Soul Searching: The History and Motivations of Substance Dualism

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Announcer:

Greetings and welcome to Mind Matters News. This week we have Dr. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, contributors to the book, Minding the Brain. Their contribution focuses on substance dualism as one explanation for the nature of the human soul. To dive into this topic deeper, here's your guest host, Pat Flynn. Enjoy.

Pat Flynn:

Okay, everybody. Welcome to the podcast. My name is Pat Flynn. I am the host of Philosophy for the People, and today we are going to discuss substance dualism. I have two experts, experts indeed, with me, Dr. Stewart Goetz, and Dr. Charles. I'm sorry, I'm going to mispronounce it right away after you just told me how.

Charles Taliaferro:

Oliver with a Toliver in this country. But as I say, internationally I go by Taliaferro.

Pat Flynn:

Okay. Yeah. Well, thank you for the assistance. It is wonderful to be joined by the two of you. Like I said, I've been familiar with your work for a while. This is the first opportunity I've had to have a conversation with you. You both contributed together to a recent volume called Minding the Brain, and your contribution is on substance dualism. So I'm excited to explore this with you, to give a brief history of the soul to explain what substance dualism is, look at some of the motivations for it, consider some of the objections against it, and whatever else comes up along the way. I'm sure we'll have a good time. So thank you both for joining me.

Stewart Goetz:

Thank you.

Pat Flynn:

So before we get into it, I'm sure it would be helpful to have just a brief introduction by way of biography for both of you. So Stewart, if you wouldn't mind, let's begin with you. I'd love to hear just how you got into philosophy in general and specifically what brought you to philosophy of Mind.

Stewart Goetz:

Yeah, like many, I probably got initially interested in philosophy through philosophy of religion. Many, many too many years ago now I had a tutor actually that convinced me one couldn't do good philosophy of religion without doing philosophy of mind and what's called philosophy of action, which is questions about freedom determinism. And rightly or wrongly, I believed him and I got very interested in philosophy of mind and questions freedom of the will. And I ended up pretty much focusing on those issues and only in recent years have gone back more towards philosophy of religion. So it was largely a

tutor who had a huge impact on me and persuaded me that I needed to do philosophy of mind and philosophy of action in order to do good philosophy of religion.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. Well, great. Sometimes you hear that when it comes to philosophy to ask one question is ultimately to ask all the questions.

Stewart Goetz:

That's right, yeah.

Pat Flynn:

You can't help but hop from one subject area to another. So great. Very good. Charles, how about you?

Charles Taliaferro:

Well, I'll make this a little personal because the reason why I got into philosophy was I had three really dominating older brothers who were constantly exploitive. And what I found in philosophy as a teenager reading Will Durant's The Story of Philosophy, a classic in the mid 20th century for beginners, was a context in which you had a non-sarcastic, non-big brother kind of exchange where people respected each other's views, the reasons for why they held them, and so on. So I got into philosophy as a refuge from what I thought was unfair domination and so on.

The reason why I got into philosophy of mind and philosophy of religion was largely late high school, early college, and then through my 36 years of teaching at St. Olaf and before that at Notre Dame and elsewhere, is I found all the central issues that really mattered to me about right, wrong, the existence of the divine, the transcendent, whether it makes sense to think about God, the relationship with God and so on. And then also environmental concerns. I taught it and published it in environmental ethics for at least 20 years or so. And so my interest in ethics, the transcendent, and really the big questions is what really kept me and keeps me in philosophy.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. Well, that's wonderful. And yes, God and soul are certainly very big important questions, ones that I try to think a lot about myself. So where I would like to begin with this conversation is actually following the structure of your article. You do a great job in this article giving a brief history of the soul, and I know you two have actually both co-authored another book called The Brief History of the Soul. I think this would be a good starting point if one of you wouldn't mind taking the lead on this. Obviously this will be the truncated version, but I think it would be helpful for the listeners to have this brief history of how thinking about the soul has developed through the history of philosophy. And then at some point that'll of course bring us to the contemporary debate between dualists and non-dualists. So yeah, how does that sound?

