

## **Closing Arguments: J.P. Moreland's Case for the Soul**

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Announcer:

Greetings, and welcome to Mind Matters News. Today we're wrapping up our conversation with JP Moreland and discussing his arguments for the existence of the soul. If you haven't already listened to the first two parts of this interview, I'd encourage you to do so. Now, here's your host, Pat Flynn.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, excellent. Okay, so I would like to ask you then, what do you think is a good transition into some more of the direct arguments that you like to present for the soul, either related to things we discussed or maybe a little bit unique or separate from them? Because you've got kind of an army of different arguments, don't you, Dr. Moreland, over the years?

JP Moreland:

Well, I do.

Pat Flynn:

You think there's quite a number of good arguments. And I'm with you. I think there are a good number of them, so be curious-

JP Moreland:

Well, yes.

Pat Flynn:

... to pick your brain about where you might want to start, some of your current-

JP Moreland:

Sure.

Pat Flynn:

... ones you think are the most forceful and so on. Yeah.

JP Moreland:

Well, thank you. I think if you don't mind, I'll just start briefly with consciousness. And one of the interesting things is that for every state of consciousness, there is a what it is like to be in that state. So there's what it's like to be in pain. There's a what it's like to taste a lemon. There's a what it's like to think that George Washington was the first president of the United States, and that's different than the what it's like to think that I'm having turtle soup for lunch.

Now, there's got to be a different what it's like to have those thoughts, or I would not be able to tell what I was thinking about through introspection. Because I know what I'm thinking about if I stop and say, "Well, what thought did I just have?" It has a distinguishable texture to it that I can recognize.

So conscious states have a what it is like to them, but nothing physical has a what it's like. I mean, if you study neuroscience or biology or chemistry or physics and they're characterizing some kind of an entity, they will not have to leave the level of physical description to characterize it. So if you're going to tell me, "Describe what neurons firing is," well, they'll talk about synapses and dendrites and axons and various chemical movements and so on, and that's it. They won't say, "Well, there's what it's like to be a neuron." I mean, there is no such thing. So consciousness then would be those states that have a what it's like to them. And that's all I'll say, but there's more that you can say about it.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, if you don't mind just saying a little bit more, I want to emphasize another point you've made in your work that I think is very interesting. So there's this, call it a qualitative abyss that seems almost impossible-

JP Moreland:

Yes.

Pat Flynn:

... to traverse, right? So for the physicalists, the kind of deep down in reality you have all this stuff is essentially everything that consciousness is not, right? It's not directed.

JP Moreland:

Yeah.

Pat Flynn:

It's not about anything. It doesn't sense anything, right?

JP Moreland:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Pat Flynn:

And then somehow, by just kind of shifting the blocks around, there emerges this incredible qualitative landscape. It does seem like an appeal to magic. At minimally, it seems like they owe us a much better story than the one they've given. But an interesting turn, as you know in the kind of literature, is towards a sort of panpsychism.

JP Moreland:

Yes.

Pat Flynn:

And the thing that's interesting about that is they seem to get the problem, that you can't traverse this qualitative abyss. So rather, what we'll say is that the stuff we're trying to get is kind of... It's already there in some sense, right?

JP Moreland:

That's right.

Pat Flynn:

Now, one thing that... And this is a point you make, and I really appreciate this point in your work, and it's actually in the book you have with Dr. Craig on moral realism with Wielenberg and you make it elsewhere, is trying to get the physicalist or the naturalist, And they're not the same program, but they bear a strong resemblance, to play within their own inner logic, as you put it, right?

JP Moreland:

Yeah.

Pat Flynn:

There are rules to this game. And what the physicalist and the naturalist will tell us is that, "Hey, we can explain everything that needs to be explained through some sort of combination of atomic and evolutionary theory." It's a broadly scientific epistemology, right?

JP Moreland:

Right.

Pat Flynn:

And so whatever else you want to say about panpsychism, it just seems a little bit cheap, right?

JP Moreland:

Yeah. Yeah.

Pat Flynn:

You see what I'm saying?

JP Moreland:

I sure do.

