

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 12 | Issue 1

Article 11

1-1-1995

David Braine, THE HUMAN PERSON

Stewart Goetz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Goetz, Stewart (1995) "David Braine, THE HUMAN PERSON," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil199512111

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol12/iss1/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

The Human Person, by **David Braine**. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992. Pp. xxv and 555. \$32.95 (cloth).

STEWART GOETZ, Ursinus College

In this long but interesting book, the author attempts to defend an Aristotelian-Thomist view of a human being against materialist and dualist alternatives. He asserts that modern materialistic conceptions of a human being share with dualism the false thesis that a human being is an aggregate of causally related parts. Against the metaphysical atomism of both views, Braine insists that a human being is a unified whole whose parts are integrated in a way which Aristotle captured with his matter-form ontology. A human being is a psychophysical unity whose principles of behavior involve life and consciousness in ways which are not explicable in terms of the relationships of parts.

According to materialists and dualists, a human being is composed of a mental part which is inner and a bodily part which is outer. Materialists maintain that the subject of the inner mental life is the brain; dualists assert that it is the substantial soul. Though they differ about the identity of the inner subject, they agree in their conception of the mental as something internal which is causally related to what occurs in the outer bodily world.

In contrast to materialists and dualists, the author asserts that the mental is essentially a 'hybrid' notion: the mental is logically inextricable from the patterns of bodily behavior in which it is reflected, without the mental being reduced to the physical. There is no inner mental or experiential element which can be isolated from the external bodily behavior and which is causally related to the latter. In perception, sensation, emotion and intentional action, mental and physical aspects must be viewed as essentially intertwined such that neither can be understood in abstraction from the other.

To illustrate the difference in the atomistic and holistic views, consider Braine's discussion of intentional human action. On the materialist-dualist view, intentional bodily action is preceded by a separate inner event of willing, undertaking, or trying which causally produces certain appropriate bodily movements. This inner event is revealed in cases of failed action where an agent thinks he has acted but has not. In such instances, the agent must have done something, otherwise he would not believe that he acted. Since no bodily event occurred, it must be the case that what the agent did was will, undertake, or try.

On the holistic or hybrid view of intentional action, there is no separate inner mental event which causally produces the agent's bodily action. The primary expression of will is in intentional bodily action itself and not in anything separable from the bodily action such as a prior willing or choice. We are essentially animal, bodily agents, and what we experience as such is

not some introspectable mental event which produces our bodily movements but ourselves as bodily agents who actively move about among other bodily entities and directly causally interact with them.

While holism insists on the irreducible psychophysical nature of a human being, it also insists that a human being transcends the body, but without a return to dualism. The insight into this transcendence comes with the use of language. The use of language involves understanding at two levels. First, there is an understanding of *langue* in virtue of which words of speech have meaning in their own right. Second, there is an understanding of *parole* or speech which is the exercise of the underlying understanding of *langue*. These two kinds of understanding are present in both speaking and thinking in the medium of words. Of greatest importance for the human being's transcendence of the body is the fact that these kinds of understanding and thinking cannot be the states or operations of any bodily organ or material system.

Because these kinds of understanding and thinking cannot be states or operations of anything material, it is natural to think that they are operations of a substantial soul which is distinct from and can survive the death of its body. It is natural to think that if an operation is not bodily in nature, then the subject of that operation must itself be a nonbodily entity with that operation constituting its nature or essence. But a nature or essence is not defined in terms of some of an entity's operations, but all of them. And, since the subject of the operation of understanding is also the subject of the operations of perception, sensation, emotion and intentional action which are bodily in nature, the subject cannot be a substantial soul. Rather, it must itself be bodily in nature. Thus, the human being's transcendence of the body is not a matter of its having as one of its parts a substantial soul which exists in its own right but rather a matter of the human being existing in its own right and having states and operations which are not bodily. It is because we can speak of the holistically conceived human being existing in its own right that we can also speak derivatively of the human soul. But given the truth of holism, what is capable of surviving death cannot be a substantial soul. Rather, it is best thought of as a non-substantial person existing in a deprived state until the day of resurrection.

Braine's principal opponent in defending holism is dualism (modern materialism just adopts the inner-outer dichotomy of dualism). What supposedly recommends holism over dualism is that it best accords with our primordial, pre-critical ways of thinking whose categories are holistic in nature. In other words, the holistic way of viewing human beings is allegedly rooted in our ordinary-life ways of speaking and thinking which view perception, sensation, emotion and intentional action as essentially hybrid in nature.

