that people fall so in love with their models, that they won't abandon them even when they're proven wrong. Angus and I were talking about this beforehand. And indeed that's true, and I think that that's the definition of thinking outside of the box, and that's where the creativity comes in. You have to think outside of your rut and the older you get and Angus, and I agree, the older you get, the deeper the rut you dig and the harder it is to see outside of the box. And it's all the young people that don't know what's impossible that come out and do great things. Anyway, let's get back on topic, Angus.

Angus Menuge:

Yeah. So, this shows, I think already that there's something quite remarkable about mental properties. When you give that second-order analysis, the painfulness that you have this intrinsically subjective intentional qualities. When we look at the responses of philosophers, you distinguish four and end up rejecting three of them. The first one is called the ontological thesis about properties. What's that saying?

Mihretu Guta:

Yeah, ontological thesis about properties treats individual distinct properties to be independent of each other. For example, mental properties are mental properties by their nature are not physical properties. Physical properties are not mental properties, they're just physical properties. For example, physical objects can be described in terms of the space that they occupy and the extension that they display. For example, the table in my office right here at Biola is extended in the space, it occupied the space. So that's a Descartes definition of the property of physical objects. So we're not going to be able to lump that with, let's say a propositional attitude, which means, the property that we call beliefs or desires or

intentions or regrets and so on. These are mental properties. They do not extend in the space, nor do they occupy a space, and they are not even visible, we can't really see them.

Mihretu Guta:

So there is a complete sharp difference here, but they work in tandem. My beliefs are sustained by the healthy functioning of my brain, and my brain is complicated organ with the least hundred billion neurons, each neuron making 10,000 different connections at the least. That would really give us a minimum of 100 trillion synopsis. All of those work amazingly complicated mind-bogglingly, breathtaking manner. You have neurotransmitters and their properties, electricity and blood and water and proteins, and the least goes on and on and on. Okay, that's a physical property, all of that is physical property. But then we have this mental properties. So ontological thesis says, "Let us not lump those two species of properties, let us keep them distinct from each other without denying that they collaborate and they work together and they are in sync most of the times." So that is literally what the ontological thesis is saying without reducing one to the other.

Angus Menuge:

So now of course, physicalists, in general don't want to grant there's anything special about the mental. So they adopt what you call either the conceptual thesis or the identity thesis or the eliminativist thesis. Can you briefly explain what they say and why ultimately you think that they're not adequate?

Mihretu Guta:

So the conceptual thesis says, "Well, look, let us go ahead and use the terms. Okay, yeah, mental properties and physical properties. Let us not sacrifice these terms and reduce them to one single term." Rather I'm doing that, I can say, "When I say mental properties, I do not mean these are properties like unique kind of a species compared to physical properties or the neuronal firings in my brain." But what we're witnessing here is, conceptual difference, not the reference difference. I want to make this point clear. When I say referent, object that the descriptors that we use are meant to refer to. So the conceptual thesis says, "There is only one species of property that is physical property. We can talk about this one species, this physical property using two distinct concepts." When I say mental and physical, I mean one kind of property, ultimately speaking, that's kind of physical property. That's one aspect of the conceptual thesis. But things are not that straightforward, and I just want to add one more twist to it.

Mihretu Guta:

There are philosophers who reject being identified as physicalists, for example. Let's say if you take John Heil, a very prominent philosopher, he's a neutral monist. Neutral monism is a view according to which properties are neither physical nor mental. Okay, how should we go about understanding this claim? We don't have time to get into that, but just simply-

Robert J. Marks:

What else is left?

Mihretu Guta:

Yeah, I want your listeners to think about it and suffer over it and sweat over it and so on. So I think that would be fun stuff. But the definition is, okay, they're neither physical nor mental. But then when we talk about properties, we are just not talking about ontologically distinct properties, but we're talking

about a property that's neither physical nor mental. Hence, the name says that, neutral monism, there's one thing, there's one property. Neutral, neutral between what? Neutral between pronouncing that these properties are ontologically distinct from each other. So John Heil himself, as far as is concerned, the best way to understand about properties is what we call powerful qualities as powerful qualities. Properties are both powerful and they're also qualitative. And he uses the example called sphericality.

