Why Medicine and Biology Need a Concept of a Unified Soul

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Abstract

In this talk, I will cover the following questions / items:

1. **The Premature Announcement of Vitalism’s Demise:** We still seem to need words like “life”, “mind” – and even “soul”. Why is that – and what do these particular terms have to do with one another, i.e., what do they have in common?

2. **Why Stephen Dedalus, In Spite of His Best Efforts, Still Owes AE a Pound:** In a discussion of a passage from Episode 9 of James Joyce’s Ulysses, Stephen Dedalus wonders whether he ought to pay back the pound he owes to AE (George William Russell). Against some of his inclinations, he decides that he should pay AE the pound.

3. **Clash of the (False) Titans: Monism versus Dualism:** Cartesian dualism, that is. What a mess René Descartes has made!

4. **What is a Computer?** And is the brain one? (Yes … and no.) But more importantly, what is meant by the question?

5. **Extra! Extra! Thomas Aquinas is a Substance Dualist!!** He was not a Cartesian dualist (of course), but in his thought, the mind and body are not taken to be quite the same kind of … stuff. Human beings are composite, not simple substances.

6. **About Dedalus and that Pound He Owes AE… Why, Exactly, does Unity of the Soul Entail Moral Obligation?** Or, to put the question slightly differently: Why is it that Stephen Dedalus, for all his faults, is a mensch, while Napoleon, for all his
accomplishments, was still a schmuck?

7. And What This Might All Have to Do With Solid-State Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy: The natural sciences have been spectacularly successful in studying efficient and material causes, but avoid formal causes (mostly) and final causes (vehemently). But what is beyond the purview of science is not necessarily beyond that of the universe. What type(s) of causality is (are) necessary for understanding human life?

Speakers

Dr. Meredith is Professor in the Department of Pathology, the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and the College of the University of Chicago. He is also Associate Faculty at the Divinity School. He works on the biophysics of protein structure, concentrating on amyloid proteins associated with neurodegenerative diseases. He also teaches courses in the College and the Divinity School, including ones on James Joyce's Ulysses, and Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov, and on the problem of evil, focusing on St. Thomas Aquinas and Augustine. His main theological interest is in the problem of evil. In this connection, he is currently writing a book on philosophical (especially metaphysical) and literary perspectives on disease. His current interests also center on the impact of biotechnology and the genetic revolution on the definition of human nature.

Dr. Padela is an emergency medicine physician, health services researcher, and bioethicist whose scholarship focuses on the intersection of community health, religious tradition, and bioethics. He is Assistant Professor of Medicine, Sections of Emergency Medicine and General Internal Medicine, at the University of Chicago. He is also the Director of PMR’s Initiative on Islam and Medicine and a Faculty of the MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics.