

# The Case for the Existence of the Human Soul

A Rebuttal to the Challenge of Physicalist Anthropology Grounded Solely on Scientific Evidence

Metaphysics and Epistemology CSSR 540 (Fall 2014)

By Gary Jensen (garyj10) © January 2017

Ever since I encountered Oscar Cullmann's book, Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead,<sup>2</sup> I had embraced the *monistic* interpretation of *human* anthropology;<sup>3</sup> namely that people are embodied<sup>4</sup> mortal<sup>5</sup> souls<sup>6</sup> whose hope of eternal life is utterly dependent on Christ's historical resurrection.<sup>7</sup> My interest in the question of the soul at that time was grounded less on concerns about biblical *anthropology* than it was on the nature of our own *resurrection* at the end of time.<sup>8</sup> In spite of his employment of philosophical considerations, Cullmann's broaching of anthropology was intended to clarify the matter of life *after* death in light of *biblical* teaching. More recently, New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright has written a treatise that spiritedly argues for a position similar to Cullmann's.<sup>9</sup> Although he too grounds his position almost entirely on New Testament exegesis, Wright includes among his target "opposition" those who impose materialism onto anthropology. Yet he neither names nor confronts the specifics that give foundation to the materialist challenge. It is for that reason that I write this paper. While my thinking on the *necessary* connection between Christ's resurrection and our own at the *end* of time (addressed by these writers) has not fundamentally changed, other matters pertaining to this present life in terms of the relationship between creation (the nature of nature) and anthropology are now taking center stage in another theater altogether: the challenge of philosophical naturalism (I will henceforth use the terms "materialism," "physicalism," and "philosophical/scientific naturalism" interchangeably). Likewise, for the purpose of this paper, I will use the terms "soul" and "mind" interchangeably.

---

<sup>1</sup>"Physicalism" is the belief that reality consists of only physical entities.

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Cullmann. (Epworth, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Henceforth, "anthropology." The term "*human* anthropology" is a redundancy for the reason that the Greek word *anthropos*, in itself, means human beings. "Anthropology" is the study of the *nature* of human beings.

<sup>4</sup> Human beings have bodies because of God's intention through His act of creation (Gen. 1:31). Although I am sympathetic with Cullmann's anthropology (Op.cit. (2)), I do not agree with Dr. Pickavance's suggestion that to regard our body as "a mere possession of [oneself]," logically opens up the door to all kinds of abuse (Robert C. Koons and Timothy H. Pickavance. Metaphysics: The Fundamentals. (Unpublished). p. 178). Instead I believe our environment is to be treated with respect because we are created to be stewards (Gen. 1:26f.) of God's creation.

<sup>5</sup> In line with the Greek word, *thnastōs*, human beings, body and soul, are entirely subject to death. However, Christians may differ in terms of the distinction between these two aspects, the Bible rejects every notion that our soul is, by its own nature, immortal. (Reinhold Niebuhr. The Nature and Destiny of Man: v. I Human Nature. (Scribners, 1964), p. 12, 13).

<sup>6</sup> My paper will argue in favor of the existence of the soul in the framework of the term "substance dualism." That is the position of both J.P. Moreland (Does God Exist: J.P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen. (Thomas Nelson, 1990), p. 88), \*\* and Richard Swinburne, who states, "*So I now consist of two parts - my soul (the essential part) and my body as a contingent part, each of them separate substances.*" (Mind, Brain, and Free Will. (Oxford, 2013), p. 170). My own intention is neither to explicitly define nor explain the soul as an entity. It is instead to both argue for the *existence* of the human ego (the soul)" as the "arena" in which consciousness, mental activity, and spiritual engagement occurs, and to distinguish that realm from the physiological entity called our body in which *physical* activities take place. I consider the word "substance" to be both problematic and helpful. On the one hand "substance" normally stands for a physical reality, which I argue the soul is emphatically not. On the other hand, I argue that the soul is just as real as the physical body. My affirmation that the soul is distinct "substance" from the body in no way suggests that the soul is measurable and can be located (as in localized) in the normal sense of the term.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Romans 6:5.

<sup>8</sup> In the words of the Apostles' Creed, "*I believe in the resurrection of the body*" (boldface mine).

