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Are We Sending Mixed Messages? How Philosophical Naturalism Erodes Ethical Instruction

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Section: *Philosophical Foundations*

ABSTRACT. To develop critical thinking skills, higher order ethical reasoning, a better grasp of the implications of ethical decisions, and a basis for ethical knowledge, it is necessary to explore the philosophical premises foundational to one's ethical persuasion. No philosophical premises are more important than those pertaining to the nature of human personhood and business' responsibility to respect the inherent value of human beings. Philosophical naturalism assigns the essence of human personhood strictly to causal interactions of physical matter. Substance dualism, on the other hand, posits both a physical aspect and an immaterial substance to personhood, interacting within the totality of each being. This paper argues for the logical superiority of substance dualism in achieving the overriding objective of discerning ethical knowledge. Substance dualism offers a better explanation – and one that more closely follows the way most people commonly experience themselves and others – than naturalism for free agency and accountability, meaningful moral standards, confidence in knowing what ethical decisions to make, and the moral drive residing in conscience.

KEY WORDS: accountability, conscience, ethics instruction, materialism, metaphysics, moral standards, naturalism, substance dualism

Introduction

There is no shortage of well-publicized reports pertaining to questionable treatment of human persons in the workplace. In virtually every case, questions arise as to why some people treat others as less valuable and as worthy of less respect than they would expect and demand for themselves. The following are merely three illustrative examples: (1) Four women sued Fox News, claiming that Fox discriminated against female employees and subjected them to sexual harassment and a hostile work environment, including a male vice president who routinely used obscenities and vulgarities in his interactions with female employees (*Wall Street Journal*, 2006). (2) As an example of the ongoing controversy surrounding excessive executive compensation, AMR, American Airlines' parent company, failed to disclose to its unions a provision in its recovery program that stipulated large bonuses for seven senior executives. Employee union members who had agreed to a steep \$1.62 billion in annual concessions to keep the airline afloat expressed outrage and accusations of betrayal of their trust (Shuit, 2003), lessons at American is apparently unable to learn (*Wall Street Journal*, 2006). (3) Companies' increasing expectations of employee performance and job commitment are creating high levels of stress among employees (Anonymous, 2003). These work stresses affect family life, especially in the case of single-parent families and when both parents work outside the home (Parasuraman

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et al., 1989; Walls et al., 2001). Additionally, increased stress levels inevitably result in workplace rudeness and incivility (Johnson and Indvik, 2001); a large percentage of workers report being verbally harassed by a manager or co-worker (Oldham, 1999).

These examples provide only a token representation of the pervasive impact of ethical behavior (or lack thereof) on human quality of life in the workplace, but they serve to raise questions about our collective assumptions concerning the domain of business ethics. Are the negative effects emanating from these situations merely productivity issues? Or concerns with the mounting costs associated with lawsuits, employee retaliation, and social interventions, respectively? Should instructors of ethics be primarily concerned with measures to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace or steps to overcome negative publicity from ill-advised executive decision-making? Or is something more basic an issue here as well? Could it also be important in the study of business ethics to delve deeper into our philosophical premises concerning the nature of human personhood in order to adequately formulate coherent analyses of these and other ethically questionable cases?

For both students of business ethics and those who endeavor to provide instructional guidance in these matters, it would be helpful to examine the fundamental assumptions on which they base their ethical conclusions (Byrne, 2002). Although research shows that circumstances (Dukerich et al., 1990; Weber and Wasieleski, 2001) and age (Malinowski and Smith, 1985) do impact ethical decisions, it is also true that one's beliefs, although sometimes unconscious or unexamined, influence, at a minimum, ethical intentions (Weber and Gillespie, 1998), and very likely at least some ethical behaviors (Ferris, 1996; Rest, 1979).

Some of the most fundamental assumptions one can make in situations such as those described above concern the nature of human personhood and in what respect concepts of personhood should impact ethical decision-making. But sorting out the implications in practice can be confusing, and formulating rigorous rationales for business decisions can be daunting.

The purpose of this paper then is threefold. First, a rationale is given for the importance of exploring philosophical premises that govern business ethics in general and human personhood issues in particular.

