

DO YOU BELIEVE?
A BOOK SERIES FROM RATIO CHRISTI
- BOOK 13 -

ARE HUMANS MORE THAN A BODY?

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 RATIO
CHRISTI

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FAITH & REASON are at odds in our culture. For many, faith has come to mean little more than wishful thinking and blind belief. Such a concept is completely foreign to the pages of Scripture and historical Christianity. As Edward Feser notes, “In short, reason tells us that there is a God and that he has revealed such-and-such a truth; faith is then a matter of believing what reason has shown God to have revealed. In that sense faith is not only not at odds with reason but is grounded in reason.”

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Sherry would never forget the day she found her one-year old son lying face down in the bathtub.

When she pulled him out of the water her hands were ice-cold, but were not yet as cold as the lifeless body of her little boy. She had only left the room for a few moments to answer the door, but a few moments was all it took for little Paulie to slip face-first into the water, struggle briefly, and be still. Sherry would never hear Paulie's voice again.¹

OBLIVION OR ETERNAL LIFE?

Paulie was gone, but many questions remained. How could this happen? If God existed, how could He allow such a pointless death? Was there any point to Paulie's short, joyful life? What hope was there for Paulie or his family? And, most importantly, will Sherry ever see her son again?

Whether or not Sherry can hope to see Paulie again hangs on one question: was Paulie just a body? If Paulie was nothing more than his body, then when his body died, the little boy ceased to exist. The same could be said for us; if humans are just bodies, then regardless of what any person does, their story ends the same way: in nothingness. Oblivion turns out to be the end for everyone. But what if Paulie was more than mere matter? If so, then Paulie's story may not end in the bathtub of Sherry's house. If human beings are more than bodies, their lives may not end at the grave, and thus their actions may have significance which goes far beyond the seven or so decades that they are given on earth.

Sherry is a Christian. She believes not only that Paulie has a soul, but also that God exists and created Paulie for a purpose. So Sherry has confidence that she will see Paulie again. But is there any reason for her to be so confident that Paulie was more than his body? Is Sherry's belief in Paulie's soul just wishful thinking? Let's look at the evidence and return to Sherry's story at the end.

¹ Although the names have been changed, this story describes actual events which devastated a family I knew in graduate school.

A (VERY) BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEBATE

The idea that humans are just physical bodies (**Reductive Physicalism**) has a long pedigree, going back to at least 300 B.C., when it was defended by the Greek philosopher Epicurus. Epicurus rejected that anything non-material could exist, whether souls or minds or devils or gods. Since the days of Epicurus, Physicalism has had many able defenders, including John Stuart Mill, Aldous Huxley, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Bertrand Russell, J.L. Mackie, and Alex Rosenberg. During the early twentieth century Reductive Physicalism² gained some temporary popularity, but it has since fallen out of favor for reasons that will be discussed below.³ If what Physicalists believe is true, then there are no souls or immaterial minds, and eternal life is impossible.

Throughout history, however, the vast majority of both secular and religious thinkers have been convinced that humans cannot be reduced to their physical bodies. Such thinkers have instead argued human persons are made up of two things (sometimes called “substances”): body and soul. The body is made up of physical stuff and interacts with the physical world, whereas the soul is a purely mental substance which plays at least some role in directing the thoughts, will, growth, experiences, and actions of the human person. This view that humans have immaterial souls or minds is called **Dualism**.⁴ Dualism has a pedigree equally impressive as Reductive Physicalism’s, going at least as far back as Plato in 400 B.C.⁵ Famous historical Dualists include Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Thomas Reid, Frederick Copleston, Alvin Plantinga, J.P. Moreland, and Richard Swinburne.

2 Hereafter Reductive physicalism will be referred to as “physicalism.”

3 Jaegwon Kim, “The Myth of Non-Reductive Physicalism,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 63, no. 3 (1989): 32. Accessed December 5, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3130081>.

4 “Dualism” is here meant to encompass both substance dualism and hylomorphic dualism, but not “mere property dualism,” since mere property dualists reject the existence of a soul. Property dualism will instead be referred to as “non-reductive physicalism.”

5 Many earlier cultures were arguably dualist, but Plato was the first to philosophically articulate some form of dualism

EVIDENCE FOR THE SOUL

Historically, most philosophers have believed that humans have (or are) souls, and for good reason. Much of human experience seems to be completely incompatible with our being merely physical objects. And if there are things that are true about humans that could not be true about purely physical creatures, then human beings must be more than mere bodies; they must have souls. Let's take a look at some of the evidence which shows humans cannot be merely physical.

1. Unity of Consciousness

One particularly difficult problem for physicalism is its inability to account for the unified way in which each individual person experiences the world. For example, when a person (say, Bob) walks toward his car, he experiences the distinct colors of the ground, the tires, the car's paint, and the reflection of the sun. Furthermore, as Bob touches the door-handle he feels the heat of the handle and pauses to consider how the sunlight has heated the vehicle and how, therefore, the interior of the car will probably be intolerably hot. As he gets into the vehicle, he checks the mileage and realizes he needs to change the oil, but is frustrated by the fact that he isn't sure when he will find time to do so. However, Bob also remembers how he ruined his first vehicle by failing to change the oil regularly, and so he decides to make time in his schedule to get the oil change done.

