



*The Problem
of Reductionism in
Philosophy of Mind
and its Implications
for Theism and the
Principle of Soul*

*Framing the issue
for further Islamic inquiry*

JIHAD HASHIM BROWN

TABAH PAPERS SERIES

no. 7 | 2013

The Problem of Reductionism in Philosophy of Mind and its Implications for Theism and the Principle of Soul

THE PROBLEM OF
REDUCTIONISM IN
PHILOSOPHY OF MIND
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
THEISM AND THE
PRINCIPLE OF SOUL

*Framing the issue
for further Islamic inquiry*

JIHAD HASHIM BROWN

T A B A H • F O U N D A T I O N

TABAH PAPERS SERIES | NUMBER 7 | 2013

ISSN: 2077-8457

The Problem of Reductionism in the Philosophy of Mind and its Implications for Theism and the Principle of Soul: Framing the issue for further Islamic inquiry

ISBN: 978-9948-20-277-6

© 2013 Jihad Hashim Brown

Tabah Foundation

P.O. Box 107442

Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.

www.tabahfoundation.org

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or distributed in any manner without the express written consent of the author, except in the case of brief quotations with full and accurate citations in critical articles or reviews.

Cover Image © Rikard Stadler

Summary

This paper seeks to delineate points of entry for Muslim theological reasoning into conversations in the field of philosophy of mind. By equating the Kalam principle of soul with its foremost faculty, intellection, Muslim theological reasoning lends itself well to these modes of inquiry. By looking at the work of Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam, the collapse of “reductionism” is shown to give way to the concept of a non-physical mind, as well as an indication toward the sustainable plausibility of theism in general. The paper demonstrates that contemporary obstacles and challenges to the theological principle of a human soul are surmountable, and adds to mounting scholarship in the field that calls into question the physicalist interpretation of the universe.

About the Author

Jihad Hashim Brown is a Senior Research Fellow at Tabah Foundation. After receiving degrees in Psychology and Near East Studies from Rutgers University, New Jersey, he went on to pursue Islamic Studies with prominent religious authorities in Syria and Morocco for a decade. He also holds a graduate degree from the University of Cambridge in Philosophical Theology. Brown has appeared frequently on numerous media outlets in the Middle East and the US, and has served as a consultant to various governments and institutions, on issues relating to Islam and international relations. He lives with his wife and children in Princeton, New Jersey.

CONTENTS

PRELUDE: FRAMING THE INQUIRY	I
THE PHENOMENON OF CONSCIOUSNESS AS IT PERTAINS TO MIND, SOUL, AND THEISM	9
Swinburne's Effort to Provide Philosophical Support for Theism from the Problem of Consciousness	11
The Apparent Intractability of Consciousness	17
From an Irreducible Phenomenon <i>SAECULARIS</i> , to an Irreducible Phenomenon <i>DIVINAE</i>	24
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS	29



Prelude: Framing the Inquiry

There is often a delay of twenty to fifty years between the introduction and debate of a scientific or philosophical theory and when it is taken up in the public consciousness. Often, the academic community has moved on from an idea while it continues to shape mainstream discourse.¹ One such idea is that of reductionism. Proponents of reductionism claim that all phenomena perceived by human awareness in the world and in the self is reducible to physical explanations.² The theory of physicalist-reductionism claims that only material things exist and that all events (or occurrences) have strictly physical causes. These “causes” are the “explanations” of why events have transpired or come into

1. For example, logical positivism, from the turn of the twentieth century, never recovered from the criticisms of Karl Popper and W.V. Quine in the 1950s. However, many of its basic assumptions—namely, verificationism and jumping to non-empirical universal claims from empirical data while denouncing metaphysics—continue to influence public discourse and, inexplicably, much “elite” Muslim discourse.
2. See, for example, Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1991); Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness: A Contemporary Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984); and David Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993).

existence. An event in philosophy of mind may be physical, such as reaching for one's umbrella after hearing a weather report; or mental, such as a feeling of consternation waiting in line at the DMV.³ The physical causes on offer in the theory range from reactions to environmental stimuli to the firing of neurons in the grey matter of the human brain. This notion should be accounted for on the horizon of Islamic theological awareness, as it has serious repercussions for the principle of soul. The implications of this approach are that, not only is a principle of an immaterial soul not possible,⁴ but more critically, it is explanatorily redundant. Furthermore, reductionism has troubling implications for the idea of theism. If it is indeed the case that all things are only material things, there is no space in such a worldview for a transcendent deity.