Next, naturalistic views of human personhood are defined and contrasted with substance dualism, the view that personhood is entailed in the existence of a non-physical substance, including some emphasis on the plausibility of ethical norms being derived thereby. Finally, minimal conditions necessary for the discovery and knowledge of a coherent ethic of personhood are delineated. Also addressed is how naturalistic definitions of personhood with the emphasis on materialism offer an inadequate metaphysical basis for rigorous business ethics analysis and decision-making.

Why explore human personhood?

Members of society today are bombarded by two message streams concerning human personhood that are likely to clash as people give thoughtful consideration to the roots of such workplace behavior as that described above. One message stream, pertaining to philosophical naturalism, is pervasive within the academy (albeit not necessarily in the business ethics classroom) and presented in the public forum as scientific, fact-based, and, for the most part, unquestioned dogma. The other message stream, concerning ethical and moral values, asserts overriding moral and ethical standards that must be observed if the business community is to thrive and retain a place of valued leadership in society. It is the position of this paper that these two message streams are incompatible and that the fact that the former position is delivered as "scientific" while the latter is often treated quite loosely, as if the subject matter has little or no knowledge content (cf. Sommers, 1993), has an inevitable impact on the perceived credibility of each view.

The former message stream is based on philosophical naturalism, a worldview that purports to rely primarily on scientific data for substantiation of its truth claims. In practice, however, naturalists migrate subtly from espousing an ontology that adheres strictly to physicalism to the act of making normative pronouncements without missing a beat (e.g., Frederick, 1995). However, it is highly questionable to make the metaphysical leap from a purely materialistic or physicalist view of human beings, which is an essential component of the naturalist's repertoire, to a basis for normative pronouncements in any arena, including that of business ethics.

In contrast to a naturalistic definition of human personhood, substance dualism offers a logically superior thesis in accounting for moral and ethical knowledge as well as providing an essential underpinning for arriving at business decisions that impact human beings. Substance dualism defines human persons to be comprised not only of material properties, such as blue eyes or brown hair, but also of an immaterial substance essential to personhood. More specifically, a substance dualism view of personhood posits the necessary existence of the soul, which represents a non-material substance that enables one's access to moral and ethical knowledge.

Moral knowledge and business ethics

Controversy surrounds the goals of instruction in business ethics. Arguments against higher order outcomes, such as changes in moral posture and behavior, abound (cf. Dean and Beggs, 2006; Kristol, 1987). Although popular calls for the development of ethical convictions (e.g., Lennick and Kiel, 2005; Liberman and Etzioni, 2003) have been derided by some members of the academy, others argue that progress in one's ability to exercise critical thinking skills and thus achieve more sophisticated understanding and moral reasoning ability, as well as behavioral outcomes, is not an unreasonable expectation (e.g., Elliston, 1985; Etzioni, 2002; Sommers, 1993). Certainly research exists to empirically support the possibility, at least among a notable percentage of the student population, of achieving some success in this direction (e.g., Ferris, 1996). Further, it seems reasonable that since comparable levels of progress are expected in other disciplines, there is to date no compelling evidence that critical thinking and higher-level moral reasoning cannot be successfully addressed among business students as well (Gioia, 2002; Swanson, 2004), given a pedagogy designed to address those levels of instruction.

For these reasons, I contend that the subject matter of business ethics, dealing as it does with issues that affect the lives of literally billions of people, is worthy of the type of rigorous analysis that can lead to knowledge about objectively correct ethical positions. That is, achieving a reasonable degree of epistemic certainty with respect to some

issues is both compatible with the mandate of higher education and a plausible objective, at least for some students (Duska, 1991). Moreover, although exhaustive treatment of epistemic theories of knowledge is beyond the scope of a business ethics course, surely some attention to the topic is warranted, especially with respect to notions of human personhood, and how one obtains such ethical knowledge.

For example, although clearly lacking sufficiency, the notion of justified true belief as a necessary component for knowledge is conceded by most philosophers (Plantinga, 1993a). Additionally, Plantinga (1993a, b), for example, elaborates on the notion of warrant to justify knowledge claims, and Swinburne (2001) further adds the criterion of an adequate investigation of the evidence over time. By applying well-documented epistemic criteria to ethical reasoning, it is possible to achieve a reasonable level of certainty with respect to ethical knowledge. As far back as Aristotle, many philosophers have recognized that the good must be known by the virtuous as well as their being trained towards it. So it does not seem as if aspirations toward logical ethical reasoning and some level of ethical knowledge in business are unduly ambitious, in accordance with Kristol's (1987) indictment of academics who "...cheerfully allow that they are much too sophisticated to know right from wrong, and regard claims to such knowledge with disdain."