<sup>9</sup> N.T. Wright. *Mind, Spirit, Soul and Body: All for One and One for All: Reflections on Paul's Anthropology in his Complex Contexts*. (March 18, 2011). [http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_SCP\\_MindSpiritSoulBody.ht](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_SCP_MindSpiritSoulBody.ht)

I first remember expressing curiosity in the relationship between scientific naturalism and anthropology when I witnessed a debate between Intelligent Design proponent Philip Johnson and atheist champion, evolutionary biologist William Provine, at Stanford University, where the latter publicly denied that he himself had free-will.<sup>10</sup> Even at that time I recognized that his embrace of that position entailed the commission of logical contradictions on a whole range of fronts. Ever since then, it has become increasingly clear to me that an entrenched denial of the very *concept* of human free-will firmly follows, logically, from a philosophically materialistic view of reality.<sup>11</sup> For example, cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett, in a YouTube lecture advocating his materialistic understanding of consciousness,<sup>12</sup> claimed that what human beings imagine to be consciousness consists purely of impressions produced by the complex operations of mechanistic computers in the brain (17:50). One might reasonably ask, “impressions on *what?*” (that is, if there is no “*who*”). He further went so far as to say that “*there is no little man in the brain* (11:35)...*What lies in ‘the middle’ is a virtual<sup>13</sup> self* (15:43)...*an abstraction* (16:05)...*Inside the ghost [of the machine] is a robot*” (17:50). David Hume anticipated the same mechanistic position a century prior to Charles Darwin.<sup>14</sup> Darwin himself wrote, “*I have nothing to do with the origin of primary mental powers, any more than I have with that of life itself.*”<sup>15</sup> Indeed his own naturalistic convictions raised skepticism about the trustworthiness of the mind, as he stated, “*With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would anyone trust in the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?*”<sup>16</sup> Ernst Haeckel, a contemporary of Darwin, founded the *Monist League* specifically to undermine the biblical conception of dualism.<sup>17</sup> Reiterating Darwin’s insights in our present day, Michael Ruse stated, “*Organisms are as much material objects as are inert chemicals. Ontologically, therefore, organisms can be thought of as at one with, or reduced to, the entities of physics and chemistry...*”<sup>18</sup> Finally, Paul Churchland has stated that “*If [naturalistic Darwinism] is the correct account of our origins, then there seems neither need, nor room, to fit any nonphysical substances or properties into our theoretical account of ourselves.*”

---

<sup>10</sup> Although I cannot locate which of the four debates with Johnson that this admission comes from, it is quoted (as I remember it exactly) in one of Provine’s own articles, “*Let me summarize my views on what modern evolutionary biology tells us loud and clear ... There are no gods, no purposes, no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain that I am going to be dead. That’s the end for me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning to life, and no free will for humans, either*” (boldface mine). William Provine. *Origins Research* (16:1, 1994), p.9.

<sup>11</sup> “Philosophical materialism,” synonymous with physicalism, is the position that reality consists purely of matter and energy. Even the events within our brains are reduced to merely electro-chemical events interacting with tissue in a solely predictable manner.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Dennett. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JP1nmExfgpg>. He states, variously, “*There is no inner show and there is no single inner witness [in the brain]*” (11:20). Astonishingly, after Dennett initially stated that the dualistic view of the body/soul distinction is a “*hopeless theory*” (3:35), he concludes, after conceding cognitive scientist David Chalmers’ disagreement with his position, that “*One of us is dead wrong, and that’s not settled yet. And you may want to side with Chalmers. I’ve given it my best shot*” (19:55).

<sup>13</sup> “Virtual” is defined as “*being such in power, force, or effect, though not actually or expressly such*” (boldface mine.) [Webster’s Universal Unabridged Dictionary](#). (Barnes and Noble, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> *Enquiry*. 4:2, 6, referenced in Will and Ariel Durant. “The Age of Voltaire.” *The Story of Civilization* v. IX. (Simon and Schuster, 1965), p.143.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Darwin. *On the Origin of Species*, 1859 ed. (Harvard, 1964), p.207.

<sup>16</sup> *Darwin to W. Graham*. A July 3, 1859 letter from Charles Darwin to W. Graham. *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*. (Elibron, 2005), 1:285.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Weikart. “Does Darwinism Devalue Human Life?” <http://www.discovery.org/a/2171>, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Ruse. *Darwin and Design*. (Harvard, 2003), p. 258.