This brief account of Bob's experience is typical of the events, thoughts, and experiences of the average human person. Bob experiences a variety of mental states and properties. He experiences color, heat, irritation, and worry; he also uses his memory, his will, and his rational faculties in planning for the future. The essential point here is Bob's various thoughts, acts, and intentions are all unified and experienced by Bob at any given moment, as well as through time. While all the individual bits of information Bob takes in are distinct, they do not remain separate and unrelated; rather these experiences are unified and experienced by someone – Bob.

The problem for Physicalism arises when one considers that no physical part or collection of parts within Bob's body could be the single, unified subject⁶ of all these various experiences. It does no good to simply respond that Bob's brain unifies these experiences, for Bob's brain is merely a conglomeration of individual cells, tissues, neurons, and synapses, and these individual parts merely transmit information concerning individual mental events. But there is no part of the brain which experiences all these perceptions in the complete unified way Bob does. The philosopher William Hasker

6 By "subject," we mean a self that can experience conscious states.

makes this point very clearly:

Even a fairly simple experiential state – say, your visual experience as you look around this room – contains far more information than can be encoded in a single transistor or a single neuron. Suppose then, that the state is broken up into bits in such a way that some small part of it is represented in each of the many different parts of the brain... we still have the question: who or what is aware of the conscious state as a whole? For it is a fact that you are aware of your conscious state, at any given time, as a unitary whole. So we have this question for the [Physicalist]: when I am aware of a complex conscious state, what physical entity is it that is aware of that state? This question, I am convinced, does not and cannot receive a plausible answer.⁷

Furthermore, as philosopher of mind E. J. Lowe points out, Bob does not require any specific part of his brain or body to have this unified experience because many people who have significant sections of their brain removed nevertheless have a unified subjective experience.⁸ Incredibly, doctors have examined live, normally functioning patients to find that the patients are missing over half of their brain - some patients missing the right half, and others the left half!⁹

These individuals may have had some relatively minor loss of function, but otherwise they experienced life as normal adults; they were able to have a unified experience of the world around them. Hence, to go back to our friend Bob, even if Bob were missing a significant portion of his brain, he can still have a unified experience of sights, sounds, smells, and rational thought – an experience for which no specific part of his brain is sufficient or necessary. This data only makes sense if Bob has a soul (or mind)¹⁰ which unifies and experiences all the widely varying data his senses take in. Thus, Bob's daily experience as a unified self is powerful evidence that Bob is more than his body.¹¹

2. Identity Over Time

A second problem with Physicalism involves the preservation of identity over time. The problem can be best understood by imagining some physical object composed of parts, like a bicycle. Imagine a mechanic removes one part of the bicycle every minute and replaces it with an identical new part, so after several hours every part has been changed. Most would agree it is not the same bicycle; it is an entirely different bicycle

⁷ William Hasker, "Persons and the Unity of Consciousness," in *The Waning of Materialism*. Eds Robert C. Koons and George Bealer (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 182.

⁸ E. J. Lowe, "Dualism," in *The Oxford Handbook to Philosophy of Mind*. Eds. Brian McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), 74-75.

⁹ Feng Yu, Qing-jun Jiang, Xi-yan Sun, Rong-wei Zhang; A new case of complete primary cerebellar agenesis: clinical and imaging findings in a living patient, *Brain*, Volume 138, Issue 6, 1 June 2015, Pages e353, <https://doi.org/10.1093/brain/awu239>

¹⁰ The terms "soul" and "mind" will be used interchangeably.

¹¹ For a scholarly defense of this argument, see William Hasker's *The Emergent Self*. (London: Cornell UP, 1999). 122-146.

even though the parts were replaced one at a time. If the example was extended so that a new part was replaced every year instead of every minute, it would not change the results. Once the original parts are gone, the bicycle is a different bicycle.

Think of it this way: Suppose the bicycle is composed of aluminum parts and all of them are replaced with wooden parts. Surely the new bicycle is not identical with the original one. But the reason is not that the new parts are wooden. Rather, the reason is that the old parts are replaced by new ones. The bicycle is composed solely by its parts, so if you have new parts you have a new bicycle.

If Physicalism is true, this example reveals a major problem because humans would be reducible to a complex set of physical parts standing in various relations to one another, and this combination of parts and relations is constantly changing. In fact, “in a year approximately 98% of the atoms in us now will be replaced by other atoms that we take in in our air, food, and drink,”¹² and the other 2% take just a little longer to be replaced. If, as Reductive Physicalism implies, humans are merely a complex arrangement of physical parts, then after a year we are not that same person.

Such an odd conclusion has some incredibly counterintuitive consequences. If identity is only retained for a few years then any person who is being punished for a crime longer than that is being punished for someone else’s actions. Any memory more than a few years old is someone else’s memory. Of course, such conclusions are absurd. Human experience retains a relatively stable identity in spite of significant physical change. Such stability would be impossible if humans were merely bodies. Once again, the Dualist view that humans have an immaterial soul solves this problem. If we each have an immaterial soul which unifies our experience of the world, a soul which remains constant while our physical bodies change drastically, we could retain stable identities in spite of significant physical change. Thus, our experience of maintaining such a stable identity over time is evidence we do have souls.¹³

3. Mental Causation

It seems an obvious and vitally important fact that our thoughts, beliefs, and other mental states can actually have some effect on our actions. This fact is what philosophers call “mental causation.” Of course, our conscious thoughts are not the only cause of our actions – some actions and responses may be automatic or subconscious, but our conscious thoughts clearly have some effect on what we do. Philosopher Jaegwon Kim, himself a Physicalist, points out that mental causation is necessary for human agency, perception, reasoning, and memory, and “If you take away perception, memory, and

12 Paul C. Aebersold, “Radioisotopes – New keys to knowledge”, in *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institute* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1954), 232. Accessed here 8/28/18 <https://archive.org/stream/annualreportofbo1953smit#page/232>

13 For a more recent scholarly defense of this argument, see Martine Nida-Rumelin’s “An Argument from TransTemporal Identity for Subject-Body Dualism” in *The Waning of Materialism*, eds. Robert Koons and George Bealer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 191-214.

reasoning, you pretty much take away all of human knowledge.”¹⁴ Kim is far from alone in understanding the importance of mental causation. Philosopher of mind Jerry Fodor writes as follows:

*If it isn't literally true that my wanting is causally responsible for my reaching and my itching is causally responsible for my scratching, and my believing is causally responsible for my saying... if none of that is literally true, then practically everything I believe about anything is false and it's the end of the world.*¹⁵

Any theory of mind must make sense of mental causation. Thus, if someone's view of human beings would imply mental causation could not happen, then that is an excellent reason to reject their view.

The problem is, given Physicalism, mental causation becomes not just mysterious, but apparently impossible. For if Reductive Physicalism is true, then every mental event is ultimately reducible to a physical event. As a physical event, each mental event would be fully determined by the laws of physics and chemistry rather than by reason or by the content of beliefs or experiences. Under Physicalism, the informational content of our thoughts wouldn't matter. Rather, every thought and every action would be caused by non-rational physical events which have been determined entirely by other purely physical events. However, since we all experience our thoughts and experiences causing us to act, mental causation provides excellent evidence we are more than our bodies.

4. Free will, Rationality, and Moral Responsibility

People make choices and it seems obvious in at least some of these choices that they could have chosen differently from what they chose. For example, if a friend betrays us we get angry at him because he should have done something different; he should have been loyal. We also often regret our own actions, which implies not only that we *could* have done something different but that we *should* have done something different. We try to encourage other people to act in specific ways, as though they have the ability to evaluate what we are saying and choose either to listen or to ignore our advice. All of these situations reveal that human beings experience a certain level of real freedom in their everyday lives – a freedom which allows them to choose between two or more options. Atheist philosopher John Searle concurs that, “there are all sorts of experiences that we have in life where it seems just a fact of our experience that though we did one thing, we feel we know perfectly well that we could have done something else...human freedom is just a fact of experience.”¹⁶

Furthermore, we often speak of certain actions or beliefs as rational or irrational

14 Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 31.

15 Jerry Fodor, “Making Mind Matter More,” reprinted in *A Theory of Content and Other Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 156.

16 John Searle, *Minds Brains and Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 87-88.

depending not just on what the beliefs are, but on how a person comes to believe them. For example, a person may believe that the earth is round because a fortune teller told her so. Her belief is correct, but it wasn't rationally acquired, because fortune tellers are unreliable sources of information. This scenario shows that for people to be rational they must be able to evaluate the reasons for their beliefs and be able to choose between more or less justified beliefs based on rational and experiential considerations.¹⁷

The problem for Physicalism here is if humans are purely physical objects then all the beliefs we hold and all the decisions we make are determined purely by our biology and environment. These biological and environmental factors are themselves purely determined by the laws of physics and chemistry not by the content of thoughts or the laws of logic. Hence, if humans were just physical stuff, then human beings would not be capable of free choices, a conclusion which makes nonsense of moral or rational decision-making along with the accompanying praise, blame, regret, and punishment. Since we all stake our lives on the fact we are capable of moral and rational decision-making, free will provides a very powerful reason to believe humans are more than their bodies.

Physicalists tend to respond to this argument by redefining freedom to mean merely "choosing what one wants". With this definition, it doesn't matter if what someone wants was determined by their biology or programmed by a mad scientist, as long as they are doing what they desire, they are free. Since this sort of freedom is *compatible* with their choices being caused by something outside their control, philosophers who believe in this definition are called Compatibilists.¹⁸ However, the redefinition doesn't solve the problems of moral responsibility and rational decision making. If someone is caused to desire and choose an "evil" or "irrational" act by mindless biological and environmental factors which are outside of her control, then it makes no sense to hold her morally or rationally culpable for those actions. It's not as though she could have done or desired anything different. So, the Compatibilist redefinition of freedom doesn't actually escape the force of this evidence for human souls. The universal human experiences of freedom, rationality, and moral responsibility all provide evidence that humans are more than their bodies.

5. How does it feel?

Let's once again imagine our poor friend Bob when he experiences severe pain – say, by putting his hand on a hot stove. Bob certainly responds physically to the pain. He winces, pulls his hand back, and yells "ouch!" But, that physical reaction is far from the only thing Bob experiences; he also experiences a feeling, a qualitative experience of "ouchiness" that is not reducible to the physical reactions Bob has. Mental experiences

¹⁷ Various versions of this argument have been ably defended by C.S. Lewis (1960), Victor Reppert (2003), Goetz and Taliaferro (2008), Alvin Plantinga (2011), and others.