A brief definition of naturalism

A simple definition of naturalism is that our best understanding of what is, is what science says there is (Raley, 2005). Naturalist John F. Post writes, (1991, p. 11),

According to a number of influential philosophers, the sciences cumulatively tell us, in effect, that everything can be accounted for in purely natural terms. The ability of the sciences to explain matters within their scope is already very great, and it is increasing all the time. The world view this entails, according to many, is naturalism: Everything is a collection of entities of the sort the sciences are about, and all truth is determined ultimately by the truths about these basic scientific entities.

Post implies that data and conclusions about reality should be drawn from the appropriate sciences (including mathematics). The material world constitutes the whole of reality, and scientific endeavors constitute the sole means of acquiring knowledge about reality. Note that this view of reality virtually eliminates everything but that which is fundamentally material or physical, whether pertaining to human entities or otherwise. Thus materialism, defines human beings as mere property-things. That is, human actions are manifestations of these entities engaging in “physical cause-effect relations with their environment and through which run causal chains of events according to the set of externally related chemical and physical parts that constitute humans” (Moreland and Rae, 2000, p. 91).

Although various writers offer slightly different views of naturalism’s implications for definitions of human personhood, the underlying conclusion of the majority of current philosophers of science and others is captured in the following quote from Ellis (1990, p. 19): “One would have to have very good reasons indeed, or be very arrogant, not to accept the scientific viewpoint on questions of ontology as the best there is.” As we consider the impact of different definitions of human personhood on one’s ethical foundations, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the high degree of certainty Ellis associates with a physicalist interpretation of reality stands in stark contrast to the (often) weakly formulated philosophical rationales presented to business students as the basis for ethical norms (e.g., Dean and Beggs, 2006).

At this point, a word of caution is in order. It is important to avoid making the mistake of conflating science with scientism, materialism, physicalism, or reductionism (Haught, 2005). “Science” refers to the empirically based scientific method; however, the latter four terms are different aspects of a philosophy that purports to define the nature of reality. One can logically argue the significant problems associated with consigning explanations of all of reality to the scientific method without advocating the demise of science as we know it. For the sake of this discussion, a legitimate distinction is made between the scientific method *per se* and ontological philosophies that often masquerade as science in the

guise of scientism, materialism, reductionism, or physicalism.

Contrasting naturalism with substance dualism

In general, scientific naturalists do not allow that humans possess an immaterial substance, the soul. Although nuances exist among different naturalistic thinkers, an overriding commonality is that the naturalist believes the physical aspects of the universe, including persons, is all there is. Lest there be any doubt, two representatives that epitomize the naturalistic position are offered. According to Churchland (1984, p. 21):

“The important point about the standard evolutionary story is that the human species and all of its features are the wholly physical outcome of a purely physical process. ...If this is the correct account of our origins, then there seems neither need, nor room, to fit any non-physical substances or properties into our theoretical account of ourselves. We are creatures of matter. And we should learn to live with that fact.

Kim’s (1996, pp. 3–4) statement is even more explicit:

The idea that our mentality consists in the possession by each of us of some immaterial mental substance is fraught with difficulties. In the first place, there seems no compelling reason to think that there are wholly immaterial things in the world. Second, even if there were such things, it is dubious that they could do the job for which they were intended...In addition, the idea of an immaterial and immortal soul usually carries with it various, often conflicting, religious and theological associations that are best avoided.

Some naturalists do allow for the emergence of irreducible mental states, such as the mind and/or consciousness. Hasker (1999), for example, cites various theories of emergence, which argue that somehow mind emerges from the functioning of the brain and the nervous system. Since the nearly universal human experience of self-consciousness, or the concept of the mind as an entity distinct from the brain, is one of three central objections leveled at materialistic naturalism, theories of emergence hold great appeal for naturalists who grapple with such

ontological difficulties. However, those who hold to any of several emergent positions are shackled with the necessity of demonstrating how a non-physical property can reasonably be conceived to have derived from the purely physical, a not inconsequential challenge for philosophers, and much more a challenge for scientists. Indeed, Peacocke and Gillett (1987, p. 55) says:

I find it very hard to see why that functional property [consciousness] coded in a certain complex physical structure requires a new entity to be invoked, of an entirely different kind, to appear on the scene to ensure its emergence. How could something substantial, some substance or some other entity different in kind from that which has been evolved so far, suddenly come in to the evolutionary, temporal sequence?

If the only recourse to mind, consciousness, or soul is to assume it arose from the merely physical, we must agree with Peacocke that the notion lacks credibility. However, note that his underlying assumption is the absence of a transcendent non-physical force or generative entity. Given Peacocke's own philosophical rules of reason, grounded as they are in empirical verification, and given the impossibility of offering material evidence either for or against the soul, it is disingenuous for him to make such a definitive assertion.

A second objection to the unfettered acceptance of physicalism is that it is logically self-refuting. One outstanding articulation of the self-refutation argument is framed by Baker (1987, p. 134), in which she declares that "if the thesis denying the common-sense conception of the mental is true, then the concepts of rational acceptability, of assertion, of cognitive error, even of truth and falsity are called into question." Since under physicalism, mental faculties simply reflect the action of synapses firing in the brain, how could one ever be certain that any thought or idea was not merely an artifact of a chemical reaction? She concludes, "It seems that we can neither rationally accept nor assert nor even formulate the thesis denying the common-sense conception of the mental. Indeed, if the thesis is true, it is at least problematic whether we can rationally accept or assert or even formulate any thesis at all" (p. 147).

A third objection to physicalism is closely related. Put simply, if the physical is all that exists of human personhood, then the notion of free agency is

absurd. Even quantum indeterminacy cannot rescue physicalism from the elimination of any rationale for supposing one's deliberate control of one's own thoughts and the necessary mental processes to ground real freedom (Moreland and Rae, 2000). Rather, thoughts, ideas, and mental states, including those related to moral and ethical reasoning, become merely manifestations of the physical functioning of physical properties within the organism interacting with each other as well as with properties outside the organism. Accordingly, Searle (1984, p. 92) states:

In order for us to have radical freedom, it looks as if we would have to postulate that inside each of us was a self that was capable of interfering with the causal order of nature. That is, it looks as if we would have to contain some entity that was capable of making molecules swerve from their paths. I don't know if such a view is even intelligible, but it's certainly not consistent with what we know about how the world works from physics.

And so we find that Searle inadvertently directs us toward substance dualism and a theory of human personhood that not only addresses the inconsistencies inherent in a physicalist definition but is also much more consistent with how human beings commonly experience themselves.

Moreland and Rae (2000, p. 121) define a human person as "a unity of two distinct entities – body and soul." The body consists of the physical parts and characteristics that define the material aspects of an individual. The soul, however, embodies the essence of the individual, the self-consciousness, the conscience, the mind, and the means of perpetual existence of the human person. If we repeatedly replace the parts of a physical object, say a bicycle, at some point the object becomes a different bicycle; it is no longer the original thing. However, if a human being loses limbs and parts that are replaced, do we equally believe that that person becomes someone else? No, it is the soul that carries enduring personhood within it, and it cannot be taken apart and reassembled as someone else. Although people can change in limited respects, they cannot lose their essential selfhood.

Reminiscent of Kim's first objection above, one of the most common criticisms of substance dualism from materialists is that there is no scientific evidence of the existent of an immaterial substance. That is,

there is no physical evidence of the soul. Of course, one logically would *not* expect to find physical evidence of the immaterial; to be consistent, one logically would look for immaterial evidence of soulish substance. And what do we find? Quite simply, we find that regardless of the specific religious proclivities of various cultures, the notion of an enduring self, one that has a future beyond the cessation of physical life, has achieved overwhelming consensus.