*We are creatures of matter. And we should learn to live with that fact.*<sup>19</sup> Notice here firstly, that his premise denoted by the words, “*that fact,*” is in fact a subjunctive uncertainty, which qualifies the entire statement as incoherent. Yet in actual fact, both assertions fail to take into Quantum Mechanics (QM) into account. Mathematics Professor Granville Sewell States, “*One of the philosophical implications of the “uncertainty principle” introduced by [QM] is that the idea...that all humans are strictly determined...is shown once and for all to be wrong.*”<sup>20</sup>

The purpose of the above list of examples is to highlight the connection that has existed historically between philosophical materialism on the one hand, and the denial of *libertarian*<sup>21</sup> free will on the other. The track record that these individual examples (taken as a whole) illustrate is clear. Every proponent noted, in one way or another, commits the *house-of-cards* fallacy since they are all arguing from a circle which lacks independent evidence sufficient to justify their assertions.<sup>22</sup> It is in my judgment logically absurd to limit one’s view of human nature on the authority of science on the basis of philosophical commitments that have no scientific foundation.<sup>23</sup> For example, in spite of Dennett’s claim to demonstrate the superiority of the physicalist view to account for our perception of consciousness, the most he managed to do was conflate an *observed* correlation between sensations and perceptions, with *causal*<sup>24</sup> connections, that are not *demonstrated* to exist.<sup>25</sup> So his case for a physicalist position wasn’t successfully demonstrated *scientifically*.<sup>26</sup> Atheist Philosopher Thomas Nagel intellectually elevates the actual challenge to a fitting level by stating, “*Even if consciousness is something that cannot be analyzed in terms of the purely physical properties of organisms, its appearance still needs to be explained, as part of the larger project of making sense of the world...the problem, then, is this: What kind of explanation of the development of these organisms...that are not only physically adapted to the environment, but also conscious subjects?*”<sup>27</sup>

Although the *substance dualism* position I am advocating, likewise, is founded in part on philosophical or (to be precise) *theological* convictions, there are also, by contrast, at the same time positive arguments to be made in its favor that are founded on empirical evidence and rational arguments of a kind that are independent of philosophical preferences. I consider the five strongest testable arguments that affirm the legitimacy of substance dualism as a rationally grounded description of human nature to consist of the following: (1) Leibniz’ *Law of Identity* as a key for distinguishing the brain from the soul, (2) The existential personal experience of

---

<sup>19</sup> Cited in J.P. Moreland. *The Soul: How and Why it’s Real and Why it Matters*. (Moody, 2014), p. 94. \*\* Dr. Angus Menuge confronts Churchlands illogic differently by stating, “*Scientists [are supposed to have] projects, plans, and goals; and they learn that various ideas are either fruitful or unhelpful, true or false...How can we assert and test hypotheses [if such concepts don’t exist?] “Agents Under Fire: Materialism and the Rationality of Science.* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), pp. 53-4.

<sup>20</sup> *In the Beginning: and Other Essays on Intelligent Design*. (Discovery Institute, 2010), p. 113.

<sup>21</sup> Some materialists willingly concede that humans have the capacity to do as they will, but not to *will* what they will. (Dinesh D’Souza. *Life After Death*. (Regnery, 2009), p.140).

<sup>22</sup> Duncan Pritchard. *What is this Thing Called Knowledge?* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Routledge, 2014), p. 42f.

<sup>23</sup> Swinburne (Op.cit. (6), p.10) has noted, “*It is important for any science to describe its data as fully as possible before it proceeds to explain [or negate] them*” (boldface mine).

<sup>24</sup> Of the two: “correlation” and “causal,” only the latter distinguishes cause-effect from incidental relationships.

<sup>25</sup> Op.cit. (12), 17:50.

<sup>26</sup> J.P. Moreland notes that “*Dualism and physicalism are empirically equivalent views consistent with all...the same data.*” (Op.cit. (19), p.36.)

<sup>27</sup> *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. (Oxford, 2012), p. 45.

human consciousness, (3) The existential experience of human intentionality and libertarian<sup>28</sup> free-will, (4) The self-defeating logical absurdity entailed in denying the existence of the soul, and (5) The challenge of accounting for the verifiable reality of out-of-body experiences.

