

# **PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE**

**Andrew Garford Moore and Father Daniel Joseph**

2009

Andrew it was a good meeting preceded by a good discussion at Get Real....this + the challenges of your dissertation have increased the steam being piped to my cylinders and prompt me to make the following points which you might think about at some stage....it would help me to understand your position better...as you know I describe myself as a Christian Existentialist Subjectivist Inductivist Realist, which is a bit of a mouthful but makes it clear to me anyway... I put my minimalist view of the subject as the logical owner of a train of experience (+ appropriate qualifiers such as perceptual judge, moral agent etc etc) in prime position on the grounds that this is what I have whilst I am alive....it seems to me that other positions selectively disqualify the subject – but in favour of the supposed superior authority of other subjects...this seems to me to be a contradictory position....nor can I see the benefits of metaphysical deterministic materialism over and above a position of theistic determinism - both of which I reject on grounds of subject erosion to the point of extinction (Kierkegaard's point) both views carry a logical necessity, and, accordingly, no counter example is ever logically possible...so is either view useful? ....is there no freedom of choice of world view? ...did I really commit to a religious path because I could not do otherwise, or because on grounds of decision theory I made that choice – which is subject to review....if there is no God I would prefer to know this in order to stop putting energy into religion and put more into other pursuits such as helping people out etc etc...is not freedom of thought facilitated better by making some kind of a social contract with the principles of logic: deductive and inductive – rather than with subatomic particles or a theistic determinist metaphysic.....otherwise is any conversation about anything – let alone world views – ever meaningful other than as a rehearsal of computer programmes? ....my apologies for these lunatic ramblings.....kind regards...d

**The Very Reverend Archpriest Daniel Joseph**

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Ok

So I'm no expert on existentialism so I hope that I understand your position correctly.

I don't deny that there exists a person - what you would describe as the owner of a train of experience. And it is not my intention to deny that we are conscious, that we have a point of view or that we weigh up options and make decisions. I am certainly not trying to explain this away.

What I am attempting to do is provide an explanation of this phenomena (i.e. our conscious experience) that is consistent with our scientific knowledge of the mind (or rather the brain), and of the nature of the world in general. It is not to privilege science over experience or vice versa but to find a unifying explanation (or theory) of mind that does justice to both.

So for example to say (as I was yesterday) that given the exact same input and the exact same brain state; the exact same output (e.g. decision) would be reached is consistent with our experience (for it does not preclude weighing up options etc of the kind we experience) and also consistent with our scientific knowledge of how the world works i.e. that physical systems behave in certain predictable ways (that is not considering quantum mechanics which may or may not introduce an element of randomness, but randomness brings you no closer to a free choice).

To say we have a free choice in the sense that we could decide differently give exactly the same conditions is consistent with our experience but not with our scientific knowledge, for there is no room in a physical system for a "free choice" in the sense that you want. Therefore the explanation that does justice to both should be rationally preferred to the explanation that does justice to only one i.e a theory with greater explanatory power should be preferred over one with less.

So, I believe that our world view is determined by the structure of our minds (brains) and our other relevant beliefs in addition to experience. This does not deny that we weigh up factors in order to come up with a decision of world view (and so is consistent with our experience) but in order to be consistent with our scientific knowledge it is necessary to concede that this process is in the main determined.

I'm not sure that our disagreement here is so deep. I suspect that you think that I deny more than I do..... what do you think?

Does that make any sense?

**Andrew**

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....now it's getting really interesting...I can see a lot of common ground here...my response is this - and I could be sacked from the church for saying certain things...

To me, neither I, nor theoretical entities and their supposed laws of operation, nor God are necessary beings, but contingent. What I do hold to be necessarily true is that, if I exist, and for as long as I exist, then I am at least the logical owner of a specific train of experience, and I call this phenomenon "this existing human subject". Theories about the nature of this logical owner are a contingent matter, in that they arise from scientific investigation. My religious claims, hopes, etc based on my religious journey, or engagement, so to speak, are also contingent, and subject to the "death by a thousand qualifications" strictures with which we are both familiar, and, accordingly, subject to my giving up on it should I think fit. As far as I can see, both scientific and religious narratives issue ultimately from subjects reflecting upon experience, according, hopefully, to the rules of logic, on pain of incoherence. I thus believe (along with SK and others) that the existing subject has a certain primacy over narratives, and that no narrative, however compelling, should be allowed to erode the existing subject, either experientially (loss of subjective confidence), or theoretically. The subject, that is to say, should resist any quasi moral imperative, pressure, or appeal to rationality exhorting the subject to leap into the narrative and dissolve away into it - I say again - be it scientific or theological.

best wishes...d

**The Very Revd. Archpriest Daniel Joseph**

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Interesting, I'm starting to get a better feel for the shape of the debate.