Mihretu Guta:

If you pick tomato, tomato is a spherical in its ship. So sphericality is the quality of the tomato, but then the ship of the tomato, the sphericality also allows tomato to roll over, let's say over a flat surface, let's say across a flat surface. Because it's sphericality that enables it to roll. So Heil says that, "Well properties are powerful qualities, means that, they are both instantiating the feature of powerfulness and the qualitative feature at the same time." So we shouldn't really, with surgical precision identify powerfulness with another quality and qualitativeness with another quality. He already defined his definition neutral monism. Well, he is not going to concede that properties are ontologically mental and physical, no neither. But he's neutral on that. But he wants to say that there have powerful qualities.

Mihretu Guta:

When you see properties of objects, certain aspects of those objects are being powered, enabled to do something because of the quality that those objects actually have. So the conceptual thesis comes in many different forms. But David Papineau, the British philosopher, actually calls people who defend conceptual thesis, conceptual dualists. Conceptual dualists and not substance dualists. They are simply literally defending the duality of concepts, which means mental and physical are concepts that are meant to have one single reference, if that makes sense.

Angus Menuge:

Yeah, it does. What about the more extreme austere views, the identity thesis and the eliminativist approach?

Mihretu Guta:

Yeah, and my chapter, actually, I criticize a little bit Heil's approach and Papineau's characterization as well. A person who is committed to the Conceptualist thesis is automatically, is forced to embrace the identity thesis. I know these two philosophers, Papineau wouldn't reject, but Heil actually rejects my comment here. But yeah, the identity thesis says literally, the identity that is in play here is not qualitative identity, but it's numerical strict identity. So this is a concept that is fleshed out by invoking what we call philosophers, Leibniz's Indiscernibility of Identicals. Leibniz is a 17th century philosopher. I think many people know him reading the history of philosophy. So this law called Indiscernibility of Identicals simply says that for all X and for all Y, there is a property P such that, if one thing is true of X, the same property must be true of Y. In that case, X and Y are strictly identical, not qualitatively, strictly identical.

Mihretu Guta:

So the identity thesis is literally saying that, mental properties are 100% with zero qualification and reservation are the same thing as physical properties, which means that to be absolutely precise neuronal firings in our brain or action potential in our brain or whatever, there's different neurotransmitters actually do, chemical properties in our brain, for example. So the identity is not missing any work, and there are many people who are committed to this view, including Jaegwon Kim,

for example, very influential philosopher. So the identity thesis here should be understood in its strictest form, not in its qualitative form. So I hope, I don't know, Angus, do you want me to explain qualitative sameness and strict sameness, or is that okay?

Angus Menuge:

That should be okay. I really just want you to focus more on what is it about the subjectivity feature which you focus on in the chapter, that in the end makes you argue that the identity view or even the eliminative view that wants to get rid of mental properties altogether, why do you think that they're ultimately unsatisfactory? And we do have to maintain the reality of mental properties and especially consciousness.

Mihretu Guta:

Right, so consciousness is an umbrella term for various kinds of mental properties such as sensations or human agency or perception and the rest. So if you adopt identity thesis, basically, literally what you're saying is that, consciousness that we call, the subjective experience that we all have, the inner awareness that we each has. The fact that we can be in a position to tell how it feels like for me to have a taste of coffee or to look at a beautiful day, a sunny day or a roaring ocean sound and so on. All of that is nothing but literally neurons bumping into each other like a traffic jam hitting, there's nothing special about that. So they say that's what it's. And okay, if that's why is it that I end up actually having my own story to tell about how things feel like for me? So where am I getting that information? Why is that information available to me?

Mihretu Guta:

You see, if you ask me right now, which part of my brain is lightened up, I have no idea. I can't give you any information whatsoever. I am pretty sure that, this is true of each one of you as well. We can't introspect our physical properties. We don't know. We can't introspect our blood circulation. We can't introspect our proteins, how proteins actually get organized and synthesized. We have no idea. We don't introspect our digestion takes place and so on. All of these are physical things, but imagine, you can introspect so many things. Where is that? Okay, here's this analogy. So here's an impediment. So why I'm able to do certain things, such as introspection, but why am I not able to, let's say, be in a position to do the same thing with respect to my other physical properties? Let's say neuronal prerogative, so on.