¹⁸ For extended discussions of the compatibilist/incompatibilist debate, see the entries entitled "Free Will," "Compatibilism," and "Arguments for Incompatibilism" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu>).

like pain are called “qualia,” and some think that they present an unsolvable problem for Physicalists because the qualitative experiences of pain, pleasure, color, music, and emotion seem to clearly go beyond the merely physical descriptions of c-fibers, synapses, and so on. Certainly, one could describe the way in which nerves physically transmit or cause these experiences, but such descriptions are a far cry from the experiences themselves. The qualitative feeling of pain, for example, cannot be observed or described scientifically, and many would argue this unobservable feeling is what defines the “intrinsic nature” of pain!¹⁹ In fact, if all we had was the physical reaction without the feeling, we would not say the pain was different; we would say we felt no pain at all.

Nearly all other qualitative experiences (qualia) create this problem. For example, a scientist can describe what physically causes pleasure, but the feeling of pleasure itself cannot be described physically – it has to be experienced. Similarly, one could describe what wavelength of light produces redness, but he couldn’t describe what red actually looks like to a blind person, red has to be experienced to be fully understood. Not only are such experiences indescribable in purely physical terms, they also constitute the most universal aspects of human experience! Since the qualia that we all experience throughout our lives cannot be reduced to the physical, the fact we all constantly experience such qualia provides excellent reason to think that human conscious states are not reducible to their physical brain states.

6. Knowledge

Closely related to the question of qualia is the question of knowledge. To understand this problem, imagine that Bob has led a charmed life; he has never experienced pain of any sort. However, Bob is fascinated by pain, and so he becomes a neuroscientist. He learns every physical fact there is to know about pain; he understands the chemistry, the biology, and the physics behind every sort of pain that could ever exist. He becomes the world’s greatest expert on the subject, but he has not yet experienced pain. Then imagine that one day Bob drops a hammer on his toe and experiences excruciating pain for the first time. Did Bob learn anything? Of course! He learned what pain feels like.²⁰ This thought experiment shows that, even if Bob knew every physical fact about pain, he would have not learned everything there is to know about pain, a conclusion which indicates that there must be something more than a merely physical reality to the experience of pain.²¹

7. Private Access

The knowledge argument above is closely related to the problem of private access.

¹⁹ See, for example, Goetz and Taliaferro’s *Naturalism*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). 44-50.

²⁰ Example borrowed from Frank Jackson’s, “What Mary Didn’t Know” In *The Journal of Philosophy*, 83.5 (1984), 291-295.

²¹ For an extended argument for dualism based on Qualia and Knowledge, see Howard Robinson’s *From the Knowledge Argument to Mental Substance: Resurrecting the Mind*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Our conscious thoughts are immediately accessible to ourselves. A person can directly know exactly what he is thinking or experiencing, whereas no study of the physical brain will reveal the content of that person's thoughts. Human mental lives are simply not open to direct scientific observation. The only way scientists can know what someone is thinking is to ask that person what thoughts they are having while the scientists are observing the brain. This practice allows researchers to correlate what areas of the brain deal with particular mental events, but such researchers are completely unable to experience the content of these thoughts; they can only know what a person is thinking by asking that person to recount his thoughts.

Of course, material objects are not restricted in this way; rather material objects are equally observable by everyone. Indeed, the scientific method is built on the idea that we can observe and test the natural world in a way that other individuals can similarly observe and repeat. Human thoughts, however, are not so open to investigation; they exist in the private experience of the person having those thoughts, while it is the very nature of physical reality that it is open to public examination. Thus, the private nature of human mental lives shows humans must be more than physical objects.

8. Intentionality

Philosophers have long discussed that human thoughts have an “aboutness” to them; human thoughts are directed towards things. A person can be planning for the day's work, or desiring a cheeseburger for lunch, or reminiscing about a close friend from college. Such thoughts are not merely biochemical reactions which exist in isolation; they are *about* things that have no relation to the biochemical makeup of the brain. Human thoughts can even be about things that do not exist anywhere in the physical world. This “aboutness” is what philosophers call “intentionality.” The problem then is purely physical objects aren't about anything, they just exist. Rocks, quarks, atoms, trees, cells, nerves, synapses, and other physical objects aren't the sort of things that have intentionality. Since our thoughts clearly display this “aboutness”, our thoughts cannot be merely physical.²²

9. Modality

Let's return for a moment to our unfortunate friend Bob, but this time let's imagine Bob is involved in a fatal car crash and subsequently rushed to an emergency room. While in the emergency room, Bob has a near-death experience, during which he floats above the hospital bed and can observe the nurses administering CPR on his body. Such a scenario may not be actually possible, but it is at least logically possible – there is no difficulty in conceiving of such an event. However, it is not logically or conceivably possible for Bob's body to be disembodied.

²² For a discussion of Intentionality and some attempts to explain it away, see William Hasker's *The Emergent Self* (London: Cornell, 1999), 1-26. See also Dallas Willard's “Intentionality and the Substance of the Self.” *Philosophia Christi* 13.1 (2011): 7-20.

The problem for Physicalism is that in order to establish humans are nothing more than their bodies, a philosopher would need to defend that humans are identical to their bodies. If there is anything true about a person that is not true about their body, then that person is by definition not identical with their body. But we have already found something that is true of Bob that is not true of Bob's body; it is true Bob could conceivably be disembodied. Bob could suffer a near-death experience. But it is not true Bob's body could conceivably be disembodied. Therefore, Bob (and all other humans) cannot be identical with their bodies. There must be something to human persons that goes beyond the merely physical.²³ And while we believe in life after death, this argument does not depend on its reality. It is the mere possibility that Bob exists disembodied that establishes that he is more than his body since his body is not even possibly disembodied.