The principle of soul is indispensable in Islamic theology. Prior to the twelfth century CE (sixth century AH), the concepts of soul (*al-nafs*) and spirit (*al-rūḥ*) tended to be collapsed into one another without many signs of systematic differentiation. After the twelfth century, the concepts underwent some systematization. Soul (*al-nafs*) and the life principle (*al-ḥayāt*) were understood to constitute the metaphysical support for the spirit (*al-rūḥ*) as the locus of religious experience. Key to this "religious experience" was spiritual development, moral accountability, access to the Divine, and post-mortem existence. At the intersection of this historical shift, the eminent jurist and theologian 'Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) articulated a transitional definition of soul as a subtle body integrated within the physical body.⁵ Al-Juwaynī's concept of the "subtle body" was further qualified by his student, Abū

3. Or, a "belief" that it will rain today.

4. Its impossibility stems from the claim that nothing exists except material things.

5. 'Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), *Kitāb al-irshād ilā qawāḥi' al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i'tiqād* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'ādah, 1950), 377.

Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), as being an extraordinary, divine affair. It has been compared to a diaphanous steam or vapor, to light given off from a lamp as it moves through the rooms of a house, or the pervasiveness of rose water in the petals of a rose. While there is an implication of “physi-
 cality” to this “body-ness”, the conception incorporates an intentional movement away from “concreteness”. In the late Kalam period, ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) and others⁶ redeployed the definition of soul as a completely immaterial substance: “an initial perfection (*entelechy*) for a natural body insofar as it is nourished, grows, or senses and moves with volition; or apprehends universals and analyzes according to reason.”⁷ This later position clearly illustrates a post-Ghazalian comfort—though always a critical comfort—with Avicennan thought.⁸

There is an additional component of dualism to Islamic theological thinking on the soul. A perceptible preference for dualism emerges in Kalam theology. Regardless of whether the soul is conceived of as an immaterial substance (*jawhar mujarrad*), a subtle body (*jism laṭīf*), or a single substance (*jawhar fard*), it is a substance nonetheless, possessing capacities (*isti’dādāt*) and faculties (*quwwāt*). It should be kept in mind, however, that it is the exacerbation of seventeenth-century Cartesian dualism of certain Platonic problems that has driven the modern incriminations against the plausibility of dualism. Islamic dualism cannot be construed in the same category. It proposes an integrative approach to body

6. Such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliyah*; Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1223), *Abkār al-afkār*; al-Qāḍī al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), *Ṭawāli’ al-anwār*; and Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 793/1390), *Sharḥ al-Maqāsid*.

7. ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī, *Kitāb al-mawāqif* (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1970), 229.

8. One plausible reading being that it was the critical work of al-Ghazālī that made a confident and sustained engagement with philosophy possible for subsequent Kalam scholarship.

and soul in such a way as to surmount the “pairing-problem” that arises for Cartesian dualism in contemporary philosophy of mind.

It continues to be the convention in contemporary theology in the Western tradition that, almost without fail, all talk of “soul” is reduced to discussions of problematic issues in the philosophy of mind. Much of this is due to the modern problem of “explanatory redundancy” alluded to above. As it would so happen, however, the Kalam conception of soul lends itself handsomely to the philosophy of mind. The intellect (*al-‘aql*, i.e., mind) and intellection has always been intimately associated as a patent faculty (*quwwah*) of the soul. Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), in his inter-linear commentary on al-Ījī’s *al-Mawāqif fī ‘ilm al-kalām*, defines the intellect as, “a rationally possible existent that is not a body nor inhering in a body, nor a part of one. Instead, it is an essentially abstract substance, independent in its effectiveness from any corporeal instruments.”⁹ For this reason, the human soul is differentiated from animal life on account of it being identified as the “rational soul” (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*).