Stewart Goetz:

Well, in terms of just ordinary people, I think Charles would agree with me here that most people, if not all, in some sense have a very basic belief in a way that we are things or substances that are separate from our physical bodies and what we know of, at least in the Western tradition, that some of the first people really to start and think about this philosophize about this really universal belief for the Greeks. And we find that the first person of whose work we have a lot seemingly is Plato and Plato's student,

Aristotle, also contributed a work on the soul. And when Christianity comes on the scene, you get Christians who are on our telling of the story, I think, are already believers in the soul, but they access the Greek thought about the soul in order to try and explicate their own views. And in the Christian tradition, you'll have a largely followers of Plato, the platonic line of thought, which largely comes down I think through Augustine and Descartes is a general but fair way to put it.

And then the Aristotelian tradition, which its primary spokesman probably in the Christian tradition is Aquinas. When you get to Descartes, you have somebody who, although he tells us, I believe the beginning of the meditations, he's going to basically use the word mind and soul synonymously. You get this tradition that starts to think of the mind instead of the soul. Descartes makes a major move intellectually, I think up until Descartes. Most people talked about the soul took it to be something that not only was separate from the physical body, but also gave life to it. And Descartes says, "No, we should start to think of the body as a machine. It's not something that is given its life through the soul." And so coming out of Descartes, he breaks that connection between the soul and the life-giving power that the soul bestows on the body. And I think people start thinking in terms of the mind more than the soul.

And it's only, I don't know, Charles, I think fairly recently where we're seeing a resurgence among philosophers and theologians who want to talk about the soul and not think of it so much as something distinct from the mind, but it just is the mind which Descartes actually said. And just one little note here, in the Christian tradition, particularly among New Testament biblical people, scholars, they all constantly repeatedly over and over again, they'll ascribe the idea of the soul to Plato and they'll say it's a platonic idea. And there's a move among biblical people to say that, "No, this is too much of a Greek idea, and we want to return to a more Hebrew monistic type view of the self, which doesn't include a separable soul."

And this is really a bunch of, I got to be careful here when I say, this just isn't true. The idea of the soul is universal in nature. Plato didn't invent the idea of the soul. It is not a Greek idea. He philosophized about the soul and the Christian tradition accessed his thought about it. But this idea among biblical scholars that the soul is a Greek idea is thoroughly fallacious.

Charles Taliaferro:

Yeah, I agree completely with what Stewart is saying, that people make the mistake of thinking that it was Descartes or Plato who began with the concept of mind or soul or substance dualism. But really it is been supposed that, and certainly in Egypt and China and India and Sanskrit, you have a steady stream of at least an intuitive understanding of persons as something of more than the body. And in fact, the ritual practices of burying people with grave goods and so on suggest that even in Neanderthal times, there was the notion of the person as somehow more than their biological bodies. So I agree with all that. I think what might be emphasized is, and that Descartes brings out, and Augustine as well, is that substance dualism, and both in terms of common sense and in its philosophical genre does gain a lot of momentum from our sense of ourselves, our self-awareness as being primitive or basic.

It might for young children and infants be something that develops over time, but that you have a kind of primary access to knowledge of who you are as an enduring subject over time and as in the modern era, which we'll get to, which has a primacy to mind independent physical things. But really the dualist tradition is something that is anchored in a sense of self-awareness that each of us has. Also, we might note that the word dualism is a very recent term. It was first introduced in the 19th century to describe Zoroastrianism, which has a good God and a bad God. So Plato and Descartes, Augustine and so on, none of them said we're dualists. And in a way, the word dualism seems a little awkward in the sense it

sounds like there are just two things, whereas really so many thinkers, Plato, for example, believed in a myriad of plentitude of kinds of things and so on.

