

1 The Nature of Humanness

- Module: Philosophy
- Lesson 14

2 Some Recommended Sources

- “The Coherence of Theism” in Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview, by Moreland and Craig
- “Physicalism, Naturalism, and the Nature of Human Persons”, by J. P. Moreland, in To Everyone an Answer. ed. by Beckwith, Craig, & Moreland
- Body and Soul, by J. P. Moreland and Scott Rae
- Mind and Cosmos, by Thomas Nagel (atheist philosopher)
- There is a God, by Anthony Flew (atheist turned theist)

3 Two Important Questions

- 1. Are we matter or more?
 - Are we merely physical, a collection of particles or matter animated solely by the laws of physics and electromagnetic impulses? Do our actions and mental processes result only from electrical impulses carried along the fibers of our central nervous system?
 - or
 - Are we something more? Is there some non-material aspect to us and to our mental processes, something undetectable to modern science, yet as real and essential to us as humans as the material aspects?
- 2. Are we just animals?
 - Are we merely highly developed biological entities—really smart and gifted animals—with no more intrinsic value than other biological life or “other” animals?
 - or
 - Are we unique among all living things? Is there something about our essence that makes us not just more advanced, but different, essentially different, than all other biological or animal life, and which endows us with certain privileges, obligations, and worth not possessed by any other biologically living organisms?

4 Some Definitions

- Essence: The intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of something; a property or group of properties of something without which it would not exist or be what it is.
 - Each thing is composed of its own set of characteristics or features, which Greeks referred to as its essence.
 - A definition of something is the expression of the characteristics (essence) by which a thing is identified. It is through its definition that the identity of a thing is discovered.

5 Some Definitions

- Physicalism: The belief that a human being is exclusively physical or material.

- We consist solely of what can be described using the language of physics and chemistry.
- Our mental faculties include only the brain and central nervous system, consisting of neurons, synapses, C-fibers, electrical and chemical events, etc.
- “Mind” is merely the same as the brain, or else is an epiphenomenon of (arises from) the brain.
 - If “mind” is merely another word for brain, all mental states and events are merely physical phenomena in the physical brain.
 - If “mind” is an epiphenomenon of the brain, the states and events of the mind are caused by the brain, but there is no causal relationship going the other way—the mind does not cause events or states in the brain.

6 Some Definitions

- Dualism: In the context of the nature of humanness, dualism is the belief that the human being is both physical and non-physical (immaterial). (Typically the non-material aspect is referred to as the mind, or as the soul or spirit.)
 - Note: Dualism is a word used in a variety of contexts with a variety of meanings. In discussions about the nature of humanness, it is used as defined above.
 - According to dualism, the mind is distinct from the physical brain. It is often seen as an aspect of a soul/spirit.
 - Thus, according to dualism, the cognitive faculties include two distinct entities:
 - The mind (a non-material entity, often viewed as an aspect of a soul/spirit).
 - The brain (a material entity, part of a physical body).
 - Under dualism, a bi-directional causal relationship between the two exists. The mind may cause states and events in the brain, and the brain may cause states and events in the mind.

7 Dualism: The Biblical View Of Humanness

- Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.
(Ecc. 12:7)
- Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.
(Matt. 10:28)

8 Dualism: The Biblical View Of Humanness

- Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. ...He looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.
(Acts 2:27, 31)

- Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God.
(Rev. 20:4)

9 A point of clarification on the use of the word mind

- “Mind” is often used in a generic sense about a person’s cognitive dimension without regard to either dualism or physicalism.
 - e.g. In the statement “She has a great mind,” one may be referring to a person’s overall cognitive abilities without implying a distinction between her mind and brain.
- In our discussion of dualism vs. physicalism we will use “mind” in the technical, rather than the generic sense, to refer the non-material aspect of our being, including our cognitive dimension, which is distinct from the physical brain.

10 Arguments for Dualism

- The primary strategy for establishing dualism over physicalism involves Leibniz’s Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals.
(Gottfried Leibniz, 1645–1716)
 - Leibniz’s Law: If you are thinking about truly identical things, then there is only one thing you’re thinking about—not two, and any truth that applies to one applies to the other.
 - Illustration: How to know if Rick Harvey and Fred Harvey’s youngest son are the same person or two different people?
 - If you were to find only one thing different between Rick Harvey and Fred Harvey’s youngest son (e.g. hair color, height, food preference, whatever), then you would know that they are two different people.
 - The two are really the same person, if, and only if, they are completely identical in every way.