10. Near Death Experiences

The idea that one could possibly be disembodied receives support from recent studies of near-death experiences (NDEs). In such events, a person who is close to death has an experience of being separated from their body and observing events which their physical body is not able to observe, often because they are brain-dead. A study in Germany found that nearly one in twenty-five adults claimed to have had such an experience.²⁴ A 1992 Gallop poll in the United States confirmed about five percent of Americans similarly claim to have had a near death experience.²⁵ While such experiences are often dismissed as being a mere pop-culture phenomenon, they are incredibly common and often involve corroboration by medical professionals who confirm the patients were brain dead when they had the experiences, and were aware of events or information they could not have known in their physical condition.²⁶ If any of these millions of stories are accurate, then Dualism of some sort is true. Even if these events cannot be confirmed however, the fact that NDE's are so common at least establishes a distinction between a person and a body; a person can conceivably be disembodied while a body cannot.

These ten arguments give convincing evidence against physicalism and *for* the existence of a human soul. In order to respond to these evidences, Physicalists have suggested an alternative.

23 For a recent development of this argument see Rojka, Luboš' "The Modal Argument for Soul/Body Dualism." *Studia Neoaristotelica* 13 (1):45-70.

24 Knoblauch, Hubert & Schmied, Ina & Schnettler, Bernt. (2001). "Different Kinds of Near-Death Experience: A Report on a Survey of Near-Death Experiences in Germany." *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. 20. 15-29. 10.1023/A:1011112727078.

25 B. Greyson. "Varieties of Near Death Experience." *Psychiatry*. Nov 56.4(1993):390-9.

26 See, for example, Gary Habermas and J.P. Moreland's *Life Beyond Death: Exploring Evidence for Immortality*. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 155-199.

PHYSICALISM 2.0

The sort of Physicalism we have been discussing thus far (Reductive Physicalism) was very popular in the early 20th century, but it has since fallen on hard times. For many philosophers, a theory which fails to account for free will, knowledge, rationality, intentionality, mental causation, unified experiences, qualitative experiences, and the private nature of our thoughts fails spectacularly as a theory of mind.

By the end of the twentieth century, Reductive Physicalism had lost the widespread support it briefly enjoyed in the philosophical community, and a new sort of Physicalism had risen to take its place: “Non-Reductive Physicalism.”²⁷ **Non-Reductive Physicalism (NRP)** implies that, while humans are nothing more than physical objects, these physical objects can have non-physical properties. So, for example, NRP would argue that a person who is experiencing pain is experiencing something real and non-physical, but the person himself is entirely physical. Such a theory would purportedly allow for meaningful mental realities without requiring belief in an immaterial soul. NRP is called “non-reductive” because it accepts that some parts of human experience cannot be reduced to physics and chemistry, but it is still a type of Physicalism, because it holds that human persons themselves are entirely physical, and that *all their mental experiences are caused by their physical brains*.²⁸

For critics however, NRP represents a paradigm case of having your cake and eating it too. NRP certainly promises great things, but the grass is not always greener between the fences. There are two major problems with NRP. First, even if mildly successful, NRP is a very incomplete solution to the problems with Physicalism. Second, NRP isn't actually successful.

NRP: An Incomplete Solution

If NRP was true, it would allow for the bare existence of individual qualia such as the feeling of pain and the qualitative experience of redness, and it would help a little with the idea that thoughts are non-physical and can be about things. Unfortunately, that is the end of its success story.

When it comes to many of the greatest difficulties with Physicalism, NRP doesn't help at all. It does nothing to solve the problems of how humans have a unified

²⁷ Jaegwon Kim, “The Myth of Reductive Physicalism,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 63, no. 3 (1989): 32. Accessed December 5, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3130081>.

²⁸ The idea that all causes are physical is called “the principle of causal closure,” and it is considered a sort of benchmark for Physicalism. Any theory which allows for non-physical causation is not Physicalist, whereas a theory which allows for non-physical entities to exist can still be Physicalist as long as those non-physical entities have no causal effect on the physical world.

experience of multiple perceptions or how humans retain a stable identity when their physical bodies change. Additionally, NRP is not able to account for the mere possibility, much less the actuality of near-death experiences; most Physicalists focus on debunking NDE's because if they are even possibly real, Physicalism of any type is false.

Most importantly, NRP still requires all mental experiences to be entirely caused by physical states, which means the content of our thoughts – which would be non-physical – could not cause other thoughts, much less cause actions. If the Non-Reductive Physicalist wants to save mental causation, he will need to allow for non-physical mental properties which have their own ability to cause both physical events and other mental events. However, a non-material reality which can interact with a physical reality is a form of Strong Dualism – not a plausible form of Physicalism. The preservation of mental causation thus requires there to be an immaterial soul which is not fully determined by physics and chemistry.

Because NRP fails to provide a convincing account of mental causation, it equally fails to make sense of libertarian free will, reason, and moral responsibility. These factors count against NRP as forcefully as they count against Reductive Physicalism.

Does Non-Reductive Physicalism Even Make Sense?