Pat Flynn:

If you're still going to call yourself a physicalist or naturalist, you're just sort of stretching the boundaries here in a way that to me just seems a little bit suspicious. If you're going to tell me that you have some sort of superior explanatory system or superior epistemology, you at least have to give something up that a lot of people aren't being open about giving up when they make these sort of moves. You see what I'm trying to get at here?

JP Moreland:

Not only do I see it, but in David Skrbina's book on defending Panpsychism, he makes it clear that this is not a version of physicalism. Now, he's a naturalist in that he doesn't believe in God yet. Now, maybe the Hegelian God could exist if things evolved so that he's finally realized. I don't know.

But he says that throughout the history of the tension between various versions of panpsychism and more strictly materialist or physicalist versions, they always saw themselves as competing paradigms.

Panpsychism never was just a slight modification of physicalism. And so you're right about that. And what the panpsychist does is help herself to entities that they're borrowing capital from theism. I mean, he can't get something from nothing.

And so there's all kinds of problems. But two, real quickly. One of them is that... I mean, it's odd that David Chalmers has developed his own very particular version of panpsychism, but yet he believes that zombies are metaphysically possible. Now, by believing that zombies are metaphysically possible, he's arguing that the connection between mental properties or conscious properties and the brain is contingent so that we have properties of consciousness with their own what it's like, but we could be exactly what we are physically. We could be an exact duplicate in another possible world and have no consciousness whatsoever.

So that means that if having consciousness could be present in one possible world and absent in another, even though the possessors are identical, literally the same, then the connection is contingent. Well then, he posits that the ultimate constituents of reality have both a mental, even if it's a very attenuated version of consciousness, and it has physical aspects to it, which I don't want to talk about. But you see, if that connection's contingent, then it leaves open this very, very huge question as to why these things showed up in a connected way if their connection's contingent.

If you want to announce something as a brute fact, you don't want to cite contingent things, because they are not good candid. A brute fact is something that does not have any further explanation. It's just there. Now, necessary beings, like God, or acts of free agency if they're caused by the self, are brute facts in that there's no further explanation. There may be influences, but that's a problem. And he just leaves this as this gratuitous brute fact.

And the other problem is the unity of consciousness. You get all these little things together in a body, and suddenly there's this one single total conscious state that's unified. I mean, no. Every little part of you has consciousness. It would sure seem to me like if you went to a football game, there would be a crowd. You would be literally a crowd watching the game where each little part of you that's conscious would be fixated on one part of the field and somebody another. Nothing would see the whole game. So there are real difficulties with panpsychism. Sorry.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, I agree these... That's very helpful. These sort of unification and binding problems, I think-

JP Moreland:

Exactly.

Pat Flynn:

... are persistent issues for the panpsychist. I just wanted to call out something that I felt, that you're very good at calling out, is something of a little bit of an illegitimate move.

JP Moreland:

Yeah, it's cheating.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, a little bit. A little bit.

JP Moreland:

A little bit.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, a little bit. It's fine if you want to expand your worldview, but I think you have to make certain concessions when you do so.

JP Moreland:

Absolutely. Yep.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. So great. Okay. All right. So then moving on to maybe a few other considerations or arguments for the soul. What else do you think is a particularly forceful line of reasoning here? Yeah.

JP Moreland:

Yeah. Let me just give you a couple here real quickly.

Pat Flynn:

Great.

JP Moreland:

One of them, there's a fact that everybody knows now, there've been dozens of psychological studies that little children, as one psychologist said, are natural-born Cartesians. That is that little children... And they don't have to be taught about the soul. In fact, they've never heard of it. They don't know anything about religious instruction. But at a very early age, before they can understand religious instruction, they naturally believe that they're a soul that's different from their body. And so they don't have to be taught to believe in the soul. This is a natural view that they come to hold.

And this is even true in atheist countries where physicalism is taught as the state ideology. Not only are children naturally Cartesian or they believe in a soul, but they're also... 99% of the people in the entire history of the world, even going back to Neanderthals, have believed in the reality or at least the real possibility of life after death in a disembodied state of some kind.

And so they did not believe that they were their bodies. They believed that there were very real possibilities that they would leave their bodies and they would be a non-physical eye or soul, but they would all be irreducibly mental entities. And the question I'm asking is why is that? And Nancy Murphy explains it by saying, "Well, they all have been schooled in religious traditions." My view is she's got it backwards.