11 Arguments for Dualism

- (cont.) On using Leibniz’s Law (Differences between mental and brain events.)
 - One need discover only a single difference between brain and mind to suffice to establish dualism (that they are two distinct entities).
 - “To establish physicalism, it is not enough that mental states and brain states are causally related or constantly conjoined with each other in an embodied person. Physicalism needs identity to make its case, and if something is true, or possibly true of a mental substance, property, or event that is not true, or possibly true of a physical substance, property, or event, physicalism is false.”
Moreland and Craig in *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, p. 233

- Hence, physicalism is falsified, and dualism established, if just one thing can be shown to be true of mental states which is not, or even possibly not true, of brain states.

12  **Properties Unique to Minds**
(as distinct from physical brains)

- (cont.) On using Leibniz's Law (Differences between mental and brain events.)
 - Self-presenting properties
 - Things like sensations, thoughts, beliefs, desires, and free choice.
 - Such mental states are presented directly to the subject, he or she has them "immediately" through introspection, without another mental state. (One has an immediate awareness of one's mental life.)
 - For example: imagine a pink elephant in the room.
 - Physical properties, on the contrary, are not self-presenting. They are mediated to us.

13  **Properties Unique to Minds**
(as distinct from physical brains)

- (cont.) On using Leibniz's Law (Differences between mental and brain events.)
 - (cont.) Self-presenting properties
 - Private access:
 - No one else has direct access to one's own mental properties/events.
 - On the other hand, physical properties/events are. in principle, publicly accessible.
 - Prov. 14:10 "The heart knows its own sorrow, and a stranger does not share its joy.
 - Explanation: "One can be aware of the external, physical world only by means of one's mental states, but one need not be aware of one's mental states by means of anything else. One is directly aware of them." -Moreland and Craig-

14  **Properties Unique to Minds**
(as distinct from physical brains)

- (cont.) On using Leibniz's Law (Differences between mental and brain events.)
 - Incorrigeability
 - A subject is incapable of being mistaken about the mental property.

- Someone may experience seeing water on the highway ahead (as in a mirage). It doesn't appear possible to be mistaken that one is having the sense of seeing water. Physical properties, however, are not incorrigible. It is possible the person may be mistaken about whether or not the water is there (the physical property).
- First-person Perspective
 - According to physicalism, there are no irreducible, privileged first-person perspectives.
 - If physicalism were true, one could theoretically describe you exclusively and entirely in third-person physical and spatiotemporal terms. (You weigh such and such. You are so and so tall. You are having certain electrical/chemical events in your brain, etc.)
 - Such a description would fail to account for your own subjective first-person awareness of your own self. (What you are believing. What you are seeming to see. What kind of pie you prefer. What you felt on August 21st in 2007. etc. etc.)

15 Properties Unique to Minds (as distinct from physical brains)

- (cont.) On using Leibniz's Law (Differences between mental and brain events.)
 - Ongoing personal identity over time
 - It seems a person can maintain absolute sameness through change—personal identity. (I am the same self-aware person who fished in the sand pit at the age of thirteen, and who climbed on the garage roof at seven.)
 - Even given radical physical change over time, a person remains essentially the same self-aware person.
 - Free will
 - A person can choose whether or not to act or how to act. He or she is the ultimate originator of his or her actions.
 - Physicalism, on the other hand, implies determinism. All "choices" are determined by physical and chemical laws operating in the physical brain. The individual has no independent means to act, think, or believe differently.
 - However, free will is a necessary component for moral obligation. (If physicalism is true, then it appears there are no moral or immoral actions because there is no free will.)

16 Other Arguments for Dualism

- Human Consciousness
 - What is consciousness?
 - It is a complex and debated issue.
 - At a minimum, it is an awareness of ourselves and the world around us.
 - As humans, we are not only conscious, as are many forms of higher life, but uniquely we are conscious that we are conscious.
 - There is no material explanation for human consciousness, it appears to be an immaterial reality.

17 Other Arguments for Dualism

- Human Consciousness (cont.)
 - “The problem, however, is that nothing about a brain, when surveyed as a physical system, declares it to be a bearer of that peculiar, interior dimension that each of us experiences as consciousness in his own case.” (Sam Harris, neuroscientist and militant atheist)
 - Mind and Cosmos, Why the Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False, by Thomas Nagel.
 - Nagel is a renowned philosopher and an atheist.
 - He argues that neo-Darwinian evolution, as it currently stands, cannot account for consciousness, cognition, and values.

18 Other Arguments for Dualism

- Physicalism is self-refuting.
 - If cognition is the product of accidental mutations and natural selection, one has no reason to have confidence in our ability to reason to the truth.
 - Physicalism implies determinism.
 - According to physicalism, our minds are determined to think the way we do, to believe or not to believe what we do. Hence, according to physicalism, one believes physicalism is true, not because it is true, but because the laws of chemistry and physics acting in our brains dictate such a belief. The actual truth of the proposition is irrelevant. Hence physicalism undermines its own claim to truth.
 - See Thomas Nagel’s Mind and Cosmos.

