

Topic IV.

The most pertinent philosophical issue exposed by the statements “The human body is a prison of the soul” and the “the soul is a prison of the body” is the problem of the causal relationship between our bodies and our souls. It is essentially a question of ontological freedom, but not one strictly limited to the freedom of the soul, but also to the freedom of the body. These two statements represent completely opposite cases. In the case that “the body is a prison of the soul”, our thoughts, emotions, fears and our internal, mental worlds are determined by the physiology of the body. We are then completely constrained and limited by the occurrences in the body and we, as conscious beings or “souls”, may not do anything at our own will and are, metaphorically speaking, imprisoned by the body. In the opposite case the soul causes bodily events; my hand moves, because I desired and willed it to move. Hence the body is nothing but a puppet in the hands of the soul, the master puppeteer, or, if you will, its jailor.

But let me first define my terms. The “soul” will be used synonymously with the “mind”, with which I mean all conscious mental experiences, thoughts, memories, qualia and so forth. What I will consider as the “human body” are all the objects and events external to my consciousness. Some may say in incredulity that saying that the wind and the trees I see from the window are the body is insane. Certainly, for practical purposes our environment is not our body, but since bodily stimuli, such as thirst and hunger do not originate in my conscious mind or soul to any greater extent than the wind which makes me bow, bodily and environmental events have the same function of being the determining factor in any discussion on ontological freedom. Hence, for the purposes of this essay, the body and the environment will constitute the same thing. Finally, to call someone or something ontologically free, I will adhere to the libertarian definition, where the following three criteria have to be satisfied:

- (1) I *want* to behave in a certain way.
- (2) I am physically *able* to behave in a certain way.
- (3) I can decide to do differently (even given the same set of external conditioning and circumstances)

Hence, only the behaviours that I want and am able to engage in with the additional qualification of being able to do otherwise are genuinely free.

I will argue in this essay, that souls or minds *do possess* ontological freedom and that they *can* cause bodily events. However I do not defend this idea to the extent of Foucault’s expression, where the body is completely depended and imprisoned by the mind, but rather that a causal interdependence

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exists between these two entities. Minds may cause bodily events, but the vice versa is also true. But since the general philosophical atmosphere regarding freedom and determinism of the mind is generally inclined towards the statement that the mind is a complete prisoner of the body, I will argue explicitly against determinism to establish that minds can *at least sometimes* cause bodily events and that hence none of the extreme statements described above are completely true.

One of the most famous expressions of determinism was brought forth by Laplace, who argued that science is progressively showing that the natural world is completely governed by rigid, unchangeable and quite arbitrary natural laws. Each particle of matter must behave in relation to other particles according to universal rules of nature. That this is true is shown by the success of scientific theories, which can predict the behaviour of particles of matter with incredible accuracy, precisely because they account for the natural laws that rigidly govern them. The predictability of the behaviour of matter is indicative of its complete subduction to natural laws. Laplace illustrated his point by imagining a scientific genius, who has complete knowledge of all laws that govern matter and complete knowledge of the location and momentum of each particle of matter in the universe. He would then, due to the rigidity of nature's rules of interaction between particles, be able to foresee the location and momentum of every one of those particle for any given point in time. This being said, Laplace further reasons that humans and their minds are nothing but collections of matter. Our thoughts, emotion and other mental experiences are nothing but the result of the complex arrangement of basic biological units. But since everything biological is subjected to the same natural laws as any other material object, it must then be true that our biology is determined, and by extension, that our minds are determined as well.

But Taylor offers an argument against Laplace's determinism, which stems from a problematic assumption within his theory. Namely, that all objects and events in the world are then merely one element in an endless causal chain of object and events that came before and after it. For instance the event of a stone flying through the air never occurs randomly, but it had to be caused by some antecedent events, like a person kicking it, which were sufficient and necessary conditions for this occurrence. Similarly, the occurrence of the stone flying through the air causes a handful of other events, such as hitting a butterfly, which would not have fallen on the ground had it not been for the flying stone and so forth. Thus all events are just an element in an endless chain of causally connected events. But then the question of where and when this chain first started arises. Laplace's theory presumes that there is no beginning or end of such a causal chain, everything is causally related by natural laws from the dawn of time. But precisely the dawn of time is what Taylor is concerned with. He claims that causal chains can indeed pop out of nothing, some events can occur without sufficient and necessary antecedent events. A beautiful example from the scientific world is

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that of the Big Bang. Nothing existed before it, not even time or space and the laws of conventional physics collapse under the conditions of the infinitely dense point from which the Big Bang, and indeed, everything else occurred. Because there was no time before the Big Bang, it is illogical to ask what came before it and hence what caused it, since the causes always come before the consequences to form a chain. We are then forced to conclude that the Big Bang simply happened without a cause, because causes in those conditions are unintelligible concepts. Therefore, Taylor reasons, there are such things as uncaused events, or as he proceeded to call them “originators” of causal chains. That is because although they are uncaused themselves, they cause other events and thus start a causal chain. Certainly, the Big Bang created the greatest causal chain, since the entire universe was created as a consequence of that event. Taylor then asserts that humans (or their minds) could be considered such originators as well, for this would then comply with our subjective experience of our conscious freedom, which completely contradicts Laplace’s mechanistic story, but we also avoid contradicting scientific findings and facts, as libertarians often attempt to do.