So dualism is, yeah, again, it also as a term, it suggests a kind of bifurcation that is to talk with us, is to talk with our bodies that we are controlling and so on. Whereas historically, whether for Plato, Augustine, this great tradition, there's an understanding, certainly Descartes held this, that you weren't in your body like a captain is in a ship. That is to see a person who's functioning properly and so on is to actually not see just a machine that a ghost is controlling. But to see an organically unified whole that's functioning as a whole, but it does involve the mind or soul as well as bodily life.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, that's really helpful and very clarifying. And I like the way that the two of you have outlined this so far. If I can just ask a few more questions just to help gain further clarity before we move specifically to considering motivations for substance dualism and common objections. When I think of sort of oftentimes Aristotle and Plato are pitted against each other or the platonic tradition and the tradition that of course I'm most familiar with, which is Aquinas's. And this itself is a part of the debate like is hylomorphism a form of dualism or is it not? And I mean, we can get into that a little bit, but when I think of Aristotle, he's got this sort of wider metaphysical system of hylomorphism, like matter formism, right? And he's not really interested in debates in philosophy of mind that we're having. He's interested in how do we make sense of change and stuff like that, and then he offers his different principles of how we make sense of how things remain the same, even though they undergo contingent modifications and stuff like that.

And then of course, Aquinas adopts that and synthesizes it with Christian thought and offers different motivations for it, and even goes beyond Aristotle and argues that there's an aspect of us concerning intellect specifically that actually would not suffer from decomposition like the rest of our body would. So he thinks it can be extended to the immortality of the human person philosophically as well. So I guess that'd be my first question for the two of you. Where does Hylomorphism fall for both of you? Do you see Aristotle and Aquinas being dualists, or do you not classify them as Dualists? Stewart, maybe we'll start with you. It's a tough question. I know. No matter where you land on this, you're going to get people objecting. So I didn't say you had pretty easy one.

Stewart Goetz:

I'll make no friends in answering this question that make many enemies. I would be inclined to myself think of Aquinas as what we would today call a substance dualist, although I'm going to get vehement protests in opposition to that. But it seems to me that he does recognize the existence of the soul after death and has the idea of the resurrection of the body. And so there's some kind of, I think, intermediate state there. And it's pretty simple terms here, Pat. I just think that that would be the idea of a soul. But you're going to have people like Eleanor Stump that'll just say, "No, no, no, no, it's not." But those are just very technical debates. For my purposes, I would lump Aquinas in with substance dualists.

Charles Taliaferro:

Yeah, I'm agreeing with Stewart, especially when Aquinas thinks of the soul as enduring the decomposition of the body. However, Aquinas sometimes I think he does say the soul is not myself, however, it is the conduit or the receptor of personal identity is what makes you self-same and to be resurrected and the like. But Aristotle, you're right, he wasn't primarily concerned with philosophy of religion and the like. He does have a notion though of the intellect, which does admit of some kind of a

hint or suggestion of something indestructible. But you do see historically among Aristotelians, especially among the Arabs and well Persians or Iranians thinkers, Al-Farabi, Avicenna and so on, for those heavily influenced by Aristotle, there is a real hesitancy about affirming the individual identity of persons after death.

Now, in Islam, Sunni and Shia, they do believe in an individual dynamic afterlife and the like. But the Aristotelian framework of Hylomorphism does challenge that. Now, I would say today some Hylomorphists self-described are prepared to consider themselves dualists, like J.P. Moreland, for example, subscribes to a version of Hylomorphism. My own inclination is to think that he's not necessarily wrong. I'm not Humpty Dumpty like you control the meaning of the words, but I do think that it's perhaps one of the way Moreland and some other contemporary Thomas are trying to insist on the integrity of the mind-body relationship, that it's not this radical bifurcation, but we should treat each other in a holistic way.

Pat Flynn:

Yes.