First of all, it doesn't explain little children, and it doesn't explain why atheists believe naturally in the soul. But I think the reason people have developed religious traditions, unless they were revealed by God, which I take the Judeo-Christian religion to be, they developed these to make sense out of what they already know about themselves. They already know their souls. Now, how do they know their souls? We are directly aware of ourselves. And we're aware that we are not a collection of anything.

When I attend to myself, I'm aware that I am a... I have consciousness. I'm not my consciousness. I'm a subject of consciousness, and that I am a unified being over time, and that I dwell in a body. I recognize my body as different than I am, but I indwell it. And so I think that this is an appeal to direct awareness, so it's not... Dualism is not, first of all, supported by an argument, but by direct awareness. And it explains what's called the hard meta problem of consciousness, which is if physicalism is true, why is

everybody in the history of the world, except for an isolated group of Western intellectuals, why are they all substance dualists of some kind? And this explains it.

Now, another argument that I like to use is that persons are indivisible and they cannot exist as percentages of themselves, but any physical object can be divided if it's spatially extended, and it can come in percentages.

So just take my brain. My brain, I can lose 55% of my brain, so I no longer have a whole brain. I have a 45% brain. There's a syndrome called Dandy-Walkers syndrome where these individuals... And I've got Xerox copies of x-rays of their heads, have about 10% of a brain or less. Inside their head is a sack of fluid that covers almost their entire skull, and it's surrounded by a very thin little layer inside the skull attached to the skull of brain material.

Now, these people can get jobs, they get married, they go to work and all the rest of it. And they can do about 75 or 80% of what normal people can do, but they're 10% of a brain. Now, I would never in my wildest dreams call them 10% of a person.

Pat Flynn:

Right.

JP Moreland:

And I suppose you know somebody that's lost... They got hit in the brain, and they lost some brain function. They couldn't do certain things or they couldn't remember certain things. What I'm going to say is that's not 80% of a person, that's a person who's lost 20% of their functioning.

So it does seem to me that we're not divisible, and some people claim we are in brain bisection cases, but we can talk about that later if you'd like. And I've never met a person that I would... It seems like a category fallacy to call someone a 70% person or a percentage of a person. We're all or nothing kinds of things, and our functioning's different.

But now take any physical object, like my body or my brain. They're clearly divisible and can be a percentage of their original object. And so there's something true of me, I'm not divisible, and I don't come to percentages, that is true of my body and my brain, and therefore I cannot be identical to my body or my brain.

Pat Flynn:

Yes.

JP Moreland:

And if you assume that those are the best candidates for the physicalist as to who I am, it follows that I'm not physical. And I would argue the two live candidates in the history of the world that I'm either physical or I'm a spiritual thing or conscious substance of some kind. So that would be another argument.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. And I think you agree that a lot of philosophy, if not most philosophy, is best done in a sort of cumulative fashion, right?

JP Moreland:

I do. Yes. That's right.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. And that said, I don't want to be more modest than is necessary. I think there are just a few arguments that are quite demonstrative, these direct awareness arguments. I think our ability to engage in formal determinant thinking is-

JP Moreland:

Oh my gosh. Yes.

Pat Flynn:

... absolutely... that physicalism is done there, but then you present these other arguments, and there's a real weight there, right? And maybe the weight is more moral. I mean, a lot of people really don't want to bite the bullet on giving up things like human dignity or accepting that there could be something like a degraded personhood. That just seems repugnant to a lot of people, and it should seem repugnant, right?

JP Moreland:

Yes.

Pat Flynn:

Sometimes you keep showing what the costs are to go-

JP Moreland:

Oh, yes.

Pat Flynn:

... the route of physicalism. But then beyond that, I think there's a really important thing is you don't... What are the costs of your position? I think people will say, "Well, science." But as we emphasized before, there's nothing incompatible with your position of what's going on in contemporary neuroscience whatsoever. And there's probably a number of things that actually are a better fit-

JP Moreland:

I agree.

Pat Flynn:

... with an Aristotelian worldview, at least science as a whole. And we receive a pretty strong resurgence of neo-Aristotelian thought in contemporary philosophy of nature and philosophy of science and stuff like that as well.

JP Moreland:

Boy, you're right about that. absolutely right.