## I. The Gottfried Leibniz' Philosophical Law of Identity

My first argument in favor of substance dualism employs the metaphysical criterion known as *Leibniz's Law of Identity* to the task of distinguishing the *dualistic* view of human nature from the *monistic* view. Although not obvious at first glance, his insights here are critical to addressing the challenge of differentiating between the mind and the brain. I remember with shame my impatience with what seemed at first to me an utterly trivial and unnecessary rational distinction, namely, that in terms of identity "*everything whatever (sic), stands in this relation to itself and to nothing else.*" That is, "*Whatever is true of a thing is true of anything identical with that thing, since anything identical with that thing is that very thing itself.*"<sup>29</sup> It so happens that with respect to the existence of the soul, employing this analytical criterion is essential means for addressing that question. Physicalism holds that human beings consist entirely of *physical* properties only. According to that position, the brain is the sole repository of all so-called mental functions. There is no such reality of the soul (or mind) that is separate from the physical brain. If physicalism is correct, then there are no aspects of mental activity that cannot be accounted for solely by the brain. Indeed, according to that position, both the brain and our experience of the so-called mind (or soul)<sup>30</sup> are identical entities. It is here that Leibniz's law provides the criterion that is essential to judging whether physicalism is true. Stated simply, in order for the two entities; the brain and the mind to be the same, they must have identical properties. If the two are found to not be identical, then the two are not the same thing, and dualism therefore is established.<sup>31</sup> Correspondingly, Moreland declares, "*Physicalists [on the other hand] must not only show that mental and brain phenomena are inseparable to make their case. They must also show that they are identical.*"<sup>32</sup> Swinburne states similarly, "*If a substance is a different substance from some earlier substance, there must be some parts or properties which are different.*"<sup>33</sup> In other words, in order to establish identity, it is not sufficient to demonstrate mere correlation between two entities, there must instead be demonstration that the one *cannot* exist without the other.

Dr. Moreland delineates a host of property categories that illustrate how it is that the brain cannot be identical with the mind.<sup>34</sup> I summarize them as follows: (A) The matter of our inner experience of ourselves as, well, a self; that is, an "I," or, "ego, (B) The aspect of privacy

---

<sup>28</sup> The term "libertarian" emphasizes that the experience of free will isn't merely a faulty internal *perception*, but results from personal choice.

<sup>29</sup> E.J. Lowe. *A Survey of Metaphysics*. (Oxford, 2002), p. 23. \*\* Also, Swinburne. *Op.cit.* (6), ch. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Although the soul and the mind are distinguishable as concepts, it is not within the scope of this paper to make that clarification. Let me simply state here that the biblical view of the soul, in contrast to the pagan view, is that the soul is not immortal. I turn readers back to Cullmann's teaching referenced by note 1, above.

<sup>31</sup> *Op.cit.* (19), p. 33f.

<sup>32</sup> J.P. Moreland. *Scaling the Secular City*. (Baker, 1987), p.84.

<sup>33</sup> *Op.cit.* (6), p.170.

<sup>34</sup> *Op.cit.* (19), p. 78f.

with respect to our mental processes that does not apply to electro-chemical activity within our physical brain, (C) The distinction between our personal direct experiences in contrast to sense perception, (D) The *continuity* of the memories that we recall within our mind in contrast to the transitory aspect of the physical brain.

### A. The Inner Experience of the Ego

Rene Descartes said famously, *“I think, therefore I am.”*<sup>35</sup> It is an undeniable fact that when we are awake, we exercise the ongoing subjective experience of consciousness. Dinesh D’Souza writes, *“The problem for materialism, and for modern [materialistic] science more generally, is that **human** subjectivity is a fact of nature no less than planets, rocks, and trees ... We recognize consciousness because we are unmistakably aware of it and because through it we are aware of everything else”* (boldface mine).<sup>36</sup> Renowned Professor and Neurosurgeon Professor and Neurosurgeon Dr. Eben Alexander M.D., who was converted to the dualistic belief in the soul following his own near-death and out-of-body experience, now states, *“Each one of us is more familiar with consciousness than we are with anything else, and yet we understand far more about the rest of the universe than we do about the mechanism of consciousness. It is **so** close to home that it is almost forever beyond our grasp. There is nothing about the physics of the material world (quarks, electrons, photons, atoms, etc.) and specifically the intricate structure of the brain that gives the slightest clue as to the mechanism of consciousness. In fact the greatest clue to the reality of the spiritual realm is this profound mystery of our conscious existence”* (boldface mine).<sup>37</sup> Dr. Moreland boldly states that if one begins with physicalism, then there is logically no room whatsoever for consideration of the notion of mind and consciousness.<sup>38</sup> Yet Dr.’s Tim Pickavance and Robert Koons, in light of Descartes’ famous ‘cogito,’<sup>39</sup> wrote, *“We know that we exist, since...it is incoherent to try to deny one’s own existence.”*<sup>40</sup>