Charles Taliaferro:

But fundamentally I'm with Stew, and so we may be public enemy number one and two.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, well you might be able to count me as number three there because I'm inclined to go with you. I think one of the important things to note here is, yes, for Aquinas the soul is the form of the body. It's that sort of organizing principle. And sometimes when people think of substance dualism, and the way you describe Descartes' position, at least the popular understanding of it is not that. It is sort of still the ghost in the machine idea, like we have two fundamentally different things and one sort of inhabits and controls the other, but there's not that deeper unity for Aquinas's theory, as I understand it, has really distinct principles, but these principles are deeply interpenetrating and irreducible to one another.

But I'm with you in the sense that when I think about it, and many people following Aquinas do classify it as dualism. And I'm glad you brought up Dr. Moreland. He of course is a contributor to the Mining the Brain volume, and I just got his other new one on the substance of consciousness, which is very good as well. So, sorry, kind of a technical, in the weeds dispute there, but I think it's important for this conversation, because whatever we say going forward, I guess I'm curious how much of the motivations for substance dualism you think would apply to thinkers in the broadly Aristotelian camp, if that makes sense?

Stewart Goetz:

Yeah. Well, just to finish up, when I try to think about this stuff, if you look at it from the perspective of a naturalist in today's terms, an atheist, if they were to look at Thomism, it seems to me they would regard this debate between Thomas and Descartes or whatever, they would buy very much this kind of internal dispute that people on the outside I think would clearly see Thomism here, Aquinas as dualistic in nature. So it's an intramural debate at that point to them, and they would be opposed to both views because there's something that survives the death of the body and that's dualism to these people.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, great. Okay, so now that we have that brief but somewhat complicated history of the soul on the table, and these debates are tough, as all debates in philosophy are. Help convince us of substance dualism in the broad sense. What sort of arguments, what sort of motivations, and we already hinted at one, is that it seems that most of us just have these very strong call them dualistic seemings. It just seems like this is the common sense way that we just experience that the world and really ourselves is presented to us, but either expanding upon that or going beyond that, let's now consider some of the arguments and reasons that you think point in the direction of dualism if you wouldn't mind. Whoever wants to take that first. Go ahead.

Stewart Goetz:

I've been going first here, so I'll let Charles go first.

Pat Flynn:

Well, I think we're-

Stewart Goetz:

I'm fair, Charles. I'm fair.

Charles Taliaferro:

Okay. Well, I think we're, Stu and I are aligned is in believing in the primacy of self-awareness of ourselves as substantial beings over time. And that this stands way over against a very late 19th century, but mostly 20th century, early 21st century materialist views that we are more convinced of the reality and the identity of physical bodies than we are of the mind or the soul. The latter seems so hopelessly abstract, but really our sense, and I think the sense of many of us is that really it's self-awareness or the first-person point of view that has primacy over the third-person point of view. If somebody says to me, "Well, look what makes you this animal rather than that animal," I wouldn't know what this or that refers to unless I had an awareness of myself as a subject over time. That animal means simply the animal that the speaker is drawing attention to and so on.

So our sense of our understanding of ourselves existing over time, which is strict, we may undergo all kinds of amnesia and visual agnosia, we lose our sense of the familiarity of objects around us, but really we understand what it is for Pat Charles to exist over time. But the existence of our bodies are something quite different in the sense that it is we're gaining and losing cellular parts all the time. It is, as one philosopher, Joseph Butler said, it's existing over time in an imperfect fashion as an aggregate or as a bundle that has detachable parts and is being renewed and so on. Whereas self-identity seems in a technical sense to be simple, that it's just not composed of detachable parts. Yes, you may talk about different aspects of your identity and the dreams you have versus the desires you have and different aspects, but it's different aspects of the self-same person.

Now I put a little more stock in Descartes' original argument for mind-body dualism. He does ground his understanding of the self in self-awareness. The famous Cogito backed up by his theistic argument, giving him confidence in his cognition. But he believes, and this is a recent argument of Richard Swinburne's as well, that it is conceivable whether it happens or not, that persons may survive the death of their bodies or their dissolution, their non-existence, body switching reincarnation and so on. All of these persistence conditions seem radically different from our concept of what it is to be a body, which is why, going back to what I was saying earlier, the reason why some people think that dualism goes all the way back is because of belief in that a person could persist even after the biological decomposition of their body. And this indicates something that there's more to it.

