

Which Theory of Mind Best Explains Reality? More with Dr. J.P. Moreland

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Announcer:

Greetings, and welcome to Mind Matters News. This week we're continuing our conversation with Pat Flynn and JP Moreland about Philosophy of Mind. This is the second part of this interview, so if you haven't listened to the first, I'd encourage you to do so. Otherwise, here's your host for today, Pat Flynn.

Pat Flynn:

Thank you for that, JP. Now, to maybe show how some of the different positions in metaphysics and in mereology, and mereology for people who are unfamiliar with that is the study of parts and holes of composition, play into different positions and philosophy of mind, and this might be an opportunity to get into some of the arguments you present for the soul, I think it's important for people to realize that if somebody is a physicalist, yeah, they sort of think that reality is either totally amorphous, which I confess to not being able to make any sense of that, or that the only sorts of substances are these very primitive physical simpes, right?

JP Moreland:

Yes.

Pat Flynn:

Right?

JP Moreland:

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

Pat Flynn:

And that they somehow aggregate up to larger composites that have no substantial identity of their own, and they hold to a position that's known as sort of miriologial essentialism, right?

JP Moreland:

Yes, yes.

Pat Flynn:

Where any of these aggregates, you might call them, depend entirely upon the parts, that if the parts are swapped out or lost, and then that thing is no longer that particular thing anymore.

JP Moreland:

That's right. Well, yes, yes. Go ahead, Pat.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, and I was going to say, once you think that through, that has really weird implications because you think that you were a thing that endures over time, yet our parts are constantly being swapped out. Isn't that right?

JP Moreland:

Well, that's right.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, so why don't you build that out for us and maybe spell out some of the implications of these positions, now segueing into philosophy of mind, if you don't mind.

JP Moreland:

Yes, of course. Well, there is a world picture that many call the scientific image, and it is called the Marialogical Hierarchy, and what that means is when we're talking about individual things, at the bottom are what we might call atomic samples, and then we end up having electrons and then atoms, and then at the next level we might have compounds. Then, the next, higher level we might have, let's say, cells, and you go up with organisms and so on, but the point that is important about this is that the ordinary holes that we see, including living organisms, are collections of what are called separable parts, and that means these are parts that can exist outside the hole, like a leg of a chair. You can take that chair leg off and sit it over there, and it's still itself.

So, the parts, as you pointed out, are prior to the hole, and the hole just is a certain structural collection of parts, separable parts. Now, the problem, there are many problems with that, and one of them, though, is how could an aggregate like that, if that's what we are, maintain its strict identity through change? The answer turns out to be, no, it's very hard to make a case for that, because if I had a pile of lumber in my backyard and there were five boards, and I took one off and I put another board in there, it wouldn't be the same pile. Now, suppose I gave structure to it and I nailed them together, the five boards in a certain shape. Well, if I took one of the boards off and threw the nails away, and I put, let's say, frozen green jello in there and I nailed it to the pile, it wouldn't be the same pile because it's got different parts.

Now, it doesn't matter if there's only five entities or if there're trillions. The same principle applies, that we are collections of parts, such that if you gain and lose parts, there's no grounding for you to literally be the same thing over time. Now, if that's true, then there's a problem with things like reasoning, because if I reason and say, "Well, if P, then Q, it's raining, and then it's wet and P, it's raining, therefore Q, it's wet," but you see there are two premises if P, then Q and P, and then a conclusion. Now, if one self, instantaneous self, where the parts of the homosapien were there at that time, attended to if P and Q, and then parts change underwent, so there would be another instantaneous self that attended to the second premise, P, and another instantaneous self attended to the conclusion Q, there would be no reasoning. You would've three different selves entertaining one proposition, and that's all.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, right. Nothing to hold the chain together, right?

JP Moreland:

There you go. In order to reason, you have to have the same self endure the process of deliberation and reasoning. This becomes, obviously, a pretty big problem, so if we are our brains, or if we are animals or

biological organisms, just about everybody agrees that biological living things have a deeper kind of unity than purely physical objects, but they don't have an account for it, because what they really need is something to inform and to be ontologically prior to those parts, and so let's go to that direction now. There's another kind of whole and part that is called the substance, and that goes all the way back to Aristotle, and we have to distinguish a substance from stuff. If I said, "Mary had a little lamb," if I'm talking about a substance, I could ask the question, "Well, where is the little fella? How long have you had him? Has he been sheared yet?" That would mean lamb would be referring to a particular substance. I'll define that in a minute.

But if we said, "Mary had a little lamb," and somebody said, "Well, how much did you eat?"

"Oh. Eight ounces."

Now you're dealing with stuffs, because stuffs are what you might call just a continuous amount of, all you can say is mass or some other kind of stuff. I can't use another term, really, but it comes to greater or lesser degrees than where you divide. It's arbitrary. A substance is an individual, unified thing that has properties. It is not had by anything more basic, and it has a deep unity at a point in time that's called synchronic unity, and it has diachronic unity through time in that it retains literal sameness. Even if your memories come and go or your body parts come and go, you can literally undergo change, accidental change. I can't lose my humanness and still be the same thing. I'd pop out of existence, so substances are holes that are prior to their parts. Now, the interesting thing is that the parts of a substance are what are called inseparable parts or modes. Now, let me explain. Aristotle, Thomas, and all those in that tradition made one important point that was foundational to their whole project, and it was that no substance has other substances as proper parts.

Pat Flynn:

Yes, right.

JP Moreland:

Now, why not? Well, if a substance has other substances as parts, it loses its unity and it becomes an aggregate, so it doesn't have the kind of unity needed to sustain it through change and so on. The kind of parts that substances have, like organisms are the classic example of a substance, would be that I have different faculties or modes. So, there's a thing called a thought, and let's suppose that you and I have the same thought, but what's same is the content of the thought. We're both thinking that snow is white, and that would be what I would call a universal, propositional content or semantic content to my thought, and it would be the same for the two of us that, by the way, that's why we can communicate to one another.

But my having of that thought is a particular, and your having of the thought is a particular, and I could not have your having of the thought, and you couldn't have my having of the thought. Now, having of the thought is a mode of me. It modifies me, so an inseparable part depends upon the whole for its existence and nature, but the whole does not depend upon it for its existence and nature, so the whole substance, which we can talk about what I take that to be, is ontologically, not temporarily ontologically, prior to its parts in that it grounds their nature and existence. That's why it has a unity to it that aggregates don't, because those parts, if they're taken out of the substance, lose their nature and identity, and they don't exist anymore. Aristotle said a severed hand is no longer a hand, and you'll find that out in a few weeks because you'll see that it's an aggregate and it'll start decaying.

Pat Flynn:

Right, yeah.

JP Moreland:

Does that help?

Pat Flynn:

No. It's very helpful, and I want to just play on these points a little bit, because I think they're very important. In fact, there's a term for this position. It's sort of a reverse myriological. Essentialism, right?

JP Moreland:

Very nice, very nice.

Pat Flynn:

Where my cells are completely dependent upon me, right? They couldn't be the cells of anybody else.

JP Moreland:

That's exactly right.

Pat Flynn:

And that might seem a little bit weird, but it actually seems to make a lot better sense of what goes on in the world, because it's very clear that I think I'm a substance. I think I'm a good candidate for that, a very tightly unified entity, right?

JP Moreland:

Absolutely.

Pat Flynn:

Where there's a clear organization, right?

JP Moreland:

Yes.

Pat Flynn:

A top-down sort of organization, directing the interplay of all the various, extremely intricate processes that go on in my body, right? An Aristotelianism seems to be able to make a very good amount of sense of this, where a physicalism does not. Now, I want to get your take on this, because sometimes Aristotelians will try to answer the question of, "Well, when have we identified a real substance rather than a mere heap or an aggregate?" I think I think the most promising is what you've already said, when there seems to be a clear priority of the whole over the parts.

JP Moreland:

Right, right.

Pat Flynn:

Others say that there's other instances where there seems to be system-level properties that are not reducible to the parts as well, and maybe those things just genuinely coincide in most cases. Think of water and H₂O or something like that.