Mihretu Guta:

So identity thesis seems to be very, very unconvincing now because if it were identical, then I would be in a position to have some insight into it. So since I don't, hence by Leibniz's, Indiscernibility of Identicals, we can actually kill the identity thesis here because I'm telling you a property that is true of my mental life, that is not true of my physical aspect of my life. Because I'm able to do X, but I'm not able to do Y, therefore, what is true of Y is not true of X. Therefore the difference is established, hence, it should follow from that, the identity thesis is not going to be true. And the same thing with eliminative thesis, Churchlands would say that both husband and wife Churchlands, they say, "Well, okay, physicalism might have some deficiencies and so on." Their proposal is, you have to deny folk psychology altogether.

Mihretu Guta:

Common sense is garbage, it doesn't really illuminate anything. Common sense doesn't unravel any mystery. We have to hope that neuroscience will give us information and help us understand the true

nature of our own experiences. So they proposal is, beliefs are not true, they're not real. Desires are not real, intentions are not real, painfulness is not real, and the list goes on and on and on and on. That is even the worst proposal, the identity proposal. So let me deny, okay, let's deny together now, we are having headache, but let's deny pretend that oh, headache is not true, it's just I'm dreaming, or something like that, good luck. So the whole experiment that we undertake to eliminate beliefs, desires and intentions, and the rest, automatically fails. So common sense is not mistaken here. So I'm not saying common sense is perfect, well, where it goes wrong, we should prune it, we should correct it, we shouldn't jettison it.

Mihretu Guta:

Science is entirely grounded in common sense, and I've written elsewhere why that's the case. And I'm ready to debate anyone who tells me that science is completely divorced from common sense. What are we talking about? Our initial gateway to any investigation is absolutely common sense. So, you see the problem now, in the Eliminative case, consciousness is not real. How about that? Okay, we've eliminated consciousness. Really? What does it even mean? So, what is happening here, to be honest with you guys, is that verbal debate. A verbal debate is just simply making the statements and then say, "Oh, okay, consciousness is not real." But you go home with your full experience, nothing has changed when it comes to your experience. Headaches, they're real, you feel hungry, you look at the beautiful day, you go like, "Wow," and you still introspect, nothing has changed, nothing.

Mihretu Guta:

What has changed is a verbal sound we make in saying, oh, okay, scholars or philosophers have no, the majority of them agree that consciousness is not real. Why does that matter? We can't bring in consciousness into reality by vote. It's not a majority thing. I, as an individual person, I'm an authority over my subjective experiences, not even my doctor, not even anyone else. I am the world-class authority. You cannot prove me wrong. If I'm having headache, I'm having headache full stop. If I'm not literally being psychotic or some egregious form of medical complications is messing up with me, where I'm hallucinating, auditory hallucination or verbal hallucination.

Mihretu Guta:

If I'm literally a normally functioning human being, a distant human being with a very distant life, if I tell you honestly that I'm having a bad headache, no amount of denying that is going to change. So what are we doing then? We're wasting our time. That's what we're doing. So forgive me for being absolutely explicit and then just not apologies being asked here, so that's how I do things. When it's really obvious, there's no point in denying things. So common sense is okay.

Angus Menuge:

All right, thank you. That's very helpful and I'd suggest that we'll take a stop here. We'll do-

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, let's do that. Yeah, this is great. My co-host, Angus Menuge, and I have been talking to Dr. Mihretu Guta, who teaches analytic philosophy at Biola University, and this has been a lot of fun. We're going to continue our conversation because we've been talking about his chapter, In What Sense is Consciousness of Property. That's a chapter in Minding the Brain. For more information about the book and to read Dr. Guta's chapter, visit mindingthebrain.org, that's mindingthebrain.org. Again, we'll continue with Dr. Guta Next time. I'm your co-host, Robert J. Marks. Until next time, 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.