And I find actually my students and well and others too, to differ on this, but I always find it disturbing when a relative friend parent dies and they say, we're going to bury Aunt Martha tonight. And I go, "Well, is she dead?" I always think, or this is probably not good, sorry, but when my mother died and the morticians, I called in at the funeral home and they said, "Well, we have your mother here." And I said, "Well put her on the phone." And my feeling is no, they don't have my mother, they have her corpse or remains or body. And this is just a fundamental and haunting realization.

I've been at present with the death of maybe four people now and counting. And we have to ask, is it an accidental change or a substantial change? And if it's an accidental change, well the person is still there, their body just has died just as a chicken would still be there after you've killed it and so on. The chicken is still there, it's in the refrigerator. But really with persons, I think we are left to believe or led to believe intuitively and perhaps our grasp of persistence conditions that there's more to us than our bodies. And so I think that that will remain a very enduring and deep-seated intuitive grasp of our identity as beings that are more than our bodies.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, it's interesting, if I can just chime in real quick, how there are certain thinkers, more on the materialist and strongly reductive side that will largely agree with everything you just said, Charles, but they'll just ride the train of thought in the opposite direction and essentially bite all the bullets that I personally would never know how to bite. You think of these Eliminativists of saying, "Yeah, you swap out the tire in the car, it's not the same car. You swap out my cellular constituents, it's not the same person." I'm not the same person I was five minutes ago, two seconds ago, whatever it was. I mean, minimally, that doesn't seem right. But I think it also would invite a great many other catastrophic philosophical problems. I mean, how do you even hold a line of reasoning If you don't have some sort of enduring stable subject of these-

Charles Taliaferro:

That's what I think.

Pat Flynn:

Intervals of time.

Charles Taliaferro:

That's what I think. I believe that our understanding of ourselves is not simply how we exist at an instant. In fact, I don't think we could. An instant is an infinitesimal rather that is a non-interval, you can't even think during an instant. What I would do with students is I say, you can't even say the word avocado in an instant. Something I can say very fast. Avocado. Avocado.

Pat Flynn:

Which I had for breakfast, by the way.

Charles Taliaferro:

Excellent. But it really, that's an interval. To even follow this sentence, you would have to be the self same person who began hearing the sentence as this sentence as who hears the end of it. So diachronic identity, I think is the deliverance of our self-aware experience. And so the idea, and some have suggested this, that you only exist momentarily. Well, one is you can't exist for just an instant because

that takes up no time whatsoever. But secondly, you have to exist for intervals in order to think, reflect, act, make motion, see things and so on. The idea that you could have caught worried about there could be undetectable substitutability of the self is somewhat a preposterous or science fictionish because the idea that the self same thinker would be changed.

Who heard the sentence, the cat is on the mat. Who heard the sentence, the, and then you have a new person think the word cat and so it borders on the preposterous. So our sense is, or at least my sense, but I think Stu and I share this, is that our understanding of ourselves as temporal subjects over time, so we don't accept the persons are temporal parts like a week made up of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday and so on. We believe it's the self same person who endures over time. And to say that I only exist for four minutes or five minutes and I'm different, it really begs some questions that might be harmless, but when it gets down to matters of moral responsibility or accountability and our understanding of free will and so on becomes very vexing.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, yeah. Well that's really helpful. Thank you for that, Charles. And of course, if some of these implications from the other side are right, then I guess I'm off the hook for my promises, because it wouldn't be the same person who made those promises five minutes ago, 10 minutes ago. So you can quickly see how it would invite certain moral situations that many of us, again would think are absurd. And then I think that's a lot of the philosophical game is you try to show the costs of certain position and you try to keep increasing and raising the costs. Although I am quite impressed with how certain thinkers, no matter how high the costs may be, they just keep trying to embrace them. I don't know what to do with it at a certain point, but those are some very good... Yeah, go ahead Charles.