### B. The Aspect of Privacy Concerning our Mental Life

During brain surgery, the patient is commonly kept awake (there are no nerve cells in the brain which have the capacity to sense pain) for the specific purpose of assuring the surgeon that he is operating on the correct location in the brain. In order for communication on this matter to occur, it is required that the patient report (that is, speak) to the surgeon about which thoughts or sensations the Dr.’s probing instrument is arousing in the patient.<sup>41</sup> No one else has access to the *personal* contents in your brain, even though a medical team can thoroughly map out the *physical* properties of the physical brain.

---

<sup>35</sup> Will and Ariel Durant. “The Age of Reason Begins.” *The Story of Civilization* v. VII. (Simon and Schuster, 1961), p.639.

<sup>36</sup> Op.cit. (21), pp. 129, 136.

<sup>37</sup> Eben Alexander. *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife*. (Simon and Schuster, 2012), p.154.

<sup>38</sup> Op.cit. (19), p.76.

<sup>39</sup> Op.cit. (19).

<sup>40</sup> Op.cit. (4), p.178.

<sup>41</sup> J.P. Moreland. Lecture on the soul at Biola University, June 23, 2014.

### C. The Aspect of Direct Personal Experience

Insofar as the locus of the human experience of *mental* (soulish) activity is *within* (“inside”) our bodies as opposed to external to it (perceptions attained from sight, hearing, smelling, taste, and touch), it can be distinguished from the electro-chemical events which neuroscientists study in their investigation of the physical brain. This paper does not deny that a functional connection exists between the mind and the brain, but instead rejects the notion that two are identical. Moreland has likened that very relationship to the role of a driver operating an automobile. Insofar as operators of such vehicles are seated behind the steering wheel of the car, their capacity for mobility of the car is entirely restricted to their manipulation of each of the instruments which are built into the vehicle according to the manufacturers’ specifications. Nevertheless, the driver and the vehicle are not the same thing(s). In a similar way, our *physical* brain, though not the same thing as our *spiritual* mind, is the mechanism through which the mind both *manipulates* the physical body in order to achieve a goal within the physical world, and *perceives* that world around us by means of our five senses.<sup>42</sup> One of the chief perennial philosophical questions concerns how we are to understand our perception of the outer world through our five senses. Although it is not in the purview of this paper to answer that question in Kantian terms with respect to the statement at hand, Moreland notes that the eye, to give one example, doesn’t do the seeing; it is instead the soul that perceives (sees) the physical world *through* the eye. On the other hand, and in order to further the purpose of this section, he notes that in contrast to physical perception, “*One need not be aware of one’s mental state by means of anything else [e.g. sense impressions]*”<sup>43</sup> for the reason that we have **direct** experience of our own *thoughts* and *feelings*. The actual *experience* of pain, for example, cannot be shared with another person. Nor, correspondingly, can that unpleasant experience be *directly* accounted for with physical language.<sup>44</sup>

### D. The Continuity of Memories in Contrast to the Transitory Aspect of Our Brain

The existence of memory, that is, the capacity to recall people, events, and lessons, is essential to both human survival and personal well-being. Richard Swinburne points out that though Sigmund Freud was a thoroughgoing physicalist, he too taught that the human mental life consists of a vast array of conscious and unconscious (often suppressed) thoughts and experiences. That very agenda implicitly assumes an on-going continuity of awareness that is never shut off, even while we sleep.<sup>45</sup> Swinburne continues, “*When we reason we consciously ‘look in’ on these beliefs and desires; and they give rise to conscious intentions and thoughts. It seems evident, however, that brain events must also be at work in holding in place such a system of unconscious beliefs and desires...*”<sup>46</sup> The problem for the physicalist interpretation of this obvious reality is the second fact of the transitory aspect of the physical brain. The body is

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. \*\* Swinburne. Op.cit. (6), p.163.

<sup>43</sup> Op.cit. (19), p.81 (boldface mine).

<sup>44</sup> Op.cit. (19), p.80.

<sup>45</sup> Op.cit. (6), p.167, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Op.cit. (6), p.169.

consistently replacing dead cells with brand new ones. The hippocampus area of the human brain, in particular,<sup>47</sup> adds cells.<sup>48</sup> When I queried Dr. Moreland on the reality that the brain, *as a whole*, keeps its cells over a lifetime, he replied, *“It doesn’t matter. If some cells die [that is, again, in the hippocampus] then it is a different material object ... And besides, we could run the same argument by appealing to sub-atomic particles that are coming and going, and moving and rearranging all the time is a constant state of flux.”*<sup>49</sup> Finally, Dr. Burt Peters of Zucker Hillside Hospital states, *“Our brain is changing throughout our lives. These changes underlie the capacities that emerge and are refined through adulthood... Our study identified key brain circuits that develop during adolescence and young adulthood that are associated with the growth of learning, memory, and planning abilities. These findings suggest that young people may not have the capacity of these functions until these connections have completed their normal trajectory of maturation beyond adolescence.”*<sup>50</sup> As philosopher Dr. Swinburne notes, the reality of the transitory aspect of our body, including our brain, clarifies the distinction between the brain and the soul.<sup>51</sup>

## II. The Existential Experience of Human Consciousness

“Physicalism” holds that only physical entities exist to the exclusion of spiritual realities. With respect to human nature, therefore, J.P. Moreland states, *“According to physicalism, there are **no** fundamentally basic or intrinsic...privileged first-person perspectives...**Everything** can be exhaustively described in an object language from a **third-person** perspective...[that exists, for example, as] a body at a certain location that is five feet tall, weighs 160 pounds,’ and so forth ... But **no** amount of third person descriptions (‘he,’ ‘she,’ ‘it’) captures my **own** subjective, first-person (‘I’) acquaintance of my **own self** in acts of **self-awareness**”* (boldface mine).<sup>52</sup> Self-consciousness, then, is an experience which can be described only from a first-person perspective by means of the employment of first-person singular pronouns. Dinesh D’Souza states, *“Consciousness is something we all have and know more directly than we know anything else. We are on such intimate terms with consciousness that we happily relinquish it every night, only to get it back in the morning.”*<sup>53</sup> Philosopher David Chalmers adds, *“We know consciousness far more intimately than we know the rest of the world, but we **understand** the rest of the world far better than we understand consciousness.”*<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> As distinct from the other regions of the brain where cells are not replaced.

<sup>48</sup> Pasto Rakic, Prof. of Neuroscience and Neurology at the Kavli Inst. (Yale University), writes, *“The Hippocampus is the only place in the human brain where new cells are added throughout our lifetime.”* ([www.brainfacts.org/ask-an-expert/articles/2012/are-you-born-with-all-your-brain-cells-or-do-you-grow-new-ones](http://www.brainfacts.org/ask-an-expert/articles/2012/are-you-born-with-all-your-brain-cells-or-do-you-grow-new-ones)).

<sup>49</sup> Personal e-mail to me on July 14, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/02/140203083828.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/02/140203083828.htm).

<sup>51</sup> Swinburne. Op.cit. (6), p.170.

<sup>52</sup> Francis Beckwith et. al., ed. J.P. Moreland. “Physicalism, Naturalism and the Nature of Human Persons.” *To Everyone an Answer*. (IVP Academic, 2004), p. 233.

<sup>53</sup> Op.cit. (21), p. 133.

<sup>54</sup> David Chalmers. *The Conscious Mind in Search of a Fundamental Theory*. (Oxford, 1996), p. 3. Quoted in Op.cit. (20), p. 133 (boldface mine).

Indeed, in spite of our *direct* experience of consciousness, we can neither explain nor account for that aspect of this inner encounter on *scientific* grounds.<sup>55</sup> The reason for this challenge is not difficult to see. The conviction that our mind is both real and distinct from the physical organ known as the brain is grounded on the conviction that there is a spiritual realm which is utterly distinct from the physical realm. Consequently, the existence of a *spiritual* entity identified as the mind cannot be analyzed by investigational instruments and mathematical formulas that are designed to detect electro-chemical substances and events.