So you argue that what we know of the nature of ourselves is contingent, whereas the knowledge that we do indeed exist is logical (meaning essentially that this knowledge is infallible in that it cannot be challenged by that which is contingent)? Thus leaving us in a *cogito ergo sum* type position? We know we exist, but not what we are? Or maybe the logically acquired knowledge includes other things? I am interested in the scope of this infallible core knowledge.

Personally, I would agree – along with Descartes – that we certainly do exist. But further than that, I think that our *knowledge* of ourselves – that is other than the knowledge that something capable of having thoughts exists - is on a par with any other observational knowledge in that it needs to be *interpreted* by a theoretical framework i.e. we need to use theory-laden perception in order to gain knowledge of our intentional states, which form a large part of what we would call our “thoughts”. That intentional states are interpreted I think has now been demonstrated scientifically (see my dissertation).

This is why I think that we should not privilege first person over third person knowledge.

I suppose the extent of our disagreement depends on where you draw the line between logical and contingent knowledge of ourselves.

**Andrew**

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Now I see a common structure within which I am only too pleased to work. I finished reading the – impressive – dissertation last night, and I do indeed see what you are getting at. I think back to my conversations with Prof Swinburne on these matters when he was supervising me. Curiously enough, I did not want to swell the boundaries of infallible core knowledge that much. It wasn't in the interests of theory laden perception that I took this view, but, rather in the interests of existential freedom. What I did was to define the existing human subject as at least the logical owner of a particular train of experience. Then I added a minimum in terms of – not necessarily the logical necessity of, but the practical indispensability of, in the interests of making sense of anything – the basic rules of deductive and inductive logic. I did this in order to defend IVE (Inductive View of Experience). And I did this in order to defend what might be called religious experience from the ravages of a priori dismissal by means of third party verificationist attacks based on language games necessarily constructed around material concepts, to the logical exclusion of any notion of the spiritual. My argument was and is that subjects having experiences and hypothesizing according to inductive rules (deductive principles taken as read) are two vital necessary conditions of any narrative which might inform theory laden perception. I argue for the subject not to be extinguished by any narrative, including religious narratives. (If God is originating and controlling my every thought there is no point in my existing). I see all narratives which involve falsifiable claims about reality as contingent. BUT I only privilege the first person to the minimal extent necessary to exist and to make claims. I do not say that the claims made by any one subject are necessarily true or necessarily false. So I don't want to privilege the first person any more than required to be a stakeholder in the conversation about what does/does not exist; and is/is not happening. I favour

freedom, negotiation, conversation, about “What is really the case”, and I have not time for ontological arguments of any type in that they involve the contradiction of thinking into existence entities which, if they exist, are logically independent of my existence. ....regards...d

**The Very Reverend Archpriest Daniel Joseph**

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Ok, I think I understand.

Would you accept then that anything experienced by the experiencer (to coin a phrase) needs to be interpreted and interpretation opens the door to possible error. So to say you have had “a religious experience” consists of two parts: the infallible knowledge that you have had an experience and then the fallible interpretation of that experience as religious? Meaning that the “religiousness” of the experience is a contingent spin of a logical experience?

This sounds about right to me. For example if you and I had the same raw (uninterpreted) experiences they would appear to our respective consciousnesses with different “spins” i.e. what you would experience as a religious experience I may experience as a hallucination or something similarly non-religious.

If I have interpreted (pun intended) you correctly, this raises two questions for me.