Charles Taliaferro:

Well, I'll say something, but then I think I'm hogging the mic. I want Stu to jump in here. But I will say two things. One is Anthony O'Hare and some other philosophers have pointed out how one way to make a reputation is by making your moves bolder and more and more outrageous. And Gilbert Ryle famously said Meinongianism, this is the philosophy of Meinong, which was that there could be some realm between being and nothingness. And Ryle said famously, if Meinongianism isn't dead, nothing is. Well, it's back. And just even the idea that you can exist for only four minutes, Galen Strawson, very famous philosopher, son of Peter Strawson, he actually held that view for some months. He then changed.

But it really, you get a lot of attention, and I'd have to say William Liken is somewhat right about this, that sometimes there's philosophical, it can be fruitful to maintain very bold conditions, radical skepticism, push it as far as you can, and this way you can discover certain natural limits. You know, in terms of... Whitehead has said a philosophy often attaches a price tag to certain beliefs. So you can go with that belief, but it's going to come with a price tag. And when does that price going to be too big? Over to Stewart or to Pat.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. Great. No, Stewart, definitely chime in here and expand however you like.

Stewart Goetz:

I won't say too much here. I just think that for people who are interested in this topic, one of the best ways is to get a feel for it, is to pick up different introductory texts in the philosophy of mind. And in my experience over the years, Charles can correct me if I'm wrong, but just about every introductory text I would ever consider for teaching the philosophy of mind, it always started out with substance dualism.

In other words, those who write about this stuff, the default position initially is always substance dualism. There's the self and then there's the body. And so even those were in "professional philosophy" today who write about this stuff. They concede from the get-go that everybody generally has a sense of the self as something distinct from its physical body. They write their textbooks that way. They think there's a problem with the view. And thereby what you have to do is consider their objections to the view.

So I think even they will admit, they start out with substance dualists, self-body beliefs. They are the intuitive beliefs. But they go on then to say, but they can't be right. There's a problem with them. So even those who disagree with substance dualism of the self-soul body distinction, which in the profession for a long time now has been the majority view, the views just got to be wrong. But even they will concede, it's intuitively right. But there are problems with it. And you know, Charles, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I know, and years I taught philosophy of mind, new books would come out on the topic, but I can't right now think of a one of them that didn't start with substance dualism.

Charles Taliaferro:

Yeah, I agree completely with you Stu and when I was at visiting scholar at MIU and substance dualism was immediately dismissed in the first lecture and the professor said, "Look, I'll give you proof it's false. Just after class you drink quite a bit of alcohol and you'll eventually go unconscious. This proves substance dualism can't be true." I'm going, "What?" I mean, the idea that causal interaction between thoughts, actions, intentions, feelings, sensations, nerve endings, this is the most basic constitutional part of our ordinary ways of living and experience. Eating properly, having sex, writing books, and whatever activity you're involved in, you have to assume on a pragmatic level your intentions and desires are impacting the world. John Searle once said, "If you're going to have a revolution, someone's going to have to bring the molecules." In other words, if you're going to explain a revolution, whether it's in Iran or Moscow or wherever, you can't do it by just molecular biology. You're going to have to get into desires and intentions and beliefs and manifestos. And Stu has an excellent critique of this philosopher, Alexander Rosenberg.

Pat Flynn:

I was going to bring him up as one of those eliminativists.

Charles Taliaferro:

Please. Well, why don't you bring him up and we'll see what Stu-

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, let me comment because you bring up an excellent point, Charles, and this has always bothered me. I'm somebody who was on the naturalistic side for a while and then now I'm not. I'm a very religious person now. I'm very much attracted to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, but I-

Stewart Goetz:

I could tell by your Iron Man poster there.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. But I should probably change that. But anyways, you brought up a really important point. There's this sort of air, and I don't want to say this is just on one side, but it is strong, and I experienced it when I

was doing my undergrad of this absolutely arrogant, chronological condescension towards thinkers of the past. It's like, okay, you drink some booze, you get a little fuzzy. And this refutes Aristotle, somehow, maybe he was wrong about some things, but the man, he wasn't an idiot. Like they always knew if you mess with the body, you get different qualitative experience. They didn't have all the strong correlative mappings that we have with neuroscience, but that's offering specifications of something that people always generally knew. You hit somebody over the head, their experience is very different.