Pat Flynn:

So I don't know. Maybe I'm just being naive in my optimism, but it seems like there's a whole lot of upsides here to endorsing this particular position. You avoid a whole lot of serious downsides as well, right?

JP Moreland:

Oh my gosh. Absolutely. And another one's free will. I mean, look, people know that there are times when they're responsible for a choice they made. And to be responsible, you have to be free to do it or refrain from doing what you did.

Let me give you an illustration. If some mad scientist moved into a vacant house across the street from me, and one night he snuck into my house, and while I was asleep, he put a little brain chip, a physical chip in my brain, and went back across the street, and anything he typed into his computer and hit enter would cause that little brain chip to create in me a desire or a thought of some kind that I had no choice to resist. The chip did it.

So I'm walking down the street in the morning. I don't know the chip's in there. And there's a guy coming down the sidewalk, and the scientist wants this guy to get punched in the face. So I get about within two feet of the guy, and he hits the chip, and it creates this inexorable irreversible desire, a deterministic desire in me, to punch the guy. And so my hand goes out and punches him.

Now, I had no choice as to whether I hit him or not. I couldn't refrain. So I would say I wasn't responsible. In fact, I don't think I actually punched the guy. I think the scientist punched him through me. I was an instrumental tool. So to be free at the moment of decision, I'm deliberating as to whether to vote for the class president or refrain and not raise my hand, at the moment of decision, if I'm free, I can either raise my hand or refrain, and both are up to me.

Now, my thoughts and so on, my reasons can influence me, but they stop short of determining me. Well, what's the big problem? Well, if I'm a physical object, like my brain or a body, and I'm not a soul, then my body movements are governed by the laws of nature, most likely pretty much down at the bottom, the laws of chemistry and physics. And so my actions are determined. And I'm going to assume that actions at the macro level, objects we can just see with our senses, are governed by determinism.

Now, you might say, "Well, what about quantum indeterminacy?" I personally think that's epistemological, not ontological. I think that the quantum level is determined, but we don't know the factors that give the appearance of... Now, if I'm wrong about that, though, indeterminism doesn't help. Because if me raising my hand to vote was the result of an indeterministic movement, then I have no responsibility for things that happen randomly.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, determined or random. It's the classic dilemma. You don't want either of those. Right.

JP Moreland:

Yeah. I don't want either one of them if I'm going to be a real responsible agent. But if I'm my brain, I can't be. And you know what? That is why, by the way, the courts have moved more and more toward rehabilitation and therapeutic justice, because the idea of retributive punishment presupposes that we have freedom. And that idea in the universities has been losing ground. And those in justice have tried to accommodate what we "know" about human persons, and so rehabilitation is starting to replace more and more retributive justice.

Pat Flynn:



Yeah, yeah. Now, you bring up a lot of really great points. And I think, again, I think for most people, it's just a basic fact of experience that they have had, let's be super modest, at least one morally significant action in their lives, right?

JP Moreland:

Yeah, at least one.

Pat Flynn:

At least one. And if that's the case, boy, that seems incompatible with that physicalist worldview. But for the broadly Aristotelian perspective, there's a third category between determined and random. There's what scholastics would call reasons-based action of-

JP Moreland:

Yes. Absolutely.

Pat Flynn:

... a line of formal to final causality where we can... The power of the will is just the ability to just end deliberation, to make efficacious any finite, non-determining motive-

JP Moreland:

Absolutely.

Pat Flynn:

... or action, right? And that's a power of ours as the type of substances that we are. So there's conceptual space there to really make sense of free will and escape these sorts of paradoxes or dilemmas that do not seem like they can be reasonably escaped by people who hold a physicalist perspective.

JP Moreland:

I agree. Pat, they ought to be interviewing you. You're so darn articulate. I'm taking notes to everything you say here. Man, that's good.

Pat Flynn:

Oh, too kind. Well, I've read a lot of your work and that's helped a ton.

JP Moreland:

Oh, no, don't give me that.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. Yeah. But, no, I really have. You're one of my favorite philosophers in general, not just philosophy of mind.

JP Moreland:

Thanks. Thank you.

Pat Flynn:

I really mean that.

JP Moreland:

I appreciate that.