- 1) Is it possible to have a non interpreted experience of the infallibly knowable type? What would this be like? Everything that we experience, we experience *as something*, that is, we identify it with a previously possessed type concept. I am sceptical of the possibility of non-interpreted experiences; Sellars (my personal favourite philosopher) would say that in order to notice something, we must have a pre-existing concept of that thing. So to notice something is to already have interpreted it. Any uninterrupted experience would just be white noise or totally unperceivable.
- 2) If the above is true, and the religious element is contingent, does this not put the religious/spiritual narrative/story/theory of the mind on equal footing with its scientific counterparts? If so, and if we are judging it by the same criteria, I personally don't think that it cannot compete as it has nothing like the predictive power, simplicity or scope of scientific theories of mind/brain.

Or maybe I have the wrong end of your metaphorical stick?

**Andrew**

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.....if I have read this correctly, I agree with you absolutely...in my work I have only ever argued for a level playing field, and the possibility also of inclusion of more than one narrative focusing on different aspects of reality (= I + what is not I)...but this is what the conversations are about....regards...d

**The Very Reverend Archpriest Daniel Joseph**

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Hmm, good discussion.

So epistemologically we are pretty close, it is what stems from that where we differ.

**Andrew**

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.....indeed...

....the phrase “Mystical Pragmatism” has been going round in my little mind all night....it could well form the basis for the conclusion of my book.....it was a good session.....have a happy break...d

**The Very Reverend Archpriest Daniel Joseph**

Yes, well if there is no objective standard of truth, pragmatism is the only answer.....

But I think there is a difference between pragmatism in the sense that I use it i.e. a theory is more likely to be true the more useful it is in explaining and predicting a phenomenon. And pragmatism in the sense that adopting a certain theory provides indirect benefits such as peace of mind or a sense of purpose in the world. Perhaps direct and indirect pragmatism would be a good terminology for the distinction.

Good session yes. Disappointing that I will miss part 2 of it.

**Andrew**

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...a bit more than peace of mind in my case...a falsifiable – by experiential review, with honest conversation with understanding others – sense of the resolution of the Mystery of

Existence....that's how my religion works for me and others I have known and know....it started with, even in childhood, a kind of dissatisfaction with the Stratonician Presumption that the material Universe is all there is, and is self explanatory and self sufficient.....everything is under constant inductive review and works just like Underdetermination in Science, thus, were I genuinely to consider as a result of my continuing experience of life that my religious path did not provide such a sense of resolution, without doubt I would ditch it.....it appears purely a matter of feeling states only because the God stuff doesn't quite work like material object stuff, so it is much more vague, but I do believe some kind of religious epistemology is possible, subject to a high level of personal honesty.....regards...d

**The Very Reverend Archpriest Daniel Joseph**

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But do you think though that a religious theory is really falsifiable? I cannot think of any piece of evidence that could disprove it (mainly due to the frustrating – for me at least - “god moves in mysterious ways” response).

But that a theory cannot be disproved does not provide a positive reason for believing it, for there are almost an infinite number of theories I could put forward that are not disprovable. I could say for example that there exists green swans, I could produce white swan after white swan but that still would not disprove the claim, but surely this is not reason to believe that green swans exist?

And as for the solving of the mystery of existence, I agree that it certainly is mysterious, but I think that introducing a mysterious being in to the mix increases the mystery rather than solving it.

I hope you take such comments in the spirit in which they are intended, that is, of a free philosophical debate. I am always wary of discussing things like that as some people seem to take it as some kind of personal attack.

**Andrew**

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...I do indeed take it as free philosophical debate...I would NEVER use the God moves in mysterious ways move...it lacks integrity....my point is that if one allows the logical possibility of religious experience (NOT such as assumes a priori that God is its originator, but such as might be taken as grounds for claiming that God might exist – exactly as in any other epistemology) then the existing human subject has the logical possibility of an experiential journey which is subject to the normal disciplines of inductive assessment: and there is, and always has been, a certain amount of intersubjectivity amongst such people....the point is that those who sense the mystery of existence