As an example, it may be necessary to acquire physical data to disprove the erroneous theory that the earth is flat, because the kind of evidence required to address the shape of the earth resides outside the individual. In contrast, the relevant data with respect to theories of the mind and self-existence must be accessed by looking inward rather than outward. This in no way suggests that mind-body interactions do not influence human persons. Not only do such phenomena exist, but we would reasonably anticipate such interactions even if we did not already know about them. But what it does suggest is that evidence pertaining to the existence of an immaterial substance cannot be derived under the same criteria as are used to verify naturalistic phenomena. Put simply, metaphysical questions are outside the scope of naturalistic philosophy, and the tools with which to evaluate various metaphysical hypotheses are not the same tools used to evaluate materialistic hypotheses.

Kim's second objection is beyond the scope of this paper, but his third objection, the implied necessity of opening the door to religious associations, bears some comment. His fears are justified: the existence of an enduring, immaterial self that possesses capabilities for true moral reflection and choice certainly suggests a creator and maintainer of the immaterial. That notion also brings with it the possibility, even the likelihood, that moral motions somehow find common ground in a transcendent referent, one that embodies transcendent authority, and that is accessed through mechanisms embedded in the function of the soul. There is also the likelihood that intrinsic worth associated with human personhood lies rooted in the creative act of assigning to human persons an enduring and worthy essence. And, hence, the importance of moral and ethical standards to govern interpersonal behavior.

It seems, therefore, that a viewpoint of human persons as valuable and appropriately recipient of

respectful treatment on the part of others is inherently superior and more compelling in justifying the pursuit of ethical knowledge than purely physicalist views of human beings. With some distinctions and implications between human personhood as a purely physical manifestation versus substance dualism defined, we next turn our attention to examining some conditions that would be important in fostering a more sophisticated analysis of business ethics cases and come closer to establishing knowledge concerning ethical knowledge with respect to human personhood. Here, once again, we find that substance dualism offers a superior basis for ethical reasoning and decision-making.

The purpose of the next section is not to "prove" that substance dualism is a better beginning foundation for impacting ethical behavior, although it may well be. Rather, the intent is to demonstrate that to move forward in the pursuit of ethical knowledge, physicalism in contrast to substance dualism suffers from a lack of coherence and reality correspondence requisite for discerning ethical knowledge.

Conditions necessary for the pursuit of ethical knowledge

Discussed below are important conditions necessary, although not necessarily sufficient, to the pursuit of ethical knowledge. These include (1) free agency, (2) a meaningful moral standard, (3) epistemic confidence, and (4) a moral driver.

Free agency

Free agency carries the option of choosing to violate moral law, and it is necessary for moral responsibility to exist. Without free agency, ethical knowledge is no longer really "knowledge" in any meaningful sense; rather it takes on the notion of cultural preference or social desirability. Further, "knowledge" implies that alternative postures have been considered, and the human agent has causally rejected some and selected others. If, on the other hand, "knowledge" merely stands for "what I am bound to believe as a result of the external environment acting on my internal chemistry," then "knowledge" as we commonly use the term becomes merely an illusion, a chemically induced behavioral response.

Further, knowledge implies behavior, although it is quite conceivable that one sometimes chooses to act contrarily to what one knows for various reasons. Nevertheless with respect to behavior, free agency does not merely mean that one is free to believe or do what one wants, as this condition could be argued from the physicalist/determinist perspective. Rather, the real issue is whether one is free to want in the first place (Moreland and Rae, 2000). Therefore, free agency requires that one equally be able to want to do (or to want to refrain from doing) a and to be able to want to do (or to want to refrain from doing) b, although the agent in question may be free to do either *a* or *b*. In other words, free agency bestows the role of first mover, as opposed to derivative actor, on the acting agent.

Free agency also carries with it the idea of accountability, a feature of growing importance and the subject of much discussion in the business community. If we are free to choose or reject obedience in response to our knowledge of moral law, then we are accountable for our actions. If we are not free to choose to become knowledgeable and to act, it is absurd to assign blame. People intuitively know this and sometimes attempt to dodge consequences by appealing to their own lack of accountability through such defenses as "It wasn't my fault. I couldn't do otherwise." "I didn't know what I was doing." "I was forced by someone else to do it."