But Laplace could offer the following counter-argument. It might be true that all causal chains had to begin somewhere and that the first link in the chain therefore had to be uncaused by antecedent events, but it is farfetched to extend the specific conditions of the Big Bang to everyday occurrences, where causal chains are already established. If minds were Taylor’s originators, it would mean that they would have to directly contradict the causal relationships that already exist in the world. For instance, if some chemical reaction in the brain would normally cause me to move my arm, but I, as an originator, created a new causal chain and moved my leg instead, that would signify direct interference with what would otherwise necessarily happen. But if that were the case, science could make no sense of human behaviour, spiteful as it would be of universal laws that govern all other matter. However, human behaviour is as a matter of fact very predictable and there is then no reason to conclude that uncaused events were ever a common occurrence since the time of the Big Bang.

However Taylor may reply that this argument assumes that the current world is absolutely saturated with causal chains and that no uncaused event could *possibly* happen without contradicting one of these chains that existed before. But this is simply not true, for it would mean that there are no events for which there were no sufficient and necessary causes. These are events which, simply put, did not happen, because nothing caused them, for instance, there were no sufficient causes for me to buy orange juice before writing this essay. If then an originator/mind comes along, we can imagine, without contradiction with existing causalities, that the originator would cause the event for which there were otherwise no sufficient and necessary antecedent events and I would therefore go and buy my orange juice. Hence, simply the possibility of events for which no sufficient causes were

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present allows manoeuvre space for an originator to initiate causal chains without contradicting existing ones. The conclusion is then that minds can cause events, most probably physical behaviour of the body, without such behaviour being predetermined by the laws of nature. Hence the mind can, at least in cases where no contradiction with existing causal chains is possible, cause bodily events and perform the role of the jailor.

However Taylor's argument with originators has a fatal flaw, if not addressed appropriately. Namely, the determinists could concede to all of the above and then claim that even such esoteric uncaused events initiated by originators are determined as long as the originators themselves remain material entities and hence subjected to common natural laws. Whatever behaviour the originator might then be causing out of thin air must then nevertheless be a product of conventional laws and hence, given a set of previous conditioning and environmental circumstances, we will still have no alternative on exactly what event we will "originate". We are thus not even a little closer to ontological freedom of the mind.

Therefore, it is an imperative of any libertarian to separate souls or minds from matter. Only if minds are immaterial can they ignore the laws of matter and hence not be immediately determined. The nature of the soul and the body is an issue that is implicit in Focault's observation that "the soul is a prison of the body". Indeed it asserts that the soul must be something different from the body, whereas Laplace's discourse of claiming that mind are nothing but the product of biological arrangements implies the identity of the soul and the body. The latter view was more pertinently advocated by J. J. C. Smart and other advocates of the identity theory. He claimed that statements such as "I am in pain" and "the C-fibres in my cerebellum are firing at intensity" are essentially reports of the same event. The statement "I am in pain" is a report of a subjective experience or qualia, whereas the second statement is a scientific description of the physical state of things in the brain. But there is no more reason to say that the neurones firing and pain are different things than it is to say that water and H<sub>2</sub>O are two different things. Again, the experience of water, its wetness, tastelessness and colourlessness is a subjective report of sensory experience, whereas the molecular structure H<sub>2</sub>O is a scientific description of what "water" is in its essence. But as a matter of fact only H<sub>2</sub>O exists; the subjective experience of water is not a report of any strange thing different from its molecular structure. Likewise, pain is not a thing in itself, it is merely a report, the object of reference of which is a biological occurrence in the brain.

But in response to this argument, Shaffer argues that the examples of the qualia of pain and of the experience of water are not analogous. That is because according to Leibniz's law of the identity of indiscernibles, for two object to be identical, they must share completely the same (and all)

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properties. In the famous example of the morning and evening star, he explains that the morning and evening star were found to be the same thing, the planet Venus, because they both had the same properties of roundness, atmospheric pressure, location of craters etc. They were merely the same object at different points in time. Analogously, water has the same properties as a bunch of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules put into a glass. Its thermal and cohesive properties are due precisely to the chemical properties of the molecule. But if the same test is performed on mental and brain events, the identity is not evident. For it seems that qualia and other mental events do not have physical properties like the neurones they are supposed to be identical to. For instance it is not sensible to talk about red, round thoughts or unicorn shaped emotions. The mental concepts of thoughts, emotions etc. are simply incompatible with physical properties. Hence they cannot be identical to something material.