deeply and pretty well all the time – and I am one of those people – sense that it seems to somehow point beyond itself....however, it lacks integrity to claim that this “beyond” necessarily is God, so it is not a matter of introducing an additional mysterious being which makes two problems where there was one....I claim, on the basis of many years trying to pursue a life of spiritual discipline, that, whilst it is all very low probability stuff, on the basis of decision theory I am prepared to continue with the working hypothesis that God is there and is the resolution of my sense of the mystery of existence; but I say again, that on the basis of that same discipline, and my own judgement, I would most certainly be prepared to ditch the whole enterprise, and for a time I did so: I do not even agree with the Pascal’s Wager position, so not being falsifiable is I agree not grounds for proposing that something is the case – it is a matter of whether I consider it wise to continue my journey or not.....it is very much a matter of being honest with oneself, and that is why I chose not to earn money doing religion....of course if one APRIORI, as Ayer did, dismisses the spiritual life, religious experience etc as having the same ontological status as a toothache, then no epistemological discussion is ever logically possible.....but I think it is better to allow people to play on the field and discuss the game rather than disqualify them beforehand.d

### **The Very Reverend Archpriest Daniel Joseph**



Personally, I think that this is doing too much work here:

*The point is that those who sense the mystery of existence deeply and pretty well all the time – and I am one of those people – sense that it seems to somehow point beyond itself*

It is used to assert – or to entertain the possibility of – something beyond the physical, but I don’t think (again personally) that such an unanalysed “sense” is strong enough to justify the move.

Even for the sake of argument if I did accept this, then – as you accept – it would not lead us to god.

So accepting the belief in god is not just one low probability move but two i.e. the move to something extra and then the construal of that something extra as god.

As I said during last weeks get real, I don’t think this kind of “gamble” if you can call it that would be made forming beliefs in any other area of enquiry. Imagine the variety of exotic (albeit logically possible) positions I would accept if I were to use this criteria of acceptance for the formation of all my beliefs. For me, it is far too low a threshold of acceptance for any claim, let alone such an extraordinary claim as this one.

My contention is that the standards of acceptance for this particular belief are so low because of all the indirect benefits that people can gain, for it can provide an off the peg answer to what you call the mystery of existence. But the indirect benefits of a belief have no bearing on the probability of its truth.

So, my own position is that I am not ruling the possibility out apriori. But I contend that there is no more reason to believe in this logical possibility that there is to believe in any other unsupported

logical possibility out there. Hence – as I mentioned in a discussion a few weeks back - my position is technically agnostic, but if asked I always say atheist, despite the fact that I accept that the belief in god is a logical possibility and can never be disproved.

Again, this is all in the spirit of debate. Hopefully if anything it will be of benefit to you by providing objections on which you can sharpen and further support your own argument.

Anyway, I am off in a bit. Have fun on Thursday and I will see you the week after.

**Andrew**

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Hoping you have had a good break. I suspect I got careless and lapsed into Berdyaev over the issue of what I call the Mystery of Existence. Now I will try to sharpen up my act in the hope of recovering some common ground before it gets lost, which would make discussion more difficult. I know I write with passion but that does not mean I view challenge as a personal attack. Flew used to write with heroic passion when he was an atheist, and is much the same now he's changed sides.

To begin with, when I use the phrase “Mystical Pragmatism” I do not mean that I will choose what makes me feel better regardless of considerations of integrity of intellectual judgement. I know, and have always known that: “...the indirect benefits of a belief have no bearing on the probability of its truth.” Secondly you seem, surprisingly, to be ruling out my entire position – that an inductive case for the existence of God can be made – by speaking of “..unsupported logical possibility...” This is a new development in our discussion. I think you may also be suggesting that I am employing double standards of inductive logic, from the sentence: “For me, it is far too low a threshold of acceptance for any claim, let alone such an extraordinary claim as this one.” Nor has the notion of demanding that an agnostic/atheist disprove the existence of God ever been part of my argument.