NRP claims that conscious experiences really exist and that they are not reducible to physical properties, while simultaneously holding there aren't any non-physical substances. It does so by arguing that *purely physical* things (brain matter) can nonetheless have non-physical properties (consciousness). Such a position seems blatantly contradictory. Recently, philosopher of mind Susan Schneider argued this contradiction is fatal to NRP in light of current theories of substances. Schneider says “properties” are “part or all of the... nature of substance,” meaning if a brain has non-physical properties, then it makes no sense to call it a purely physical substance. NRP thus requires brains to be some sort of “hybrid substance” which is partially physical and partially nonphysical.²⁹ Schneider further points out that the “hybrid case” is actually “a form of substance dualism.” She concludes that “insofar as [NRP] locates a suitable bearer of mental properties, that bearer turns out to be non-physical...[and] if [NRP] cannot manage the mind problem, it must be discarded, for it is not a physicalist position at all.”³⁰ Hence, NRP can avoid the charge of contradiction only by accepting a form of Substance Dualism.

Why Physicalism?

In light of the many problems with Physicalism and the abundant evidence that humans are more than their bodies, why do so many philosophers continue to resist the evidence for the existence of souls? There are several reasons:

²⁹ Susan Schneider, “Non-reductive Physicalism and the Mind Problem,” *Noûs*. 47, no.1 (March 2013), 136. Accessed January 17, 2018. *Philosophers Index with Full Text, EBSCOhost*.
³⁰ Ibid.

1. A VERY SHARP RAZOR The simplest reason to reject Dualism is that Physicalism is, well, simpler. Physicalists point to a general rule called “Ockham’s Razor,” which teaches that one shouldn’t needlessly complicate theories with unnecessary entities. If you don’t need a soul to explain why humans behave the way they do, then you shouldn’t use the soul as an explanation. As we’ve seen above however, Physicalists don’t have adequate explanations, and Dualists believe souls are necessary to explain why humans behave the way they do, so this response falls flat.

2. SCIENCE WORKS GREAT! Another reason many reject the existence of souls is that spiritual entities would be indescribable through physics or any other scientific discipline. Even worse, these nonphysical souls would purportedly be able to affect physical bodies. As such, Substance Dualism violates a cherished Physicalist principle called the “causal closure of the physical world”: the principle one should never look outside the physical world to explain some effect within the physical world. Physicalists of all types hold to the causal closure principle.³¹ Dualists reject it. However, it should be noted the causal closure principle is simply a statement of what Physicalists believe. The assertion that no physical event has non-physical causes is what Physicalists *need to establish*. Thus, this principle cannot be used as evidence against the existence of souls.

3. WHAT DOES “NON-PHYSICAL” EVEN MEAN? A more serious question brought forward by Physicalists involves the difficulty of defining a non-physical entity. If non-physical realities like souls are so plentiful every single person has one within them, then it is fair to ask for more than a purely negative description. “Sure,” says the Physicalist, “a soul is non-physical and has properties such as intentionality and subjectivity, but what is it?” Dualists generally respond that a soul is a “mental substance,” or they may describe a soul as an immaterial form which orders the matter of the human body and directs its growth, but even contemporary Dualists such as Howard Robinson concur that Dualists have “not been notably successful” in “explaining how [they] understand the notion of immaterial substance.”³²

This objection is not false so much as it is weak. Energy, for example, is similarly difficult to define. Scientists can measure it and use it to explain various phenomena, but ask a scientist for a definition of what energy actually IS, and you will be met with blank stares. Does this mean we should not believe in energy? Surely not, because energy explains a huge amount of what scientists observe. Even if we struggle to define energy, we should still believe in energy because we have some very good reasons to do so.

³¹ See, for example, David Papineau’s “The Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism,” Jaegwon Kim’s “Mental Causation,” and Lynne Baker’s “Non-Reductive Materialism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, Eds. Brian McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009).

³² Howard Robinson, “Dualism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. Accessed December 18, 2017. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/dualism/>.

Similarly, since the Dualists can provide powerful reasons that humans cannot be purely material objects, then they are justified in believing that humans have souls, even if souls are difficult to clearly define.

4. WHERE IS THE SOUL? Another question frequently lobbed at Dualists asks where human souls are located. Dualists today give a wide variety of answers. Some say a person's soul is equally present at every point in their body; others argue souls are not located in space at all. Regardless of how the Dualist answers however, this question doesn't become a serious problem until it is paired with the interaction problem, which will be discussed next.

5. HOW DOES IT WORK? The biggest problem for the idea of souls is what is called the "interaction problem." The problem can be described as follows: accepting there are mental substances such as souls, how do such non-physical substances have any causal influence on the physical world? Because a spatial location seems necessary for cause-effect relationships, the problem is compounded by the assertion souls are not extended in space. For example, if a man swings a bat and hits a ball, it is clear that a specific spatial location of the bat in relation to the ball is necessary for causal interaction. Or, to use Jaegwon Kim's example, if a man fires a rifle at another man's chest, surely it is the location of the first man, and direction of the muzzle, and the location of the second man that determines whether the first man has any physical effect on the second man.³³ All such observable causal chains require a specific spatial relation for there to be any causal interaction between two physical substances. Under the non-spatial version of Substance Dualism there is no clear spatial location for mental substances, so interaction between the physical and non-physical appears doubly mysterious. However, this argument is not a problem for versions of Substance Dualism that in some way or another locate the soul. Further, spatial location and orientation may be a necessary condition for physical objects to causally interact, but it is far from clear that this is so for immaterial entities

Still, this question is serious, but it is actually less of a problem for Dualism than it is a problem for causation in general, because there is no widely accepted theory for causation, physical or otherwise. Nevertheless, belief in causation is rational even if causation is not understood. As Philosopher William Hasker points out in an online video interview:

[Mind and body interaction] is as much a fact of our experience as anything that we experience. I decide to lift my hand and my hand goes up; I pinch my finger and it hurts... it's just totally a fact of constant everyday experience that our thoughts and our body mutually affect one another. So if your theory makes it hard to accept that, then it's more likely that there's

33 Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 31.

*something wrong with your theory than that your experience is misleading...now if you want to say 'how does that work?' well, there's kind of a naïve assumption here that we understand in general how cause-effect actions work. But, like it or not, that just ain't [sic] so... yes, there is a mystery about how the mind and body interact, but that's just part of the bigger mystery of how cause and effect work in general, and understanding is limited.*³⁴

In other words, philosophers and scientists don't understand how material causation works, but that ignorance certainly doesn't imply that physical objects can't affect other physical objects. We are clearly justified in believing in causation between physical objects, even if we don't know how causation works. Similarly, the evidence for mind-body interaction is both abundant and universally experienced, so Dualists can be justified in following the abundant evidence *that* humans have immaterial minds which can affect their bodies, even if they don't fully understand *how* a mind affects a body.³⁵

6. RECENT FINDINGS OF NEUROSCIENCE Some argue that recent studies of the brain activity contradict the possibility of souls. Scientists have observed brain activity in different areas of the brain when people engage in different activities. Furthermore, the use of various drugs has a physical impact on the brain and causes huge changes in the patients' awareness and ability to think. Also, physical brain injuries can similarly affect awareness and cognition. If the soul is distinct from the body, physicalists ask, then why does affecting the brain have such an effect on the conscious experience?

Actually, these findings are exactly what one would expect if Dualism were true, for most forms of Dualism hold that a soul and body interact and function in unison. They are both necessary for the proper function of the person. Compare, for example, the interaction between a soul and body to the interaction between a musician and his instrument. If the musician is playing, the effects can be observed on the instrument. Furthermore, the musician cannot play well if the instrument is damaged. Similarly, most forms of Dualism hold that an embodied soul's activity will generally have an observable effect in the brain, and that brain damage can absolutely affect the soul's ability to interact properly with the body. Recent findings of neuroscience thus confirm what most forms of Dualism predict.

7. PHILOSOPHICAL COMMITMENTS In light of the evidence for immaterial souls, and the lack of substantial arguments against them, philosophers J.P. Moreland

34 Hasker, William. Video Interview with Biola University. 5 September, 2013. (Link = <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCooiCSqRc8>).

35 For more developed responses to the interaction and location problems with Dualism, as well as for a proposed theory of causality which would allow for dualism-interactionism, see Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro's *Naturalism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 55-70. For an overview of various widely disputed theories of causation, see Jonathan Schaeffer's "The Metaphysics of Causation," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 edition).

and William Lane Craig argue that the primary motivation “behind modern physicalism is not the philosophical case for it and against dualism, but a cultural commitment to naturalism and scientism.”³⁶ Some philosophers and scientists are simply committed to Physicalism (Naturalism), and thus they do not see the idea of immaterial “souls” or “minds” as being within the realm of possibilities. With such a commitment, these thinkers will accept seemingly absurd conclusions if such conclusions are required to be a Physicalist. Philosopher Michael Lockwood is instructive on this:

*Let me begin by nailing my colours to the mast. I count myself as a materialist, in the sense that I take consciousness to be a species of brain activity. Having said that, however, it seems to me evidence that no description of brain activity of the relevant kind, couched in the currently available languages of physics, physiology, or functional or computational roles, is remotely capable of capturing what is distinctive about consciousness. So glaring, indeed, are the shortcomings of all the reductive programmes on offer, that I cannot believe that anyone with a philosophical training, looking dispassionately at these programmes, would take any of them seriously for a moment, were it not for a deep-seated conviction that current physical science has essentially got reality taped, and accordingly, something along the lines of what the reductionists are offering must be correct. To that extent, the very existence of consciousness seems to me to be a standing demonstration of the explanatory limitations of contemporary physical science.*³⁷

Howard Robinson drives this point home more forcefully:

*[William] James called materialism (physicalism) a tough-minded theory... If this is so, [why are] materialists...so often on the defensive in philosophy[?] The explanation seems to be that though the materialist makes a show of being tough-minded, he is in fact a dogmatist, obedient not to the authority of reason, but to a certain picture of the world. That picture is hypnotizing but terrifying: the world as a machine of which we are all insignificant parts... but reason joins with every other constructive human instinct in telling us that it is false...To opt for materialism is to choose to believe something obnoxious, against the guidance of reason. This is not tough-mindedness, but a willful preference for a certain form of soulless, false and destructive modernism.*³⁸

The evidence against Physicalism is indeed quite damning. Free will, rationality, knowledge, moral responsibility, qualia, private access, mental causation, unity of

36 J.P. Moreland and W.L. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 246.

37 Lockwood, Michael. “Consciousness and the Quantum World.” In *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Q. Smith and A. Jokric. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003), 447. emphasis Lockwood’s.