So what on earth is going on here? So, sorry, that's just a bit of a rant over what you said, Charles, and of course there are more sophisticated arguments against dualism. We'll get to that. But I always want to just address that one just with I guess the tone of annoyance. Yeah, go ahead. Yep.

Charles Taliaferro:

Oh, I just had to add a footnote that Aristotle does, if you look at the complete works of Aristotle by Jonathan-

Stewart Goetz:

Barnes.

Charles Taliaferro:

Oh, okay. Yeah. Anyway, he does have a solution for hangovers. He makes it, I think, eating cabbage is very good for that.

Pat Flynn:

So it's a testable hypothesis. Yeah. Sorry, you wanted to bring up Rosenberg. And Rosenberg is a thinker. Actually, I like him a lot. I like him a lot. He's provocative, he's interesting. And he's a guy that I think is just trying to like grab his fellow naturalists and he's like, "It's time to commit fellas." You know what I mean? We have this certain epistemic starting point, let's follow this out right on through to its inevitable, logical end. And he's a nihilist, he's a moral nihilist, he's an eliminativist, and he is one of these guys that if you read his work, he will just keep accepting every cost that you lay out to him. Yeah. And I'm not an enduring self. Well that makes meaning hard. Well, there is no meaning. There is no meaning in this whole book that I wrote.

And I don't know what to do, honestly, once you get to it with a thinker like that or a position like that. I think it's deeply self-undermining. I don't think that it's sustainable, but that's one of those examples of somebody who I think, he's obviously not a stupid guy. He's very intelligent and I think that he's helpful in actually trying to run, I think a ferocious reductio of a certain starting point, which I think should cause somebody to go around and question and revise that starting point. But rather he just seems to just want to ride it out all the way through. So I like Rosenberg and I like the work that he does. I disagree with it deeply, but I think it's important. So yeah, sorry. Please mention whatever you were going to say about that.

Charles Taliaferro:

Sty, why don't you go, because you've written on him in particular.

Stewart Goetz:

Well, in some way I think we should be thankful for Alex Rosenberg's that are out there that actually explain the view that they hold and they take it seriously. And I think when you have people like that

articulating their view and following it out to its reasonable conclusions, you just see what the view really is. And so I've written that Rosenberg, the implication of his view is he doesn't write his books for purposes. And this just seems absolutely crazy. But, so on the one hand, I'm critical of Rosenberg, but I actually think we should be grateful for him. He's honest, and this is the implication of the view. And so what I look for in Rosenberg is in addition to, is actually taking this stuff seriously, the way he seemingly does, is I want to know from him what's wrong with my view and what's the argument?

Because this is where you end up. We should go back and take a look at what's wrong with the intuitively plausible view. And I've given talks, lectures on Rosenberg and my audience, the audience is always, "This guy actually believes this stuff." I mean, that's always the reaction. They can't. "He takes this seriously." And I say, "Yeah," but in a way that's good for us because we now have laid out for us by someone who believes it, what the implications of it are and what we really want to know from this person, at least I do, what's wrong with my view. It seems so intuitively plausible, a commonsensical. Yeah.

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 a 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. 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.

So I think that Rosenberg's primary motivation with many others is this 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 the people who believe in God or the soul think you can explain, but we can do it without all the extra commitments. And we can do it entirely through the proven, reliable, predictable enterprise of science. And then I think this sets up a pretty interesting problem. I mean, aside from of course, just how do you get the commitment of scientism off the ground with all the issues that that faces independently, but okay, just granted.