Smart's counter-argument could be that this incompatibility only seemingly arises because the languages of subjective experience and science are incompatible. He admits that the statements "I am in pain" and "the C-fibres are firing" do not give us the same information and that one statement cannot be translated into another. For instance, if I had not told you that the activity of C-fibres corresponds to sensations of pain (I made it up), you would have no idea that I am in pain. Furthermore, I do not gain knowledge about a person's sensation of pain if I look at their C-fibres. The two reports are completely different in perspective and the knowledge they encompass. However the fact that these two reports are incompatible does not mean that the objects or events they are referring to are not the same. Hence Shaffer is using a linguistic trick to make us believe that thoughts are incompatible with physical properties, whereas it is only the languages that are incompatible.

But if Shaffer is only using a linguistic trick, he should come to a similar incompatibility when the object of reference of a mental report is definitely material, for instance, a chair. He would then have to say that he cannot think of chairs with four legs and some woody texture in the same way that he cannot think of wooden pains with four legs. But as a matter of fact, when the object of a mental report is material, then we have no problems to ascribe material properties to that object, even though that is a subjective report of the chair which is supposed to be linguistically incompatible with scientific reports of the same object. I can quite easily think of wooden chairs with legs. However when the object of the subjective report is a mental event, we experience the previously described incompatibility. We are thus forced to conclude that in all cases of reports that are incompatible with physical properties, the objects of these reports must be immaterial. It is thus established that minds or souls are immaterial and if I relate this conclusion to Taylor's argument, originators are not subjected to physical laws and can thus originate events freely.

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But the latter conclusion may be questionable. Assuming that minds are immaterial, the classical objection to Cartesian dualism is expected. If originators are immaterial, how can they interact or, god forbid, cause behaviour of the body? Usually for something to cause an event you require something spatially limited and something that can exert energy, for instance a hand is spatially limited and it exerts energy in moving a glass. As established above, immaterial minds have no such properties which are essentially physical; hence causal relationships with matter are incomprehensible. On the other hand, minds are quite known to regularly interact with matter, for it does not often happen that I would think about moving my arm, but my arm would not move. Since the mind and the body are in a constant state of causal interaction and such interaction is impossible if the mind is immaterial, then the mind has to be material.

But such an argument fails to see that the need for a spatially limited entity that can exert force is a very limited criterion for the possibility of a causal relation. It does not consider, for instance the most fundamental causalities between elementary particles, which are completely arbitrary. For instance, electrons are attracted to protons, but repelled by other electrons, but these causalities cannot be further analysed to answer the question *why* this is so. The relations among these particles are simply arbitrary and for all it is worth, they present the same logical leap from cause to consequence as does the interaction between an immaterial mind and a material body. As we reduce common causalities like moving a glass into more and more fundamental causalities like the influx of calcium ions into the muscle cell and the polarity of ion channels in the cell membranes and so forth, we must eventually arrive to causalities like those among elementary particles which are irreducible. If we have a good reason to say that minds and bodies causally interact, then we can assume that their interaction must be one of such fundamental, irreducible nature, instead of claiming their identity. By analogy, we refuse to say that electrons are the same thing as protons, merely because their interaction is irreducible to some more fundamental laws. I therefore conclude that minds as originators *can* cause bodily events, that they are in so doing independent of physical laws and that such causation is logically possible.

But all above conceded to, philosophers from the camp of epiphenomenalists might argue that even though the causalities I am talking about may be logically intelligible, there is no reason why we should believe that they are necessarily taking place. It is the epiphenomenalist position that an immaterial mind is a coincidental epiphenomenon of the functioning of the brain, which is an inert property, meaning that it essentially has no function whatsoever. A famous epiphenomenalist and biologist Huxley had a hand at making up analogies; one of them that illustrated the epiphenomenalist point was that of the cuckoo clock. When you buy a cuckoo clock, you expect the cogs, springs and wheels in the clock to serve the function of measuring time, but the cuckoo bird is

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there only for decorative purposes. It contributes absolutely nothing to the clock's main function of time keeping. By analogy, the immaterial mind is the cuckoo bird, whilst the cogs, wheels and springs, the operative parts, represent the body. This corresponds completely to the "the body is a prison of the soul" metaphor, since the soul cannot do absolutely anything on its own and is the person in the passenger seat of the car, which is ultimately driven by the body, unable of influencing where it is being driven and thus a prisoner of the body.