One of the early objections to the existence of the soul was grounded on an assumed impossibility for spiritual entities (by extension, spirits, ghosts, etc.) which, by definition travel unhindered through walls, to initiate causal activity in the physical realm.<sup>56</sup> It is on this count helpful to reflect on recent medical discoveries pertaining to “cognitive therapy” whereby the “mind” is documented to successfully “rewire” certain aspects of the physical brain so as to produce healing results.<sup>57</sup> In reply to the objection which began this paragraph, D’Souza has noted that physicalism likewise must confront the challenge that it cannot account for our experience of self-consciousness in the context of a purely *mechanistic* world.<sup>58</sup>

The objection, I repeat, to the existence of the soul which began the above paragraph, additionally violates a fundamental principle of scientific investigation. Commitment to the raw empirical data must always take priority over the challenge of comprehension of that data.<sup>59</sup> For example, Isaac Newton held tenaciously to his mathematical formulations regarding gravitational attraction between planets in spite of his inability to explain such power between these objects over great distances.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the scientific community today concedes that Quantum Mechanics is a correct perception of the nature of interactions in the subatomic world for the reason that repeated rigorous testing has demonstrated it to be so.<sup>61</sup> This despite the fact that its’ indications are so broadly conceded to be counter-intuitive.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, when it comes to the question of the reality of the soul, philosophical naturalists deny not only its reality, but also both the ego and consciousness itself solely for the reason that they cannot be squared with the materialistic world-view to which they are committed. Such a step does not logically follow from the raw data of universal<sup>63</sup> human experience. Nor does it square with rationality. Neither, furthermore, can it be reconciled with scientific knowledge. Our best data that pertains to the history of our universe demonstrates that it had a beginning (came

---

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Pinker. How the Mind Works. (W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 148. Quoted in Op.cit. (20), p.133.

<sup>56</sup> Gary Ferngren. Science and Religion. (Johns Hopkins, 2002), p.330.

<sup>57</sup> Op.cit. (21), pp. 129f.

<sup>58</sup> Op.cit. (21), p. 115, 124.

<sup>59</sup> Dennis Danielson, ed. The Book of the Cosmos: Imagining the Universe from Heraclitus to Hawking. Fred Hoyle. “This Big Bang Idea.” (Persius, 2000), p. 413. \*\* Former renowned atheist spokesperson, Antony Flew came to believe in a personal God by, as he described the turnaround, following “*the argument wherever it leads.*” (A. Flew. There is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind. (Harper One, 2007), p. 89).

<sup>60</sup> Brian Greene. The Elegant Universe. (First Vintage, 2003), p. 56.

<sup>61</sup> “[Quantum] calculations yield predictions about electrons that have been experimentally verified to an accuracy better than one part in a billion.” Ibid. (32), p. 122.

<sup>62</sup> Phil Mason. Quantum Glory: The Science of Heaven Invading Earth. (New Earth Tribe Publications, 2010), ch. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Even philosophical materialists live out their lives as though possessing the very souls whose existence they deny. See Nancy Pearcey. Finding Truth. (David Cook, 2015), pp. 106f.

into existence) out of nothing,<sup>64</sup> that is, that an intelligent agent from outside of nature brought it into existence, namely the God of the Bible. It is therefore not matter which constitutes primary reality, but instead Personality (John 1:1-3).<sup>65</sup> It follows from this truth that, consistent with humans having been uniquely created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), the last work of God's artistry (the Greek word for "created"—*katartisthe*--Hebrews 11:3) in God's creation week (Gen. 1:26-31) should be an embodied soul.