What I call the “Mystery of Existence” is, in my view, the stage upon which the God/No God debate is played. Yes, for me it is experiential and also intellectual. I will leave out of the debate phrases like “...somehow points beyond itself...” because this clearly, on an intellectual level, generates yet more hoops for me to jump through. But I will say that it has the function of K, background knowledge, in Bayesian notation. Nor is it an incidental piece of evidence: I am not aware that the universe is either logically necessary or contingently necessary. Nor, being consistent, do I view God as a logically or contingently necessary being, but as, in intellectual debate, a hypothetical entity postulated on an inductive basis. Against the background knowledge, K, the hypothesis “God does not exist” is an equally big claim in my view. The God hypothesis in terms of creator is not necessarily the addition of a gratuitous entity, though I accept that it is an addition of an entity. It is worth noting that one is, these days, asked to accept that a whole armada of subatomic particles along with quanta of energy constitute ultimate reality – and there are held to be many types of these particles on the basis of not a huge amount of evidence, considering the all-encompassing claims made on their behalf. I do not see that they are in the same league as protons, neutrons and electrons, which have great explanatory power, within their periodic table remit.

I do not see the notion of a created universe as apriori more absurd than the notion of an uncreated universe, given that the universe is not obviously either logically or contingently necessary. In fact, Flew, on the basis of the complexity of entities which exist in the universe, including human subjects, now sees the notion of a created universe as slightly less absurd than that of an uncreated universe.

I am agreed that neither the religious narrative nor the materialist narrative are in any sense logically or contingently necessary. But nor do I accept that either the materialist narrative or the religious narrative should be assumed to be logically or contingently exclusive of other narratives. Leaving the universe aside for a moment, I do not consider that my own subjectivity is in the least accounted for within the materialist narrative, and I thus do not consider that such religious experience as I have, and that of others whom I trust, should *apriori* be censored, demoted, set up to fail or dismissed, by means of the materialistic narrative. I do not think I should be made to jump through extra hoops over this - ie: religious feeling state + interpretation as religious experience. My view is that ontological claims, including those of the materialist narrative are, in the end inductively based on experiential claims, and do of course vary in strength, and are to be assessed according to the rules of inductive logic. In the case of religious experience we are not dealing with a material object type claim, so it is neither appropriate to judge them as if this were the case, nor *apriori* to judge them as a toothache type experience as Ayer does. The human subject is thrown back on to subjective judgement quite understandably.

To me the situation is more like a very finely balanced set of apothecary's scales. On the God pan one might, with Flew, want to put complexity of entities, subjectivity, and so on...one could argue how significant, if at all, these weights are....but I would certainly put my religious experience on the God pan – and I have to say that this is under constant review, in other words, I would come down on the other side subject to my own integrity of judgement, and ditch religion. To me this is an inescapable part of the experiential tragedy of being a subject at all.

Look forward to hearing from you.

**The Very Reverend Archpriest Daniel Joseph**

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Hi Father D

So yeah, some good debate last night. I could have carried on for another hour or so I think.

Just to carry it on a little here and to answer your objection at the end of last night's discussion

I think we were in agreement in that epistemologically we both accept some form of the coherentist position. That being, broadly, that propositions about reality are true if they are part of a logically consistent framework that is in some way superior (I think we disagree on the definition of superior) to all other logically possible frameworks. In your terms the "best" story.

Your objection to my acceptance of a purely naturalistic framework as far as I can reconstruct it, is essentially that I rule out *a priori* the existence of god, because there is no possible evidence that can be adduced that would cause me to reject the framework. I list three replies to the objection below:

1 - I did get a chance to get my first reply to the objection in. Namely describing the circumstances in which I would consider rejecting the framework. And that is the same reason that I believe that any framework should be rejected: the recognition that there exists certain phenomena that cannot be

explained by that framework. In the example last night: proof of paranormal activity. If this could indeed be proved then initially I would look for an explanation of the phenomena within the framework i.e. to see if I could assimilate it in some way, if this was not possible, only then would I consider abandoning the framework. (you can't just abandon a framework, you need to replace a framework, so I would need to find a framework that had all the explanatory power of the old one plus the extra).

2 – My second reply, and I think a decisive one against your objection to my position, is to hold up a mirror. Are you not ruling out *a priori* the possibility of the naturalistic framework? What evidence could I possibly provide that would make you consider abandoning your framework?

I am able to describe a situation in which I would abandon (or rather swap) my naturalistic framework. But I do not see a way in which you could. So *if* (and I'll consider this in the next reply) your objection is indeed valid. Then I believe that it has more bite against your own position than mine.