19 On Properties of the Mind

- -David Berlinski, in “The Origins of the Mind”
in “The Nature of Nature”

- Although I may be struck by a thought, or moved by a memory, or distracted by a craving, these familiar descriptions suggest an effect with no obvious physical cause. Thoughts, memories, cravings—they are what? Crossing space and time effortlessly, the human mind deliberates, reckons, assesses, and totes things up; it reacts, registers, reflects, and responds. In some cases, like inattention or carelessness, it invites censure by doing nothing at all or doing something in the wrong way; in other cases, like vision, it acts unhesitatingly and without reflection; and in still other cases, the human mind manages both to slip itself into and stay aloof from the great causal stream that makes the real world boom, so that when it gives the go-ahead, what I do is, as Thomas Aquinas observed, “inclined but not compelled.” These are not properties commonly found in the physical world. They are, in fact, not found at all.

20 Arguments Physicalists Raise Against Dualism

- Physicalists argue that dualism fails to account for how an immaterial mind and physical brain could interact. (How does the non-material mind influence the brain?)
 - Assumption: Not knowing how A causes B means that it isn't reasonable to believe that it does, especially if A and B are different.
 - Answer: The argument commits the completist fallacy [That an explanation is only valid if one can explain the explanation. This fallacy leads to an infinite regress of explanation before anything can be explained.]
 - We often know one thing causes another, even when we cannot explain how it does so. For example:
 - How a magnetic field moves a material object.
 - How gravity can attract a planet millions of miles away
 - Note that in these examples the cause has a different nature than the effect (forces and fields vs. solid, spatially located objects).

21 Arguments Physicalists Raise Against Dualism

- Physicalists argue that physicalism is based on scientific assumptions and therefore provides a complete picture of reality.
 - Assumption: Since humans are the product of an entirely physical process utilizing only physical materials (material evolution), then humans can only be physical.
 - Answer: This argument commits the fallacy of begging the question (circular reasoning). The physicalist is assuming what he is seeking to prove—that there is no non-material reality, and that man is only physical, the product of solely material evolution.

22 Arguments Physicalists Raise Against Dualism

- Physicalists argue from Ockham's Razor (that, given two or more competing explanations, the simplest explanation is to be preferred). They argue that adding a non-material explanation to account for mental processes is more complex than a merely material explanation.
 - Assumption: That Ockham's Razor is the sole or primary criteria for Inference to the Best Explanation, and that physicalism actually successfully explains all of the phenomenon we observe about mental properties, states, and events.
 - Answer: In arguing chiefly from simplicity, physicalists ignore other criteria for evaluating competing explanations, such as explanatory scope and plausibility. Dualism accounts for things which physicalism fails to explain, such as consciousness and free will, and therefore possesses more explanatory scope, plausibility, etc.

23 The Uniqueness of Humans

- A popular contemporary view of humanness:
 - As products of evolution, humans are of no greater intrinsic significance or value than any other element of biological life.
 - Humans constitute a burden on the environment, and hence are a hindrance to the rest of biological life.
 - The reduction of the number of humans on the planet is a good thing. (This implies the goodness of population control, and even, for many, abortion and euthanasia.)

24 The Uniqueness of Humans

- The Biblical view of humanness, the Imago Dei (image of God):
 - "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;' ...God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."
Gen. 1:26, 27 (Note both male and female bear God's image.)
 - "...men, who have been made in the likeness of God."
James 3:9 (Note that the Imago Dei persists even after the fall.)
 - In bearing the Imago Dei, humans are in essence distinct from and of greater value than the rest of creation.

25 The Uniqueness of Humans

- Humans are essentially greater and of more value than the rest of creation.
 - Man is to "rule" over creation. (Gen. 1:28)
 - Man is to benefit creation (cultivate it). (Gen. 2:15)
 - More of mankind leads to a better world. (Gen. 1:28)
 - He is to rule and subdue the creation.
 - Man's sinful abuse of the creation and of his dominion over it, does not negate his essential uniqueness.

26 The Uniqueness of Humans

- Only humans are not only conscious, but conscious that they are conscious.
- We alone contemplate our own nature and its significance.
- We alone contemplate beauty, disorder, etc.
- We alone possess the capacity to rule over creation and to enhance the created order through cultivation, husbandry, etc.
- We alone have a sense of the divine, and inclination to worship, and a sense of obligation to the divine.
- (See handout on the uniqueness of human beings.)

27  **Next Week:**

- The Problem of Evil and Suffering