### III, IV. The Logical Absurdity Entailed in Denying Free-Will

For similar reasons, it logically follows from both the **physicalist** position on human nature and the denial of the reality of human consciousness just discussed, that human free-will<sup>66</sup> is an impossibility, even in principle. For this reason, D'Souza states that "*The argument against free-will comes not from biology or neuroscience but from physics. [If it is true that] we are a part of nature and made up [solely] of atoms and molecules just as everything else... There is **no room** in this picture for free-will.*"<sup>67</sup>

Yet it is the very premise of this world-view that must be challenged for the reason that both the denial of free-will and the foundation from which it is asserted, entails a fatal self-contradiction. To return to D'Souza, "*If there is no free-will, the entire literature of Western civilization becomes incomprehensible because every single character from Oedipus to Gatsby was merely acting in response to uncontrolled brain states...[Indeed], If there is no free will, the American founders didn't choose to adopt a Constitution in Philadelphia. Nor did Americans adopt Barak Obama a President. Nor is there anything we can do to improve Social Security or Medicare. If free-will is an illusion, then there are no good deeds or bad deeds because **no one has any choice** in the matter...*"<sup>68</sup> Renowned scientist J.B.S. Haldane famously stated, specifically with respect to scientific assertions, "*If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true ... and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.*"<sup>69</sup>

It needs to be emphasized that no one is exempted from the implications of the physicalist view of human nature. For this very reason, the assertion of the non-existence of the soul is suicidal with respect to the denigration of the value of human beings in general. At the same time it also compromises the very proponents of this position. In other words, if physicalism is supposed to be true, then what grounds does any person have for trusting the same persons who propagate this position by denying the actuality of their own personality?

---

<sup>64</sup> See my essay, "Was the big Bang the Big Beginning?" at my website, <http://www.christianityontheoffense.com>.

<sup>65</sup> Summarized here as "*In the beginning was the Word...all things were made through Him*" (1:1-3), notice first of all that "the Word" precedes creation of "*all things*." Notice secondly that it was *through* that "Word" that creation came into existence. And notice thirdly that "the Word" is a personal being ("*through Him*") who is identified with the Trinity ("*and the Word was with God and the Word was God*").

<sup>66</sup> It is not within the scope of this paper to clarify classical philosophical and theological distinctions concerning the extent of human free will, but instead to distinguish between the kind of determinism that is consistent with a physicalist worldview and the capacity of humans to both make decisions and act upon them.

<sup>67</sup> Op.cit. (21), p.138.

<sup>68</sup> Op.cit. (21), p.139, (boldface mine).

<sup>69</sup> J.B.S. Haldane. Possible Worlds. (Harper and Row, 1928), p. 220. Quoted in Op.cit. (1, p. 141

In addition, on a sociological level, the very possibility of meaningful dialogue between an two individuals becomes a conceptual impossibility. Robert McTeigue, S.J. describes the problem as follows: *“Anthropological physical reductionism...assert[s] that there are no humanly relevant non-physical realities [(souls)]. In other words, if anthropological reductionism were true. There would literally no one to have a conversation about its being true [because] there’s nobody at home.”*<sup>70</sup>

### **III. The Challenge of Accounting for the Verifiable Reality of Out-of-Body Experiences**

Dr. Alexander began his professional career as a committed philosophical physicalist. He had initially stated, *“When your brain is absent, you are absent too...If you don’t have a working brain, you can’t be conscious. This is because the brain is the machine that produces consciousness in the first place.”*<sup>71</sup> Yet experiential circumstances changed his mind. He maintained his prior position until he became so severely afflicted with Meningitis that his brain shut down completely for seven days. It was during this coma that he had so profound of an out-of-body experience that when he returned to his body, his entire thinking about the non-existence of the soul was overturned.<sup>72</sup> It is not that he overthrew his medical knowledge, but instead that, together with his commitment to scientific scholarship, he made room for the soul by concluding, *“[While] certain members of the scientific community have insisted that science and spiritual reality cannot coexist...They are mistaken”*<sup>73</sup>... [During my coma] *I had been alive and aware in another] universe ...more real than the logs burning in my fireplace.”*<sup>74</sup> Reflecting back on the fact of his own near-death neurological data, he concluded that his experience was, *“one of the most convincing cases in modern history,”* thereby rendering as *“impossible [people] arguing, from a medical standpoint, that it was all fantasy.”*<sup>75</sup>

Gary Jensen, Pastor © January 2017, revised April 8, 2021

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (NALC), Berlin, PA, USA

Christianityontheoffense.com \*\* offensivechristianity.blogspot.com \*\* gjensen549@gmail.com

---

<sup>70</sup> Real Philosophy for Real People. (Ignatius, 2020), p. 149.

<sup>71</sup> Eben Alexander. Op.cit. (34), pp. 8, 153, Appendix B.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, pp. 141f.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 73.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 130.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 135.