3 – Finally, I want to question the claim that being unable to disprove a framework counts in some way against the probability of that framework being correct. Is this not a form of verificationism? A position that I know you reject. It seems to me that it is a strange argument against a position to say that the position cannot be disproved and therefore that position cannot be correct. The verificationists said that if we cannot prove the existence of an entity then it cannot exist. You are saying that if a position cannot be *disproved* it cannot be accepted. I find this argument even more fishy than the traditional verificationist position that we both reject.

Anyway, excellent debate, and good fun, epistemology is my favourite topic at the moment. It would be boring to have these conversations with someone that agreed with you all the time. I think that it helps us both sharpen up our positions.

Hope you get a chance to respond

**Andrew**

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....I am going to have to think about this deeply and come back....I have to say, in all honesty, that I do not in the least recognize myself in the mirror you have provided for me to look at, and I came away yesterday thinking that there was far more 2 way understanding than now appears to be the case....can I ask you to read again the last reply I sent you, and I will, meanwhile, as I say, think further and try again to re state my position...like you, though, I do enjoy this...kind regards...d

**The Very Revd. Archpriest Daniel Joseph**

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This is all, I agree, in the spirit of robust but friendly debate.

The mirror I have been invited to hold up to myself contains, I contend, a distorted image of me which you have manufactured. Before I dance about to the tune of your challenges, I wish to make a few points unconditioned by the constraints of framing replies.

1. I contend that my position is always consistent also.
2. I contend that you are a Stratonician through and through, and, accordingly, less open in your thinking than I am.
3. I have never ever tried to structure the basis of my arguments in favour of theism but have only ever sought to defend the integrity of the existing human subject as the logical owner of a particular train of experience, and as a choicemaker, who may wish to pursue some religious path or other, or not, as the case may be.
4. The only presuppositions I have made are the bare minimum required for discourse and claim-making: the logical owner of the train of experience, the train of experience, the rules of deductive and inductive logic.
5. I contend that, by factoring in to the equation, logically, as I believe you do, a particular theory of ascription based on a strand of current psychological theory, you break the back of the human subject as experiencer, judge of experience, and claim-maker.
6. I contend that theories which insist on third-person logical priority over first person experiential judgement are usually formulated by materialists for materialists; and it is but a short step to factoring in - again logically - brain mechanism talk, and thus the presupposition that only material-based detection of material-based phenomena are logically possible; to say nothing of the fate of the notion of free will.
7. If anyone is pushed into accepting 5. and 6. on pain of irrationality, lack of understanding etc etc., then it doesn't take a genius to see that any attempt whatsoever to put forward even a logically possible case for theism, is well and truly stuffed.

Going back to yesterday's discussion, I thought it became clear that, having introduced the notion of an experiment to do with the paranormal, and statistically significant criteria of "proof" in the scientific sense; even if these conditions, set up by you, were well satisfied, you would STILL say "but there MUST be a naturalistic explanation". Hence there would be no point in setting up the experiment in the first place. This is what I mean by "Stratonician" and "apriori". You charge me again with this business of: "unable to disprove a framework..." but I have never, ever argued thus with respect to theism. I think that stereotyping is going on here, and I have repeatedly defended myself against this charge. I have certainly NEVER been a Verificationist. My point is that, as a subjectivist, I rely heavily upon my own experience, and, against the background, k, of the mystery of existence, my own religious experience, and that of others I happen to trust. But, again, in the light of your apriori presuppositions, no amount of such experience by any amount of subjects would count for anything at all - because there MUST be a naturalistic explanation. Of course I do not make the theistic claim apriori. I never have. I simply reserve the right of the human subject, in the mystery of existence, to take a look, without being ruled out of court before starting. In short, I am an existentialist, subjectivist, inductivist, realist with very few prejudices or assumptions apart from those which uphold the integrity of the human subject. Your position robs the human of subjectivity to the point where there is little joy or purpose or excitement in existing at all - mystery or no. Broken human subjects can neither choose nor experience nor judge. That's why I side with Kierkegaard, and there are certainly circumstances, as I have said all along, in which I would consider it appropriate to abandon my religious path: but it would be MY decision, for good or ill.

....Regards...d

**The Very Reverend Archpriest Daniel Joseph**



Hi

Ok let me have a look here.....

**1. I contend that my position is always consistent also.**

I don't debate this.