38 Robinson, *Matter and Sense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 125. Quoted in Moreland and Craig’s *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 249.

mental experience, modality, and near-death experiences together testify that humans are indeed more than their bodies. The skeptic, however, may respond that we should withhold judgment. After all, we may yet find a Physicalist explanation for all these lines of evidence. Maybe so, or maybe not, but let's not miss the irony in a "skeptic" holding blindly to their belief in Physicalism, while ignoring the abundant evidence to the contrary.

CONCLUSION

This discussion cannot end with souls, for there must be some sort of cause which could account for the existence of human souls. According to current understandings of matter, a merely physical body has no way of producing an immaterial substance.³⁹ The best explanation of the fact every human being has an immaterial soul then is the existence of a greater immaterial reality to which humans owe their existence – a creator God. Thus, our observations about our own souls can actually teach us about the Great Soul, and can provide us some reason to believe that this God may have intentionally created us with a purpose in mind.

The Bible agrees with Dualism and clearly teaches humans are both physical and spiritual.

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

GENESIS 2:7

Thus declares the LORD who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him...

ZECHARIAH 12:1

In Hebrew, the word for breath, wind, and spirit are the same so Genesis is often seen as God forming the physical body and breathing the spirit into humanity. And Zechariah adds God “forms” (same word as Genesis) the spirit within humanity also.

After the drowning of her son Paulie, consider how Sherry might have found comfort in these words from the Apostle Paul.

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house [our body] is torn down [dies], we have a building from God [a new body], a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens... For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened [with pain and death], because we do not want to be unclothed [die] but to be clothed [live eternally], so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us [His] Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that

³⁹ Interestingly enough, in *The Emergent Self* (1999), William Hasker argues for a form of emergent dualism in which the human soul emerges from physical states. However, Hasker’s view is not physicalist in any sense, and Hasker himself builds this theory on a highly teleological view of reality and matter, a theory which itself implies a theistic worldview.

while we are at home in the body [in this life] we are absent from the Lord... we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2, 4-6, 8

Sherry could also be consoled as King David had been when he fasted and prayed for the life of his child. Though Sherry never got the chance to pray for Paulie to live she could still maintain confidence she would see him again just as David did.

And [David] said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

2 SAMUEL 12:22-23

Sherry's confidence that she would see Paulie again was not ill-founded; it was backed by reason, evidence, and God's word. And the existence of God and the soul is but one of many evidences that could give her confidence. Did such confidence remove the pain of her loss? No, Sherry would miss her son terribly, and she would always wonder why God took him home at such an early age. But, her confidence in the God of Christian scriptures gave her something else: hope. Why? Paul answers:

But we do not want you to uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep [dead], that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus... Therefore, comfort one another with these words.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-14, 18

Those words contain both hope and fear. Hope is for those *in Jesus* who believe He died and rose again. Fear is for those who are *not in Christ* and have no hope. Paul says elsewhere:

Therefore remember, that formerly... you were at that time separate from Christ... having no hope and without God in the world.

EPHESIANS 2:11-12

We were once separate from Christ, without God and hope. To obtain hope and be in Christ, we had to understand what the Bible says about who we are and what God has done for us.

...a man is not justified [made right with God] by the works of the Law [by being a good

person] but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ...

GALATIANS 2:16

We are not in Christ because we are good people. No one is without sin and we all deserve death. We are only *in Christ* by faith in Him. We have eternal life and our soul lives on beyond death with God only when we receive the free gift offered to us by God. And He offers the free gift of salvation to anyone who acknowledges their sinfulness and puts their faith in Christ's work to give them new life to follow him.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

ROMANS 6:23

This is why we can have hope in the midst of tragedy. This is the good news, the "Gospel"; Christ not only offers forgiveness for sin now and eternal life in the future, but he also gives us new life in the here and now. He allows us to become part of the Kingdom of God and to become children of God. As part of God's family, we get to experience a new abundant life in Christ, and we get to help bring others into the Kingdom of God. Following Christ offers us a life of healing and hope - a life where our ultimate purpose and ultimate joy coincide.

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

JESUS CHRIST (JOHN 10:10)

Begin following Him today.

FUTHER READING

Entry Level (high school graduate to college undergraduate)

God's Crime Scene by J. Warner Wallace, Chapters 5 & 6
Miracles by C.S. Lewis Chapter 3
The Soul: How We Know It's Real and Why It Matters by J.P. Moreland
Philosophy of Mind by Edward Feser

Intermediate Level (college undergraduate to graduate level)

Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview by W.L. Craig and J.P. Moreland Chapters 11-15.
C.S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea by Victor Reppert
Naturalism by Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro
Where the Conflict Really Lies by Alvin Plantinga
Mind and Cosmos: Why the Neo-Darwinian Picture of Reality is Almost Certainly False by Thomas Nagel

Advanced Level (graduate level with some background knowledge in the subject)

The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology, eds. W.L. Craig and J.P. Moreland, Chapters 5 & 6.
The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism, eds. Jonathan Loose, Angus Menuge, and J.P. Moreland
The Waning of Materialism, eds. Robert C. Koons and George Bealer
From the Knowledge Argument to Substance Dualism by Howard Robinson
The Emergent Self by William Hasker

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