Huxley supported his view with empirical research on lobotomised frogs, which could nevertheless swim in water and he observed a French war veteran, who occasionally fell into some form of trance, where he used his cane as a rifle and was completely oblivious to his surroundings (e.g. pungent smells, noise and pain). Since the war veteran did not remember any of his behaviour and was considered to be unconscious, this example was supposed to show that the presence of the mind is not necessary for behaviour. That the body can perform all bodily functions and produce behaviour independently. If this is true it would follow that the immaterial mind then has no function.

But these examples do the epiphenomenalist case more harm than good. After all, using a cane as a rifle could hardly be considered normal behaviour and it certainly seems that this person was heavily impaired in their reasoning and perception of the world around them. Perhaps it is true that we can perform some behaviours unconsciously, like sleep-walking, but this does not mean that we can do *everything* without the mind. For instance, if I am discussing determinism, it would be preferable that I am conscious of what I am talking about, lest I would begin to talk nonsense. Thus cases of unconscious people engaging in some form of strange behaviours hardly advance the epiphenomenalist case.

But there are also positive arguments as to why the minds *do* have a function of producing behaviour. Popper and James provided evolutionary reasons for such functions. Popper claimed that for any property of an organism to be retained and even further developed through millennia of evolutionary development, this property must somehow improve the organism's chances of survival. But the only way it could do that is by influencing behaviour. Hence if the conscious mind is such a prominent faculty in humans that was maintained through the rigorous test of natural selection, then it must produce some kind of behaviour that improves chances of survival.

James' argument is that our perception always seems to guide us towards behaviours that are beneficial to our survival and away from those which are detrimental to it. For instance, we enjoy the taste of fatty, sweet and salty food, hence we are more inclined to eat it, whilst we do not enjoy the sensation of pain and that is why we will keep our hands off that hot stove. But doing so makes sense, since food with lots of fats and sugar contains quick energy, whilst burning your hand is not

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really preferable if you want to survive. What follows is that our conscious experiences direct us toward this or that behaviour and that this mechanism makes for an evolutionary advantage. Imagine, for instance, that you would absolutely hate oranges, but your body kept on eating loads of oranges. This is a completely plausible case according to epiphenomenalists, since the minds and experiences are coincidental anyhow and there is no reason why our preferences should not be the exact opposite of what is evolutionary advantageous, preferred and executed by the body.

These arguments are very compelling, since the only way in which epiphenomenalists could address it is by saying that it is not true that all properties of the organism need to have an evolutionary purpose. Occasionally coincidental by-products of evolution appear which are not really harmful to survival, hence they are not excluded by natural selection, but neither does it mean that they are beneficial. Consider for instance the appendix and the remains of the tail from our ape days. Hence the mind does not *have* to cause behaviour just because we one.

But if the conscious mind is a coincidental by-product then it is a matter of complete and arbitrary coincidence that consciousness is located in certain brain structures, such as the prefrontal lobe, responsible for decision making and planning, the amygdala, responsible for emotion and so forth, whereas the medulla oblongata, which regulates the rate of the heartbeat, performs unconscious processes. But then it might as well have “coincidentally” happened that we would only be conscious of our heartbeat, whilst thoughts, emotions and decisions would be unconscious. But this is simply hard to believe, since it seems that there is some purpose of being aware of thinking about philosophy, whilst it is better that our heartbeat is regulated automatically, lest we should manually cause cardiac arrest. The localisation of consciousness in certain faculties gives strong indication that it causes behaviour where this is beneficial. We can thus assume that there is no compelling argument for the claim that the immaterial mind is inert.

For all these reasons I conclude that the soul is not completely at the mercy of the body. My decisions, thoughts, emotions and experiences are not determined as the necessary outcomes of conditioning and environment, since minds can be thought of as originators of causal chains according to Taylor, however minds cannot cause simply anything that would otherwise contradict already existing causal chains, but they can only cause events, for which no sufficient and necessary conditions were present. The process of origination cannot be determined, since minds are not material entities and they are thus exempt from the necessity of the laws of physics. The causal interactions between material and immaterial entities are conceivable as fundamental, irreducible causalities, whereas evolutionary theory *demand*s that minds should have a function of producing behaviour. All of the above taken into account, the soul can *at least sometimes* determine the



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behaviour of the body, and the body is then the prisoner of the soul. In this case all three criteria of ontological freedom are satisfied. I do with my body what I desire, I am able to do it and there are no conditions that would determine this behaviour by necessity, hence I may do otherwise whenever I feel like it. But admittedly, many times the vice versa is true as well. When I go and buy orange juice because I am thirsty, I was conditioned by the biological needs of my body to do so and I could not do otherwise without contradiction with what should necessarily happen, hence, I am sometimes determined by my body and therefore a prisoner of the body. Thus both statements introduced in the beginning of this essay carry a grain of truth, but they are also false and the truth can only be obtained through the clash of these opinions.