**2. I contend that you are a Stratonician through and through, and, accordingly, less open in your thinking than I am.**

I don't think I will debate this either. If you mean by a Stratonician that the burden of proof is on those who claim the existence of god then yes, fair enough. I do dispute the second part of the claim however, that I am less open. Ontologically, I will commit myself only to the existence of entities which are strictly necessary to an explanation of observable phenomena. Regarding entities postulated by less cautious people, I will make no claim either way as to their existence as there is no way of confirming nor denying their existence. Where two theories are equally capable of explaining a phenomenon, the rational man chooses the simplest theory. So if by me being more closed minded you mean that I "do not multiply entities beyond necessity", I totally accept this. Not only do I accept this, I think that it is the most rational course. If I could observe a phenomenon that could not be explained by my austere materialistic ontology, only then I would consider adding to it. I don't see how anyone could object to such epistemological caution.....I would rather make no claim than make a wrong one.

**3. I have never ever tried to structure the basis of my arguments in favour of theism but have only ever sought to defend the integrity of the existing human subject as the logical owner of a particular train of experience, and as a choicemaker, who may wish to pursue some religious path or other, or not, as the case may be.**

I wouldn't disagree with this. Is it impossible for an agent to be made up of matter only? To claim it is impossible is to rule my position out *a priori*.

**4. The only presuppositions I have made are the bare minimum required for discourse and claim-making: the logical owner of the train of experience, the train of experience, the rules of deductive and inductive logic.**

This is fine as long as it carries no claims about the nature of the presupposed.

**5. I contend that, by factoring in to the equation, logically, as I believe you do, a particular theory of ascription based on a strand of current psychological theory, you break the back of the human subject as experienter, judge of experience, and claim-maker.**

I would first ask for a clarification as to what you mean by breaking the back of the human subject.....My object is to provide a scientific *explanation of* human experience in order to reconcile our experience with the science (*a la* Sellars, Carruthers etc) rather than replace our concept of a person with some kind of neurological explanation (*a la* Churchland etc) and change the way that everyone talks and thinks about themselves.

**6. I contend that theories which insist on third-person logical priority over first person experiential judgement are usually formulated by materialists for materialists; and it is but a short step to factoring in - again logically - brain mechanism talk, and thus the presupposition that only material-based detection of material-based phenomena are logically possible; to say nothing of the fate of the notion of free will.**

I don't presuppose anything, but if our experience can be explained using only material entities, why would I want to add any further nonmaterial entities to my ontology? Regarding "free will" if the experience of "free will" can be explained at the micro level using only material entities why add anything further? If I can account for the experience of "free will" using only material entities, again, why swell my ontology? My explanation is consistent with our experience *and* the entities postulated by science.

**7. If anyone is pushed into accepting 5. and 6. on pain of irrationality, lack of understanding etc etc., then it doesn't take a genius to see that any attempt whatsoever to put forward even a logically possible case for theism, is well and truly stuffed.**

I totally agree, hence the fact that I don't believe in god. But maybe it is people who *do* understand and accept the naturalistic position in order to avoid irrationality.

Just to clarify the paranormal experiment discussion. If the "paranormal" was proved, sure, I would look for a scientific explanation. If I found one, then the phenomena ceases to be paranormal and becomes normal i.e. would become part of science.

If an explanation could not be found using material entities *and* an alternative framework which posited some non material entities *was* able to explain the phenomenon then I would change my framework to include these entities. If no alternative framework could explain the phenomenon then I would just say "well, I don't know".....

This is why I am open minded, I will accept any explanation as long as it is the simplest one available and it successfully explains the observed phenomenon. The reason I don't accept anything other than material entities is because the simplest (and therefore the most rational ones to accept) explanations of observable entities posit only material entities. My mind is not closed, it merely has a bouncer stopping anything that is not justified from entering.

**Andrew**

...

Hi

Just read this back.

Just a little clarification on point 7 as I notice you use the word *logical*.

I do not, nor ever have, denied that the existence of god is not *logically* possible. It is a theory (framework, story or whatever. I like theory personally) and so has the right to be assessed alongside any competing theories. So I am not ruling it out *a priori*.

