

4-1-1999

Book Review: Unsnarling The World Knot: Consciousness, Freedom, And The Mind Body Problem

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Recommended Citation

McHenry, Leemon (1999) "Book Review: Unsnarling The World Knot: Consciousness, Freedom, And The Mind Body Problem," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol16/iss2/13>

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women. Cases in point are divorce, contraception, and abortion (which in their effects, to say nothing of their nature, are disproportionately damaging to women). Nussbaum appeals to the words of John Paul II to support her views about freedom but she ignores his words about the evils of divorce, contraception, and abortion. In fact, in the case of contraception, she wants to stop the Pope and religious authorities generally from publicly speaking out against it. For contraception, she says, is a basic human right for women and any religious leader who speaks in public fora against it should be criticized as a "subverter of the constitution" (she does not say this about those who speak against abortion, but only, it seems, because some third world feminists speak against it). Nussbaum seems almost to be biting her tongue when she writes thus. From the general tone of her remarks one might rather think she was about to preach an anti-religious crusade or jihad.

Most of the essayists in this collection go after Rawls and/or Audi. Nussbaum is left untouched, which is curious for she is more open and up-front about what secular liberalism entails in practice than either of them. She makes it more explicit that secular liberalism is both a comprehensive doctrine and a novel doctrine, and a doctrine moreover that is going to oppress religion and the religious whenever it feels itself strong enough to do so. She makes it clearer, therefore, that secular liberals are the enemies of liberty that George Washington warned us against in his Farewell Address. Fortunately for the vast majority of Americans secular liberals are a minority voice in the country, and indeed in academia too. But this book is a timely reminder of the threat they pose. In this, as in other respects, it is a welcome contribution to the important discussion now going on about freedom and religion, about their relations and interdependence.

Unsnarling the World-Knot: Consciousness, Freedom, and the Mind-Body Problem. **David Ray Griffin.** Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: California University Press, 1998. Pp. xv and 266. \$45.00 (Cloth).

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Ever since Descartes failed to answer the persistent but insightful questions of Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia as to *how* the mind and body interact in the pineal gland of the brain, philosophy has been left with what Schopenhauer called the "world-knot," arguably **the** problem of modern philosophy. The sophistication of neuroscience and computer models of the brain in the past twenty-five years has certainly stimulated interest in the problem, but emerging scientific orthodoxy has been one-sided. Physicalistic materialism appears to be the only serious alternative to Cartesian dualism mainly because, according to Griffin, it is the paradigm of both wishful and fearful thinking: "wishful" to the extent that we believe what we want to be true—in this case, that all phenomena in the universe will be explained finally by materialistic laws; "fear-

ful" in the sense that we reject a priori what threatens the paradigm—in this case, that the reality of consciousness presents a terrifying prospect for the final truth of materialism. To Griffin, however, the "world-knot" has only tightened around the neck of materialism and substance dualism, both of which, he argues, present insuperable difficulties. He therefore boldly proposes a form of panpsychism—panexperimentalist physicalism—as the neglected solution that has eluded contemporary discussions.

The long and patient labor of unsnarling the knot begins with Griffin's chapters devoted to common sense, regulative principles, data, and a detailed analysis of the difficulties of materialism and dualism. Although he discusses the problems unique to materialism and dualism respectively, Griffin's focus is on the problems that they share, because "the naturalistic materialism of late modernity simply eliminated God and the nonphysical soul from the dualistic supernaturalism of early modernity, leaving intact its view of nature as insentient matter." (p. 77) But even the radical forms of materialism implicitly affirm a universe of two sorts of things: experiencing and nonexperiencing. In what follows, I will devote my attention to a few of the problems Griffin identifies as the common root of materialism and dualism, as they lead logically to the panexperimentalist solution.

(1) Given the continuity suggested by evolution, the line drawn between experiencing and nonexperiencing entities is arbitrary. Descartes had this problem when he distinguished between human souls and the rest of insentient nature. Now the debate continues up and down the phylogenetic tree with no clear answer.

(2) Despite the advance of neuroscience and the rejection of all "folk psychological" explanations, conscious experience is not explicable in physicalistic terms. Consciousness therefore remains the *Great Exception* in need of reconciliation within the paradigm. Materialists have high expectations that the properties expressed by psychological predicates will turn out to be physical, but this appears unlikely.

(3) Most importantly, materialism and dualism cannot explain without an explicit or at least implicit supernaturalism how experience arose out of nonexperiencing actualities. As William James realized, consciousness, however little, is an "illegitimate birth" in any view that professes to explain all the facts by continuous evolution. The emergence of subjectivity, of what it is like to have an "inside," is not the emergence of one more objective property or externalistic feature. Consciousness is not a property that appears for others but rather what it is to be an experience for itself.

