

Finite conscious minds such as the ones we possess provide evidence of a Divine Mind as their creator. If we limit our worldview options to theism (the belief that there is a personal God) and naturalism (the belief that [the physical, material world is all there is](#)), it is hard to see how human minds could result from the rearrangement of brute matter. It is much easier to see how a Conscious Being could produce the finite conscious minds we possess.¹

In [my last article](#), I explained why evolutionary theory enjoys a level of intellectual acceptance that goes far beyond what the evidence warrants. In this article, I will argue that, even if evolutionary theory is someday able to adequately explain the origins of the human *brain*, it will remain fundamentally unable to explain the existence of the human *mind*. As we shall see, human consciousness is a serious threat to the plausibility of evolutionary theory.

The nonphysical, immaterial nature of mind

I will refer to states of mind, or states of consciousness, as “mental states.” Common mental states include sensations, thoughts, beliefs, desires and volitions.²

Mental states may be caused by physical states, and physical states may be caused by mental states. A feeling of pain (mental state) may be caused by being stuck with a pin (physical state), and one’s arm going up (physical state) may be caused by an intention to vote (mental state). But just because A causes B, that does not mean that A is the same thing as B! Fire causes smoke, but fire is not smoke itself. Being stuck by a pin causes pain, but being stuck by a pin is not pain itself. A desire to vote causes one’s arm to go up, but that desire is different than the arm’s going up. The fact that a state of one’s mind can affect physical states and the fact that physical states can affect the state of one’s mind do not mean that corresponding mental and physical states are identical to each other. In fact, they are fundamentally different.

We know that mental states are in no sense physical (*i.e.* part of the physical, material world) because they possess four features not owned by physical states.

First, *there is a raw qualitative feel — a “what it is like to have it” — to a mental state.* For example, pain hurts. A physical state may cause pain, but the physical state itself can be completely described in the vocabulary of physics and chemistry, or in the commonsense vocabulary of the physical world. Being hurtful, however, is not describable in the vocabulary of any of these.

Second, *many mental states have intentionality — “ofness” or “aboutness” — which is directed towards an object.* A thought, for instance, is *about* the moon. But no physical state is about anything. The *brain* is a physical object, but a brain state cannot be about the moon any more than a rock or a cloud can be about the moon. Only a state of *mind* can be about the moon.

Third, *mental states are internal, private and immediately accessible to the subject having them.* A scientist can know more about my brain than I do. But I have direct knowledge of my mind which is not available to anyone else.

Fourth, *mental states fail to have crucial features that characterize physical states.* Unlike physical states, they have no spatial extension (it doesn’t make sense to ask how tall or wide someone’s thoughts are) and they have no location either (which is why it doesn’t make sense to ask *where* someone’s thoughts are). In general, mental states cannot be described using physical language.

The inability of evolutionary theory to explain the existence of mind

Given that mental states (states of mind) are immaterial and not physical, there are at least two reasons why evolutionary theory cannot explain their existence.

Something from nothing: According to evolutionary theory, before consciousness appeared, the universe contained nothing but matter and energy. The naturalistic story of the cosmos' evolution involves the rearrangement of the atomic parts of this matter into increasingly more complex structures according to natural law. Matter is brute mechanical, physical stuff. Consciousness, however, is immaterial and nonphysical. Physical reactions do not seem capable of generating consciousness. Some say the physical reactions that occur in the *brain* are capable of producing consciousness, yet brains seem too similar to other parts of the body (both brains and bodies are collections of cells totally describable in physical terms). How can like causes produce radically different effects? Though evolutionary theory can handle the appearance of the physical brain, the appearance of the nonphysical *mind* is utterly unpredictable and inexplicable. Thus the emergence of minds and consciousness seems to be a case of getting something from nothing.

The inadequacy of evolutionary explanations: Naturalists claim that evolutionary explanations can be offered for the appearance of all organisms and their parts. In principle, an evolutionary account could be given for increasingly complex physical structures that constitute different organisms. One of the driving forces behind Charles Darwin's exposition of evolution was the belief that all mental phenomena could be explained as features of physical objects. However, if minds and consciousness exist, they would be beyond the explanatory scope of evolutionary theory, and this would threaten the theory's plausibility.

Of course, theists think that minds and consciousness do, in fact, exist. But because naturalistic forms of evolution have proven incapable of explaining minds and consciousness, their existence has been rejected by naturalists.

