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BODY AND SOUL: A “WHOLE” IN ONE¹

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One of the reasons I love the game of golf is that it puts me in touch with people whose worldviews are radically different from mine. One such person is Matt.² This year Matt and I had an opportunity to team up as partners in a golf tournament. While driving to the tournament, we first talked about golf and then about God. Matt, a lawyer by profession, was convinced that humans are mere material beings. To his way of thinking, if we were to die during our drive, we would simply cease to exist. For him, the notion of a soul that exists beyond the grave was absolutely absurd.

Like so many others in our culture, he was firmly committed to Sagan’s creed — “The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.” In addition, he had embraced the mantra of Madonna — “I am a material girl living in a material world.” From his perspective, human beings are merely material brains and bodies. As we continued our drive to the golf course, I attempted to convince Matt that there are compelling reasons to believe human beings have an immaterial aspect to their being that transcends the material.

I pointed out that from the perspective of logic we can demonstrate that the mind is not identical to the brain, by proving that the mind and brain have different properties. In other words, “The subjective texture of our conscious mental experiences — the feeling of pain, the experience of sound, the awareness of color — is different from anything that is simply physical. If the world were only made of matter, these subjective aspects of consciousness would not exist. But they *do* exist! So there must be more to the world than matter.”¹ An obvious example concerns color. A moment’s reflection is enough to convince a thinking person that the experience of color involves more than mere wavelengths of light.²

I went on to argue that, from a legal perspective, if human beings were merely material, they could not be held accountable this year for a crime committed last year simply because physical identity changes over time. Physically, we are not the *same* person today that we were yesterday. Every day we lose multiplied millions of microscopic particles. In fact, every seven years virtually every part of our material anatomy, apart from aspects of our neurological system, changes.³ From a purely material perspective, therefore, “the self who did the crime in the past is not literally the same self who is present at the time of punishment.”⁴ Appealing to Matt’s legal background, I suggested that a criminal who attempted to use this line of reasoning as a defense would not get very far. Legally and intuitively we recognize a *sameness of soul* that establishes personal identity over time.⁵

As we were nearing the golf course, I quickly moved on to an argument from libertarian freedom. If we are merely material beings, I noted, then freedom of the will does not exist. Instead, we are fatalistically relegated to a world in which mechanistic material processes determine everything.⁶ Realizing that at this point Matt might have begun thinking about the golf tournament, I used a golf illustration to make sure I had his attention.

The distance a golf ball flies is fatalistically predetermined by such factors as club head speed, angle of impact, and wind velocity. In concert with Newton’s laws of motion, the precise distance the ball will travel is thus fatalistically determined by the physical processes involved. Likewise, if I am merely material, my “choices” are merely a function of such factors as genetic make-up and brain chemistry. My decisions are therefore not free, they’re fatalistically determined.

I pointed out that the implications of such a notion are profound. In a worldview that embraces fatalistic determinism I cannot be held morally accountable for my actions, since reward and punishment make sense only if we have freedom of the will. In a solely material world, reason itself is reduced to the status of a conditioned reflex. Moreover, even the very concept of love is rendered meaningless. Rather than being an act of the will, love is relegated to a robotic procedure that is fatalistically determined by physical processes. If Madonna is merely a material girl living in a material world, then she really has no freedom of choice.

In short, I presented Matt with three compelling reasons to believe human beings have a soul that continues to exist apart from the body. First, logically or intuitively, we recognize nonphysical aspects of humanity, such as ego. Furthermore, legally, even though our physical identity changes from year to year, we recognize a sameness of soul that establishes personal identity. Finally, libertarian freedom of the will presupposes that we are more than mere material robots. These three reasons give us warrant to conclude that human beings have an immaterial nature that transcends the material body. In the Christian worldview, this immaterial aspect of humanity is called the soul.⁷ It is precisely because the human soul is not dependent on material processes for its existence that it can survive the death of the physical body.⁸

Well, I could see the golf course looming on the horizon, so our discussion had to be put on hold. For the next four hours we focused on beating a little white ball from one hole to the next. By the time we returned to my car, our visions of golf glory had dematerialized. While we had not crashed on the way to the tournament, we had definitely crashed during it. Nothing seemed to go right. As we headed home, we dejectedly replayed every single shot over and over again in our minds, all the while dreaming of what might have been.

Eventually, our conversation moved from mere earthly vanities to eternal verities. As a lawyer, Matt was significantly impressed by the logical, legal, and libertarian freedom arguments I had presented on the way to the tournament. But, he was not yet convinced of life beyond the grave. And so, during the course of the next few hours I conjoined these arguments to the overwhelming evidence for a Creator⁹ and for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.¹⁰

By the time I had finished telling Matt about the resurrection, we were pulling into his driveway. While we continued to talk, I told him how some 20 years ago someone had explained to me what I was now explaining to him. I described how, after I had examined the evidence, the Creator of the cosmos had become the Lord and Savior of my soul and that today He is more real to me than the very flesh upon my bones.

While I would like to tell you that Matt yielded his life to Christ in the driveway that evening, I can't. What I can say is that since that day he and I have had numerous conversations about the afterlife and the existence of the soul. I am reminded that all the evidence in the world will not change someone's heart — only the Holy Spirit can do that. People reject the evidence not because they *can't* accept it but because they *won't*. Though Matt has not yet yielded his life to the Creator of his soul, I remain hopeful that the whole story has not yet been told.

— Hank Hanegraaff

NOTES

1. Gary R. Habermas and J. P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 52 (emphasis in original). Dr. Moreland, in particular, has greatly enhanced and expanded my thinking on the existence and nature of the immaterial aspect of humanity — the soul, including the mind.
2. Moreland and Habermas explain, "Mental events are feelings of pain, episodes of thoughts, or sensory experiences. Physical events are happenings in the brain and central nervous system that can be described exhaustively using terms from chemistry and physics. However, physical events and their properties do not have the same features as do mental events and their properties....An experiment will help you see the difference. Picture a pink elephant in your mind. Now close your eyes and

look at the image. In your mind, you will see a pink property (a sense datum or sensory way of experiencing). There will be no pink elephant outside you, but there will be a pink image of one in your mind. However, there will be no pink entity in your brain; no neurophysiologist could open your brain and see a pink entity while you are having the sense image. The sensory event has a property — pink — that no brain event has. Therefore, they cannot be identical. The sense image is a mental entity, not a physical one." (Ibid., 49).

3. Ibid., 58.
4. Ibid., 59.
5. Moreland and Habermas write, "Physicalists [who hold that the mind is identical to the brain] and property dualists [who hold that the mind, while distinct from the brain, is a property or attribute of the brain ⊗ the mind depends on the brain for its existence] have no alternative but to hold that personal identity through change is not absolute" (Ibid., 58). In essence, physicalists and property dualists are relegated to the unenviable task of trying to rationalize what are called "person-stages"; the "self" is really a contiguous series through time of closely resembling but not identical "selves." Continuity of self can be accounted for only by positing an immaterial self, that is, a soul. (See *ibid.*, 57–60.)
6. See *ibid.*, 60–62.
7. For a discussion of the nature of the soul, see *ibid.*, chapter 3.
8. While biblically we continue to exist in a conscious state after the death of our physical body, we are not complete until we are reunited with our resurrected bodies at the second coming of Christ (see John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Phil. 1:22-24; 1 Thes. 4:16). The sum substance of the self is a *psyche/soma* — a soul/body.
9. See Hank Hanegraaff, *The FACE that Demonstrates the Farce of Evolution* (Nashville: Word, 1998).
10. See *Resurrection*, Part 1.