Then I think you have one, and I want to get both of your thoughts on this, one of two ways that you can go, you can either keep with the hardball physicalism and like try and hit those virtues that are supposedly in favor of your worldview, but it's ultimately going to be fantastically absurd. You're going to have these eliminated this positions. You're not going to really explain things, you're just going to eliminate them, like this doesn't really fit, 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, so you really don't explain anything if I'm being frank, and you have this long string of reductions to be absurd, or you're forced with putting things into your worldview that clearly don't fit with the scientistic epistemology 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, it's like 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. 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 cool 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, let's just in an inadequate position to espouse in a way, we want to know what the data are that 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 describe that are generally people who just deny the data, and so you're not going to get very far about in a discussion with these people because you can't even agree on the data. No, 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 Stu observes and when Pat's observing is, I agree a hundred percent with Stu on, it's so good that people like Alex Rosenberg are writing what they're writing. I would say I have engaged his work somewhat. Someone I've engaged more is Daniel Denham, simply because it's, well, he wants both. And the 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 the grapefruit tastes." Yes, even, I mean, 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 self as the center for gravitational narratives and so on. 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 Stu is saying, that if the data or datum or data what 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 do a dualist, or let's go a eliminative. And where he is good, I think in many ways is trying to nudge the non-reductive materialist into either well, dualism or eliminatism. 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 grating. And he has pictures of them, so you believe the person is behind the eyes somewhere. And actually that picture, even though misleading and a caricature as bad as his early caricatures of 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 in 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 these 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, even 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 like, 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 alien 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, in connection with a broadly scientific epistemology. And it seems like we've just exploded all that. 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 this big fat thing with even more brute facts floating around, and the question marks have just 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 Stitch, a philosophy retreat, philosophies departments from St. Louis and Carlton. And honestly, his book, Beyond Belief, just come out. He actually, this is a true story, he recalled the book cover because the book cover, it says, "Stephen Stitch 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 Churchland, 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, Stitch literally said to me that in California, somebody who just read his book said, "I realized 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 Eemeren 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."

And so Stitch 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 on 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. You know, there's some pretty famous ones, causal interaction objections, stuff like that. So perhaps I...

We already mentioned one, which is, do stuff to the body affects affect the mind. 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 in God's existence at least, science is used as the reason why these things just aren't credible. And so that what one has to ask then from these people who want to use science as the 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 a 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 spirit, spooks, souls, gods or whatever are intervening in the scientific experiment and causing physical events to occur.

And 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 when what 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 in no way requires that you assume it universally so that the mental could 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 and 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 Stu. 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, we're 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.

So what happened was the at least temporary or provisional bracketing of the mind in the study of nature eventually became in the 19 hundreds and later as well through the 19 hundreds, eventually became like, well, as JJC 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 I pictured 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 go, George and Ringo. Well, we're going to assume Peter, Paul and Mary were, so it can be cumulative, but fundamentally we know about correlations of 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 an identity of the mental and physical? And I would say no. So cases like that, 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, like if you're talking about the sun, yeah, I mean kinetic energy. But if you're talking about the experience of warmth, is that mean kinetic energy may be 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 Stu 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, "ell, 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. So anyway, I think Stu was a hundred percent 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 that... To explain the existence of science, you have to invoke a mental explanation.

Charles Taliaferro:

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 with that. That's sort of the old, 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 Stewart's. He did one on substance dualism and Christian theology. It 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 that I-

Stewart Goetz:

Wrote.

Charles Taliaferro:

Like on Nancy Murphy, I said, "See the important work that Stewart gets," 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:

Well, I did, I just finished an article on the soul and science and the Bible basically. Just had a book come out on CS Lewis's view of higher education and higher ed is a huge topic right now. And I've become very interested in Lewis in the last 15, 20 years of my life. Never read much CS 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 30 some years, I haven't got anything on the burner right now. It's a nice position to be in for a while hopefully. But, so yeah, that's where I am right now.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. 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 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:

This has been Mind Matters News. 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.