JP Moreland:

Right, right.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. I don't know if you have any thoughts on that, but yeah, I mean this seems to make a lot of good sense, especially when it comes to biological reality, but of course the Aristotelian will say that, "Yeah. Substances really do go all the way down, because even when you have heaps or things like that, they themselves are comprised of substances, but they are not a single tightly unified substance like you said." In fact, that brings me up a question. This is sometimes a point of contention among people who hold to an Aristotelian view or Hylomorphic view, is being called dualist for the reason that you just said, that something can only have one substance. So there's not two substances at play here, right?

JP Moreland:

Right, right.

Pat Flynn:

There might be two constitutive principles or elements or what we want to call them, but there's not two distinct substances that are somehow-

JP Moreland:

That's right. That would be-

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, so maybe you could just speak to that a little bit. It's a bit more subtle than that, isn't it?

JP Moreland:

It is, that's right. Descartes would be someone who held that. Substance dualism came to be associated with the view that there are two substances that compose us, and so I'm a plurality of body and soul as different substances. Now, my particular view has a very nice way of avoiding that, and that is to bring in the distinction between a kind of distinction where if A is distinct from B, then A could exist without B, but B can't exist without A. Now, they're not the same thing, but there is a dependency relation of one on the other. So in my view, I am identical to a soul. That means if there's an afterlife, which I think it's beyond reasonable doubt there is, I don't leave my body behind. I leave a corpse behind, and I, as a soul, then am able to continue to function without the body, though it's not natural and I would be better off if I were re-embodied at some point.

Pat Flynn:

Right.

JP Moreland:

So, in this particular view, then if I am identical to a soul, then I am humanness, or I would call it human personhood, the nexus of what's called exemplification, properties are exemplified by things. If the ball is red, then it exemplifies redness, and then something that might be called, Swinburne calls it a primitive this, I call it a bare particular, but it doesn't matter what it is, as a pure individuator, meaning that it is what is responsible for making humanness Tom, this particular human, instead of Joe, and he would have his own primitive thisness. Now, let's just grant, for the sake of argument, that I'm identical to human personhood, exemplified and tied to something that individuates me and makes me particular. Okay. Now, I think that Aristotle and the late medieval guys, their notion of an essence or nature, which is the kind of thing I am, is really, really close to the contemporary concept of information.

I mean, I'm not an expert in the information, but I've read some about it. I thought to myself, "Geez. This is what Aristotle was talking about." The information is likely non-physical. It seems to be present to the organism as a whole, and it seems to be in each part, which allows it to tell this part of the organism grow toenails and another part to grow eyeballs, but something is orchestrating this. In my view, I'm going to call it the information or instructions for building a body, are latent within the soul, so when the body develops, it is being directed by. It's because the soul brings with it an individuated essence that then begins. It's like a blueprint. It begins to direct biochemical processes and other things, teleologically towards an end of having certain organs that will allow me to see, and others that allow me to hear and so on, and to eat food. The body is then developed in order to have the proper functioning entities that comport with what the soul needs to do what it does. Now, this looks to me like what people are saying information does.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. It's really interesting. I remember James Ross, in his book, *Thought and World*, he seems to have a very similar thought and stantiable software is kind of what, because he's defending a real essentialism, right?

JP Moreland:

Yeah. Now, who is that again?

Pat Flynn:

James Ross. Remember him?

JP Moreland:

Oh. Yeah.

Pat Flynn:

He was at University of Penn for many years.

JP Moreland:

Yes.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. It was sort of a contemporary Thomist-y type, but not, type of guy, right?

JP Moreland:

Yeah, right.

Pat Flynn:

That's what I mean. Yeah.

JP Moreland:

They count. They count.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, yeah. But yeah, what you're saying just reminded me of almost exactly how he articulates it, so I think that there's a good group of thinkers who think that that's right.

JP Moreland:

Right.

Pat Flynn:

Now, you're bringing up something that I think is also worth distinguishing again, is that for the position you're articulating, soul versus mind, sometimes these are used interchangeably, but you want to make sure that these are carefully distinguished in your positions. Maybe that's worth speaking about just a little bit as well.