The naturalist's question begging rejection of mind

According to naturalist Paul Churchland:

The important point about the standard evolutionary story is that the human species and all of its features are the wholly physical outcome of a purely physical process. ... If this is the correct account of our origins, then there seems neither need, nor room, to fit any nonphysical substances or properties [such as minds and mental states] into our theoretical account of ourselves. We are creatures of matter. And we should learn to live with that fact.³

Here, Churchland claims that, since we are merely the result of an entirely physical process (that of evolutionary theory), which works on wholly physical materials, we are wholly physical beings. But if, by saying "there seems neither need, nor room, to fit any nonphysical substances or properties into our theoretical account of ourselves," Churchland is saying that naturalistic evolutionary theory can adequately explain the nature of man, his argument clearly begs the question.⁴ This can be seen in the following outline of Churchland's argument:

- (1) If we are merely the result of naturalistic, evolutionary processes, we are wholly physical beings.
- (2) We are merely the result of naturalistic, evolutionary processes.
- (3) Therefore, we are wholly physical beings.

Naturalists like Churchland accept premise (2). But why should *we* accept it? Those who think consciousness and mind are real do not. They argue:

- (4) If we are merely the result of naturalistic, evolutionary processes, then we are wholly physical beings.
- (5) We possess nonphysical conscious minds, so we are *not* wholly physical beings.
- (6) Therefore, we are not merely the result of naturalistic, evolutionary processes.

Naturalists argue for (3) on the basis of (2), but (5) and (6) show us that the truth of (2) assumes the truth of (3). Put another way, nobody will not think that (2) is true unless they *already* think that (3) is true — but (3) is exactly the point in question. The naturalist's argument assumes the very thing it's trying to prove.

As we saw above, the existence of minds and consciousness would threaten evolutionary theory's plausibility. The naturalistic explanation of the nature of man, however, begs the question by simply *assuming* that we are wholly physical beings. It gives us no reason to think that minds and consciousness do not exist.

The real issue, then, is the evidence for and against the immaterial, nonphysical nature of minds and consciousness. If the evidence is good, then we should embrace the idea that mental states and physical states are essentially different and that evolutionary theory cannot account for the former. But we have seen that the evidence *is* good. Mental states possess four features not owned by physical states, and evolutionary theory seems fundamentally incapable of explaining the existence of mental states. This means not only that the evolutionary argument fails but also that there will never be a complete naturalistic account of the nature and origin of human consciousness.

It will not do to claim that consciousness simply "emerged" from matter when it reached a certain level of complexity because "emergence" is merely a label for (rather than an explanation of) the phenomena being explained. Since we are made in God's image, there should be something about us that can't be adequately explained without postulating God's existence. And that is the case with mind and consciousness. Their reality supports the falsity of naturalism and the truth of theism. 🌀

¹ Note from the editor: Alongside this article, I highly recommend J. P. Moreland and Scott Rae's [*Body and Soul*](#) (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

² This argument will assume a commonsense understanding of sensations, thoughts, beliefs, desires and volitions. For those unclear on these terms:

- A *sensation* is a state of awareness or sentience, a mode of consciousness — for example, a conscious awareness of sound, color, or pain. Some sensations are experiences of things outside me like a tree or table. Others are awarenesses of other states within me like pains or itches. Emotions are types of sensations.
- A *thought* is a mental content that can be expressed in an entire sentence. A thought is the mental content of a statement. Some thoughts logically entail other thoughts. For example "All dogs are mammals" entails "This dog is a mammal." If the former is true, the latter must be true. Some thoughts don't entail other thoughts, but merely provide evidence for them. For example, certain thoughts about evidence in a court case provide evidence for the thought that a person is guilty — "He said he would kill him" provides evidence for the thought "He is the murderer."
- A *belief* is a person's view, accepted to varying degrees of strength, of how things really are. If a person has a belief (e.g., someone believes that it is raining), then that belief serves as the basis for the person's tendency or readiness to act as if the thing believed were really so (e.g., she gets an umbrella). At any given time, one can have many beliefs that are not currently being contemplated.
- A *desire* is a certain inclination to do, have, or experience certain things. Desires are either conscious or such that they can be made conscious through certain activities, for example, through therapy.
- An *volition* is a act of will or choice, an exercise of power, an endeavoring to do a certain thing, usually for the sake of some purpose or end.

³ Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1984), p. 21.

⁴ An argument *begs the question* if it assumes the truth of the very thing it's trying to prove. For example, if I argue "Paul doesn't lie. ... I know he doesn't lie because he told me so," I have begged the question. Paul's telling me that he doesn't lie is only a reason to conclude that he doesn't if I already assume it's true that Paul doesn't lie.

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