Pat Flynn:

But, yeah. It goes back to that cost thing. I think most people, they don't really want to give up moral agency, responsibility, culpability. I mean, so much hinges on that. And what we're saying is you don't have to give it up, and there's no good reason to ultimately give it up, right?

JP Moreland:

That's exactly right.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah. Excellent. Well, yeah. Well, we've covered a lot so far. Is there any final things you want to bring out for consideration for people? Obviously, before we say goodbye, we're going to discuss a lot of your work and make sure people go deeper, but I want to make sure we've at least covered everything that you think is important and relevant just, if nothing else, to get people more interested in these types of conversations. Yeah.

JP Moreland:

Well, I think it's really important for us to know what we are, what kind of thing we are. And the debate that's going on in the world and in the university is about what is a human person. What are we? And the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism, which meets and discusses issues in worldwide evangelization, a few years ago, the lead committee said the number one issue worldwide that is relevant to people coming to Christ is the question, "What is a human being?" And I think it's very important for us to know what we are. Could we survive death, for example?

And the idea that consciousness and the soul are non-physical are not things that you have to close your eyes and hold your nose and just, by fiat, believe in it because you think you're supposed to. People need to realize that there is a rigorous case that's better than the case for the materialist view, that consciousness and the I, or the self, which we discover as a soul or mind, are actually real.

And if people would just look into this a little bit, it would, if they're Christian, strengthen their faith. And if they're seekers or considering Christianity, but at this point they believe in scientism, well then, you might want to consider how a pure materialist would explain these arguments and rebut them. So that's important, I think.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, that's wonderful. Thank you for that.

So Dr. Moreland, I'd like to just finish with a few questions about your work. If you wouldn't mind, tell people a little bit more about what they could expect that we didn't cover from your chapter in the volume *Minding the Brain*. It's called *Neuroscience and the Metaphysics of Consciousness and the Soul*. And I also want you to make sure that you mention your extremely comprehensive book, *The Substance of Consciousness*, for people who want to go further.

JP Moreland:

Yes.

Pat Flynn:

And then finally, I'd love to hear what you're working on next, if there's any new projects that you're currently...

JP Moreland:

Well, thank you. Yes. Well, I've written books through a wide range of things. I think Bill Craig and I wrote a book called the Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview, and it's got a five-star rating on Amazon. And we did it because we wanted to equip Christians to not be bullied, and for them to have a wide range of initial understanding of the different branches of philosophy.

I've written books on depression. I wrote a book on A Simple Guide to Experience Miracles. And I try to take the idea of the miraculous happening out of fantasy land and give it a solid footing. So it's a credible book, even if you don't believe what I'm claiming, but I give pretty solid reasons for that.

And I've written a number of books on the soul, which include discussions of what is free will and that sort of thing. I wrote a book on depression, which is called Finding Quiet, that I thank God that it's helped a number of people.

And then, maybe I could just say, David Horner and I have finished a book on metaethics. It's a small text, and it's accessible. But, metaethics is the study of what is ethics. When we say abortion's wrong or kindness as a virtue, are we describing reality or are these just expressions of emotion? And so the book is about worldview issues that underlie different ethical views, relativism, different versions of objectivism, we might say.

I'm working on a few chapters of different scholarly books right now, but I don't have any... Nothing has come to me in terms of a book. I've had 21 surgeries in 10 years, and that's because I have a rare disease that makes me highly likely to get a wide range of cancers. And I've had those, not all of them, thank God. But I almost died last summer, and I was miraculously healed. I don't know what else to tell you.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, thanks be to God. That's wonderful.

JP Moreland:

Yeah. And the evidence is pretty clear that I was. So at this point, I'm getting my energy back, and I taught this semester, but I don't have anything in particular.

Pat Flynn:

Well, you have an amazing body of work, and it's all great. I actually have that Metaethics book. It's a wonderful little volume.

JP Moreland:

Oh, well, thank you. Oh, thank you.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, I would highly encourage people to pick that up as well. So thank you, Dr. Moreland, for your time today, and I really appreciate it. This has been a really stimulating and fruitful conversation. I hope that we can do it again sometime in the future.

JP Moreland:

Oh, Pat, it's been wonderful to be with you. It's been a great experience. Thank you.

Announcer:

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