The reason I don't believe is that I think competing theories (namely the naturalistic one) explains more, provides better more accurate predictions and is simpler as it posits less.

Therefore, I believe it is not *illogical* to assert that god exists but *irrational* as the available evidence is better and more simply explained using the naturalistic framework.

The principle of parsimony is not a knockdown argument; the simplest explanation is not necessarily the correct one. So – as I have always maintained – I cannot rule god out. But I believe that given two competing explanations, it is always rational to commit oneself to the simplest.

Hope that clears that up

**Andrew**

•••

There is much to think about, and the debate is tough, but there is no debate more worth pursuing in my opinion. By the term "Stratonician" I mean the presumption - not merely the hypothesis - that the materialist story of the universe completely describes all that there is or ever can be. You make the Ockam's Razor move against my position, which, when all is said and done, is that there may be some kind of God. My answer is - and I thought that it was accepted in last week's discussion - that, in my judgement, the universe does not account for the existence of the universe. I am, accordingly, not content to presume its ultimacy before I even start reflecting upon existence, nor am I prepared to accept that it is apriori irrational to postulate the possible existence of a divine creator. I am more content with the notion of the universe existing by the choice of a creator, than the notion of the universe being either logically or contingently necessary. It is normal to use agency as an explanation of an event: "The letter was put into the letterbox because I chose to post it." When you say: "I would rather make no claim than make a wrong one" I guess I am more OK about taking risks, particularly in these circumstances, accepting that I could be mistaken, and please give me credit for having said all along that there is an ongoing possibility I could be mistaken, which I have accepted all my life. You talk throughout about the materialistic explanation as being the best explanation of all phenomena, but I am not satisfied that it has much at all to say on the subject of the human subject as the logical owner of a specific train of experience, plus various minimal add ons, such as the application of rules of logic already referred to. You accuse me of presupposing the nature of the subjectivist minimalist account of the human subject. I take this to be a covert reference to a presumption of dualism. I have never made any such presumption, and view such considerations as contingent rather than necessary. Furthermore I do not consider that materialism provides the best possible explanation of my subjectivity simply because I do not consider that it in fact provides any explanation at all. It appears to be a quasi religious doctrine rather than a supported hypothesis as I understand this notion in terms of inductive logic and its applications within philosophy of science. I go further. I think I am being pressured to presume materialism as a necessary condition of daring to exercise any aspect of my subjectivity at all. This may take the form of the insistence upon third person ascription conditions, or denial of my free will, or erosion of my use of my judgement in weighing up alternative hypotheses in terms of probability theory and decision theory. I contend that you do in fact seek to change the way that subjects talk and think about themselves. I relate this to the recent overruling of my claim that my daughter's dog, of whom I am very fond, would feel pain if I were to kick him as opposed to treating him in the affectionate and friendly way I always do. Your imposition of a particular psychological theory concerning self ascription seemed to me to be

an attempt to overrule my common sense assessment based upon my long experience of looking after animals; and it also ignores the obvious question of why we have evolved laws relating to animal cruelty, including vivisection, and consider it rational to have and to apply such laws. I do not accept that experience, logical reasoning, free will, has in any way been explained by postulated material entities, in the inductive sense of "explained". Any such explanation would have to be extremely convincing to satisfy me that I would be wise to regard my sense of making free will choices as illusory. If I am not being asked to so regard this sense, then precisely what claim are you making about subjectivity? If I do not accept that I should abandon my sense of subjectivity, my sense of judgement, my sense of freedom of thought, and become suffocated by a story that seems to me actually to explain nothing of significance to this particular debate; in virtue of what am I being considered to be irrational? You speak in terms of "...a bouncer stopping anything that is not justified from entering" and at the same time insist that your mind is not closed to considering logical possibilities. I on the other hand contend that the God hypothesis is, against the background of the mystery of existence (or am I now also being told to abandon that?) by no means as apriori irrational as you caricature it to be. I contend that your claims about reality are no more rational in that they deliver to the enquiring human subject no more about the big questions than the God hypothesis. The exclusivist materialist metaphysic is, in my opinion, just not sufficiently convincing to be assumed apriori to be the final word. I reserve the right not to be scared out of continuing to look around, and relying on my judgement based on my experiences accumulated within my life.