On the other hand, physicalism logically leads to determinism, not to free agency. It is difficult to see how a series of chemical reactions in the brain can lead to the sort of independent action and personal responsibility people normally associate with freedom to choose and freedom to want to choose. And higher order moral reasoning surely appears to differ not only in complexity but also in kind from the sort of brain activity that elicits, for example, physical movement.

A meaningful moral standard

A meaningful moral standard is one that is both objective and transcendent, and, to be meaningful, it must be based on knowledge. An objective standard is one that remains true regardless of the opinions of individuals. It is always wrong to rape women. It is

always wrong to torture and murder innocent people. It is always wrong to abuse children. These things are wrong even when the consensus in a society is to allow the behavior, as was the case in Nazi Germany, for example. Difficulties in reaching consensus on any given issue, say, for example, what constitutes insider trading or whether foreign bribes are ever acceptable, means only that correct moral and ethical standards are not always obvious and that discernment is required. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine our society expressly disclaiming all ability to have knowledge of right and wrong.

Objectivity with respect to ethical standards means that some standards do not change when societal consensus shifts. If some standards are objective, they exist apart from our own subjective musings, vacillations, and rationalizations. Certainly we behave as if some behaviors are universally understood to be wrong when we express moral outrage against those behaviors. In contrast, subjective standards are difficult to defend, as they may change with winds of public opinion. Apart from knowledge of morals and ethics, people may find it easy to rationalize away responsibility for expediency's sake when standards clash with personal desires or business contingencies, an inevitable occurrence.

Moral and ethical standards that are transcendent and enduring are thus subject to achieving the status of knowledge, that is, capable of being known in a sense that is different from merely identifying passing trends. There is a truth component to such knowledge that applies to everyone, regardless of time, place, circumstances, or ethnic, or national background and practice. These standards provide a common frame-of-reference for establishing commercial practices and organizational cultures as well as making strategic and tactical decisions. Without confidence in overriding standards that demand allegiance, business professors, students, and practitioners are confronted with the impossible task of reconciling seemingly irreconcilable demands, which situation tends to mitigate against meaningful ethical discussions and conclusions in the classroom and in practice. Why should a manager jeopardize her job by blowing the whistle on illegal corporate activities if tomorrow's laws may make those activities entirely legal and acceptable? Why should an engineer compromise

his chances for promotion by insisting on expensive design requirements only because they ensure the safety of the buyer that uses the product? People are generally moved to act in ways that subordinate their own interests to a higher standard primarily when they are convinced of the "rightness" of that standard, a notion which leads to the criterion of epistemic confidence.

Substance dualism allows for the acquisition of moral and ethical knowledge through the exercise of mind interacting with conscience in the proper functioning of the soul. Physicalism, however, logically and necessarily reduces assertions about moral and ethical knowledge to mere emotivism, since such pronouncements emerge strictly from brain chemistry. Consequently, truth as objective knowledge becomes illusory.

Epistemic confidence

Epistemic confidence emerges from knowledge of ethical and moral standards. But how do we know that we can know for certain what is the "right" of a given situation? Edward O. Wilson, himself an ardent naturalist, avers (Wilson, 1998, p. 53) that "Centuries of debate on the origin of ethics come down to this: Either ethical principles, such as justice and human rights, are independent of human experience, or they are human inventions." He correctly characterizes the debate on the origin of ethics as "between transcendentalists, who think that moral guidelines exist outside the human mind, and empiricists, who think them contrivances of the mind" (Wilson, 1998, p. 53). He declares that ethical principles are "no more than principles of the social contract hardened into rules and dictates – the behavioral codes that members of a society fervently wish others to follow and are themselves willing to accept for the common good" (Wilson, 1998, p. 57).

On this view of ethics as a social construction rooted in biological causes, it is difficult to find a solid footing for epistemic confidence or the pursuit of ethical knowledge and understanding. Physicalists reject the notion of substance dualism with its embarrassing entanglements of soul entities and transcendent moral authorities; yet one must wonder how the courage to act ethically is derived if moral groundings are perceived to shift randomly. Surely

epistemic certainty becomes as slippery as Jello under one's feet if our sole explanation for the powerful *ought* turns on the feeble *maybe*. And not even an enduring *maybe* but one that changes with the will of the collective.

On the other hand, it appears that true ethical courage and integrity are inextricably tied to one's epistemic certainty that some courses of action are intrinsically wrong and others are intrinsically right. If a salesperson wonders whether it is really wrong to pad her expense account, since most salespeople in the company are doing it and nobody seems to object, it becomes even more difficult for that salesperson to justify in her own mind the costs she would incur, both financially and professionally, for breaking out of the norm. Not only is courage called for but also the confidence that one's perceptions and beliefs about the ethical rightness of one's action are sufficient to sustain the inevitable criticism and censure that would follow. In contrast to naturalism, a substance dualism view of personhood does carry within it the high probabilities of epistemic certainty concerning true moral knowledge, coupled as it is with the mechanism for accessing that knowledge, the human soul.

A moral driver

One function of the soul is the moral driver, the fundamental motivator or impetus that compels an individual to select ethical behavior over unethical behavior. For our purposes, we may call this driver *conscience*, and it is the motivator behind the exercise of free agency toward moral reasoning and behavior.

Once again, the physicalist has little reason to predict human conscience and scant wherewithal to explain its origin and function. For example, naturalists often contend that moral standards derive from hereditary biases in mental development coupled with emotional conditioning that eventually "hardens" over generations into rules and laws of society. These are the tools, if you will, that have enabled the species to survive and prosper, and, therefore, they have been transmitted to subsequent generations, initially through biological means, and later through socialization.

Consider, however, the difficulty of explaining how it could conceivably come about, given the

aforementioned assumptions about the emergence of conscience, that people are sometimes self-compelled to choose moral actions in conformity with conscience that are contrary to the norms of their immediate society. Or how people might be induced to take moral actions that jeopardize their own biological survival and social wellbeing. And how does naturalism account for the fact that sometimes people make choices they do not wish to make but that they believe they must make in order to preserve moral integrity? These sorts of actions suggest a moral driver that, in some cases, supersedes mere survival instincts or biological conditioning. In fact, the moral imperatives of conscience often appear to impel behavior that is contrary to what one would expect if naturalistic origins were sufficient to explain a person's moral motions.

Even more troubling with respect to the naturalists' position is the question of how conscience itself, with its intuitive grasp of many common moral and ethical values, could have arisen from the purely physical. Theories of emergence that ultimately relegate human conscience to a higher order of chemical processing stretch credulity beyond acceptable limits. And, in fact, there is no scientific test that could empirically verify naturalistic origins of conscience.

Rea and Plantinga (*Newsweek*, October 10, 2004, p. 17), internationally recognized philosophers from the University of Notre Dame, responded as follows to Psychologist Steven Pinker's claim in a recent issue of *Newsweek* (September 27, 2004, p. 78) that neuroscience has demonstrated the absence of a soul. Rea and Plantinga respond, "The fact is, any 'argument' for Pinker's conclusion would have to invoke substantive and controversial metaphysical premises – premises that, by all accounts, would fall well outside the provenance of any natural science." To claim scientific naturalism as a basis for understanding the entirety of human essence is to make a leap of not only gigantic but also of unfounded and naïve proportions. Further, this claim, as it continues more and more to gain traction within the academy carries the potential of further undermining what are now viewed by many as tenuous foundations for positing objective moral and ethical knowledge.

Conclusion

Scientific naturalism carries a great deal of weight within the academy and society at large as an explanation of human origins and personhood. However, substance dualism, with its recognition of physical and immaterial substance, is a better explanation of the essence of human persons both as we experience ourselves and as we derive and adhere to moral and ethical norms. Since business ethics inevitably deals with issues that demand inquiry into ethical treatment of others, it is important for business students to consider what their views of human personhood suggest in terms of moral reasoning and ethical discernment. Moreover, to foster higher level reasoning and critical thinking skills about business ethics as subject matter, the underlying premises on which one predicates one's ethical opinions merit investigation.

Business students who are taught in some venues to accept a materialistic view of human beings and, in other venues, to honor and respect other people because of their inherent value and the importance of behaving morally are receiving mixed, and in many respects, contradictory messages. At a minimum, the plausibility of holding both views simultaneously ought to be explored. Otherwise, the inevitable result will be confusion and a minimizing of substance dualism; which is the view that more consistently provides a framework for discovering moral and ethical knowledge.

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