JP Moreland:

Yeah, right. Thank you for asking that, Pat. Descartes said, "The soul is exhausted by mindedness, so we are minds," and what he meant by that is that the properties that make us what we are are all and only properties of consciousness. I am a thinking thing. Descartes meant by "thinking," any kind of state of consciousness, so I could be a sensing or a desiring thing and so on. But now, in my view, we have to be more subtle, and I think that we can do that, because I believe the soul is simple, but it is not simple in some ways, but it is simple in other ways. Let me explain what I mean. Within our souls, we have a vast arrangement of what we might call powers or capacities to do things. I have the powers to see red and green and yellow and so on if I'm not defective.

I have auditory powers to hear the note C and B flat. I have powers of feel. I can feel roughness and smoothness and so on, and I have the powers to reason and have thoughts and beliefs. So, these are not just a random collection of powers that have no pattern to them. Think of a university which was built after the concept of the soul. We have chemistry professors, art professors, and so on, but they're not just on campus scattered about, so that you walk to a part of campus and you might run into seven different disciplines in one, small hallway. No, they're broken down into what we call departments, and those departments contain all of the professors that have something in common. They're chemists and so on. Now, if we have all of the powers of sight that we have, are a part of a faculty called the visual faculty.

A faculty is a, I hope this isn't getting too technical here, but it is a dependent part of the soul, which contains a naturally resembling group of capacities or powers. So, in my visual faculty would be my capacity to see red, yellow, and green. My five sensory faculties would be just modes of the soul, modifications of the soul, which is ontologically prior. Those faculties would contain, like a chest of drawers, one has socks, the other T-shirts, underwear, sweaters, each faculty would have a group of just resembling powers. Then, my mind, in my view, has three kinds of powers. One is the power to have

thoughts. The second is the power to have beliefs, and the third is the power to engage in reasoning and see rational connections between or among your thoughts and beliefs, and so the mind then, for me, would be a faculty of the soul. It would not be the same thing as the soul, and so I see it as it's metaphysically dependent on the soul for its existence, and it contains the powers of thought, belief, rationality, and reasoning.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, yeah. Great. That's a very helpful distinction, and again, it's interesting. I know we haven't gotten into too many direct arguments for the soul-

JP Moreland:

Sure.

Pat Flynn:

But in a sense, I think the things that we're discussing right now are extremely important in their own right. I mean, as soon as you sign on to a sort of physicalist program, I think you just lose so much data. I mean, I think you lose the ability to identify familiar everyday objects.

JP Moreland:

Oh, yeah.

Pat Flynn:

The ability to endure yourself. I think you lose some traditional things too, like the ability to make sense of the one in the many, right? The traditional, philosophical problem of the one in the many, and I just want to keep emphasizing that there's major implications in philosophy of mine as well, but the problems are much deeper and further back for the physicalist, to be sure, right? It's not just in philosophy. Sometimes you think that the physicalist has everything taken care of, and they'll just get consciousness. I want to say, "No way. These guys-"

JP Moreland:

Yeah. That's right.

Pat Flynn:

"They don't have anything taken care of," right?

JP Moreland:

Yeah. Absolutely. Well, yeah. You're right. Yeah. What about mathematic and logic? Those aren't empirically verifiable. In fact, science presupposes those, and we have the power, in our souls, to be aware of the laws of and mathematics. Well, what kind of a power is that? Is it a bunch of neurons firing together? Give me a break. I mean, that's just ridiculous.

Pat Flynn:

And just speaking of science too, science itself seems to suppose a real essential is a might. We think that there's a nature of things that we study, that has various predictable dispositions and behaviors

that we can then capture in the language of mathematics, right? But what are the laws of nature, if not just the laws of the nature of things at the end of the day, right?

JP Moreland:

You bet. I am with you 100% on that. Obviously, what they're trying to give us when they study, let's say, the electron is they want to give us the real nature of the thing. They don't want to give us what it might accidentally have because it's a part of this molecule. They're trying to tell us what kind of thing the thing is, and that's what they're after if they're realists, and I am with you 100% on that, Pat.

Announcer:

That's it for now. Join us again next week for JP Moreland's Arguments for The Soul with Pat Flynn. Until then, be of good cheer.

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