Griffin argues that panexperimentalism not only addresses these problems head on but offers the most intelligible solutions to them. The first task before him is to construct a view of the "inside" and the "outside," introspection and perception, mind and matter, in such a way that dualisms are broken down by demonstrating how they share common characteristics. For example, the view that mind is subjective, temporal, and unextended while matter is objective, spatial and extended is collapsed into one ontological category of entities conceived as spatio-tem-

poral units of rudimentary sentience, which are first subjective, then objective. Such units are understood to be *events* rather than mental and physical *substances*.

This ontology paves the way for understanding how mind and matter arise from essentially the same stuff. The question: "How does conscious experience arise from insentient neurons?" is reformulated: "How does conscious experience arise from basic entities that are themselves comprised of experience?" In this manner, Griffin focuses attention on what he calls "nonsensuous perception," examples for which include the experience of the unity arising from the totality of bodily experience and the sense of having just emerged from our own immediate past. In other words, our bodily experience is taken to be the closest direct observation of the workings of nature. We understand nature by generalizing from how it works in ourselves. (p. 142) Consciousness, however, is not basic in this scheme of thought; rather it emerges in degrees of complexity from a rudimentary sentience that pervades the whole of nature.

Throughout Griffin's book he carefully analyzes much of the contemporary literature on the mind-body problem, including the work of Thomas Nagel, John Searle, Galen Strawson, Colin McGinn, Geoffrey Madell, Karl Popper, and Jaegwon Kim. It is, however, clear that the main inspiration for his own position is derived from the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. Griffin is well aware that the analytic mainstream has not only neglected these thinkers but is largely contemptuous of them. (p. 115) He is therefore in the difficult position of explaining the "radical" hypothesis needed to break the stalemate in the current mind-body debate, but by doing so in terms of a system of thought vastly alien and perhaps utterly unintelligible to his audience.

Although Griffin has taken considerable pains to cover the literature of his opposition, he misses the opportunity to strengthen his position by rallying support from his allies. British philosopher Timothy Sprigge, for example, has been the most vigorous proponent of panpsychism today, and specifically for the very reason of providing an intelligible solution to the mind-body problem.¹ Griffin does discuss William James's views briefly, but this is overshadowed by his focus on the details of Whitehead's system, which, he argues, is the strongest form of panpsychism.

Despite the thoroughness and rigor of Griffin's analysis of the problem and his solution, there are, I think, a few difficulties. First, some progress has been made in bio-chemistry in explaining how organic compounds emerge under primitive conditions. In particular, the Miller-Urey experiment demonstrated how amino acids, the building blocks of protein, are synthesized from more basic chemical compounds.² Given this limited success, many biologists have speculated that the links in explaining the emergence of life and consciousness are within our grasp even if the evolutionary "scaffolds" are no longer in place to understand just exactly how the emergence occurred. The experimental work here provides a considerable amount of support to

the materialist paradigm, at least with regard to the problem of continuity between the inorganic and the organic. Griffin might have strengthened his thesis by discussing and offering his reasons for rejecting the current work in theoretical biology.

Second, for most of us the panexperimentalist solution is so radical that it is hard to imagine what kind of sentience is spread throughout the universe. For example, it is much easier to think of such conditions arising on Earth, but what about the sentience that forms the basis of the nuclear-fusion reactions of the sun, the magma of volcanic eruptions or the vast regions of empty space? In this connection, I doubt many will be persuaded by Griffin's insistence on the distinction between true individuals and aggregational composites of such individuals. Panpsychism (in its various forms) has always been an interesting hypothesis, if not somewhat exotic and fantastical. To many this will be its central weakness, namely, the plausibility factor and the obstacle that it is a theory more suited to romantic idealism rather than serious science or philosophy.

As a fellow traveller in this territory, these are some of the lingering doubts that have prevented me from embracing panpsychism with open arms. In my view, however, Griffin does an excellent job of demonstrating that the reigning physicalistic materialism and dualism are even more implausible than panpsychism. The materialist story just doesn't quite add up in the end.

For the reader who is convinced that dualism is a dead-end solution to the debate or simply tired of the arid and colorless discussions of materialism, this work offers refreshing novelty. Griffin's book deserves serious attention in order to provide a much-needed perspective and balance to the mind-body debate.

NOTES

1. See especially, Chapter 3 "The Vindication of Panpsychism," *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983).

2. See John L. Casti's discussion of the different biological theories for how life arose from natural, physical processes. Chapter 2 "A Warm Little Pond," *Paradigms Lost* (New York: Avon Books, 1989).

Arguing for Atheism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion by **Robin Le Poidevin**. Routledge, 1996. Pp. xxvii, 159.

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This book is primarily a text, but, as the title indicates, Le Poidevin also makes a case for atheism. After sketching the contents of the book, I will make some general comments about the author's argument for atheism and discuss his contention that Western religion can survive the rejection of those metaphysical beliefs traditionally associated with theism. I