The problem with this justification of holism, a problem which Braine does not discuss, is that while the ordinary person might talk holistically, he does not think holistically. On the contrary, the ordinary person thinks dualistically: he thinks of himself as a substance in its own right which is separate from and can survive the death of its physical body. That the ordinary person thinks this way is evidenced by the fact that he has no difficulty in conceiving of himself leaving his body in an out-of-the-body experience and *seeing* and *hearing* the physicians struggle frantically to revive his lifeless body. Similarly, the ordinary person has no conceptual difficulties with accounts given by people who claim to have died and *seen* a brilliant light at the end of a dark tunnel. On Braine's account of the human being, however, such reports must be conceptually incoherent because the perceptual experiences of seeing and hearing are operations of bodily organs.

That the ordinary person can conceive of such out-of-the-body experiences should not surprise us, given that the body, in Braine's words, 'does not obtrude' in seeing and hearing. Thus, in discussing sight, Braine points out how we are not aware of our eyes at all in seeing. There is no consciousness of events in our eyes and neither the image in the retina nor anything going on in the pupil of the eye nor any action of the eyes is an intervening object of attention towards which the mind is directed in being directed at its principal object in the external world. In short, we seem to be entities which see from behind our eyes. Given this phenomenology of sight and the fact that thinking is not a bodily event, it is natural to think that there is a substantial soul which is the subject of both of these operations and which is causally related to the eyes.

In addition to the phenomenology of sight, Braine recognizes another reason which explains why ordinary persons are dualists. Like other contemporary philosophers of mind such as Thomas Nagel and Derek Parfit, Braine asserts that we seem to ourselves to be simple entities with no separable parts. "A block of wood is divisible into parts each of which is also a block of wood. . . . By contrast, there is no question of dividing an 'I' . . . into parts. The 'I' . . . presents itself as undivided and indivisible. . . . [W]hen we think of the 'I' . . . as undivided and indivisible, we are *somehow* denying that, as such, it has parts at all rather than thinking of some special kind of integratedness of its parts." (p. 315) Because the human body is made up of parts and is easily divisible, it is natural to believe that the 'I' which is indivisible cannot be identical with its body but must be a separate substance in its own right.

What is puzzling about holism is not only its insistence that dualism must be false, in spite of these considerations which so clearly recommend dualism's truth, but also its claim that the person which survives death is not an entity with a nature in its own right. Braine points out how on the Thomist view the 'soul' derives its individuation as an entity from its origin with its

body. Such a view makes a relation logically prior to the terms which it relates: the terms of the relation derive their being from standing in the relation. This view gets things backwards. It is intuitively plausible to view a relation as dependent for its obtaining on its ontologically independent terms. Hence, for a soul to exist in relation to its body, each one's existence must be independent of the relation in which it stands to the other.

Braine will respond that viewing the human being as a substantial soul in relation to a substantial body destroys the unity of the human being. To preserve this unity, there must be no question of a substantial soul being incarnated or re-incarnated with a separately originating body. In defending this view, however, he is simply at odds with what the ordinary human being can conceive. For the very reasons he so ably sets forth (e.g., the simplicity of the 'I', the phenomenology of perception), the ordinary person is able to conceive of incarnation and re-incarnation. And this indicates that the ordinary person does not think of himself as unified with his body in the way that Braine asserts. This is important, because in reading a book such as Braine's, one often comes away with the impression that dualism is the invention of a philosopher such as Descartes. But it isn't. Descartes philosophized about dualism; he did not invent it. Where Descartes' view conflicts with the ordinary person's view of the human being is not with regard to the soul's existence but with respect to its spatiality. When the ordinary person thinks of the soul, he thinks of it as an ethereal or ghostly entity with a shape like that of a human body. This lends support to Braine's position that the ordinary person thinks of himself as a bodily being. Descartes argued that the soul cannot be in space because anything which is in space is extended and, thereby, divisible into parts. Perhaps, what is needed is a serious reconsideration of whether or not a substantial soul could both be a bodily being in space and indivisible. This would involve the soul being a body in a different sense than its being a physical body, but perhaps such a concept should not be too readily dismissed.

In conclusion, while Braine's holistic view of the human being is not without its problems, there is much in *The Human Person* from which one can learn. It is a book well worth reading.

Hell: The Logic of Damnation, by **Jerry L. Walls**. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992. Pp. 182. \$26.95 (cloth).

THOMAS TALBOTT, Willamette University.

As he expresses it himself, Jerry Walls' purpose in writing his book "is to show that some recognizably traditional views of hell are compatible with both the divine nature and human nature" (p. 14). He defends a two-fold thesis: first that, for all we know, God had good reasons to create persons