It is my contention that if fundamental analytical problems are resolved in favor of the principle of soul, a further metaphysical architecture may be treated at a more important meta-level. This “meta-level” is the purview of metaphysical theology. For its own part, it is not limited by analyticity, so long as it adheres to the logical rule of non-contradiction. By the rule of non-contradiction I mean validated by pure reason in a pre-positivist sense.

In the essay that follows, I seek to provide a framework for further Islamic inquiry into problems that arise for the principle of soul in the philosophy of mind. Here, soul is un-

9. Al-Sharīf ‘Alī al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘ādah, 1324; reprint. Tehran: Intishārāt al-Sharīf al-Riḍā, 1415, 2nd ed.), 7:254.

derstood, as per current convention, in terms of its correlation with mind and consciousness; both mind and consciousness being patent faculties of the soul; or, when mind is conceived as an independent entity, as soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) itself.

Our suggestion in the essay is that beginning from “the irreducibility of consciousness (or mind) to the physical” is a better starting point than attempting proofs for radical substance dualism; meaning a substance dualism that is closer to Cartesianism than to an integrated model. Of the various manifestations of reductionism, I have identified mind-brain identity theory as the most cogent. I seek to demonstrate that the effort to identify mental phenomena as being nothing other than brain events is a proposition that does not hold. With the unsustainability of reductionism even in its most effective form, we are left with three alternative courses for accounting for irreducible mental phenomena: avoidance; adaptation; or resolution. I propose that “resolution” is the only way forward. Philosophical theology, with its natural capacity to span the gap between analytic philosophy and metaphysics,¹⁰ may provide more elegant resolutions to these dilemmas. “Elegance”, here, meaning the observance of the principle of “parsimony” so highly valued in the modern scientific method. Often, positivist-influenced reasoning goes to awkward lengths to avoid “theism-permitting” outcomes.

One may find that much contemporary writing in theology seeks to further deploy its treatments of soul and mind as a defense for theism (i.e., the existence of God). As a nod to this tendency, I have also indicated directions such reasoning may

10. It is granted that analytic philosophy does undertake metaphysical questions. However, there is a difference in the conception of rationalism that shapes that metaphysics as opposed to that which shapes traditional metaphysical philosophy. The understanding of rationalism pursued by analytic philosophy tends to be informed by a latent positivism; whereas that of traditional metaphysics is one of pure reason.

take. In this regard, it is my contention that, when working within sight of the parameters set up by analytic philosophy, it may be more fecund to establish the “plausibility” of theism, rather than seeking “knock-down drag-out” proofs. What I am suggesting by this is that different disciplines (and paradigms) are more conducive to the analysis (and treatment) of different questions.

The reader may wish to bring along four ideas as provisions for navigating the material that lies ahead. First, reductionism constitutes a formidable challenge to both the principle of soul as well as theism itself. However, it is not an insurmountable one. Second, when reductionism in consciousness in its most comprehensive form (i.e., identity theory), is subjected to philosophical critique (like that of Putnam and Kripke), it begins to lose force. Third, contemporary Muslim writers in the field of theology will have to demonstrate that they are cognizant of these twists and turns in the conversation. This would be a condition for the effectiveness of their discourse with non-Muslim readers or even Muslim intellectuals active in the global marketplace of ideas. Fourth, it behooves the Muslim thinker to acknowledge the inherent relevance of concepts native to her own theological tradition to themes in contemporary theological and philosophical debate. To successfully effect such an introduction of novel concepts would require a thorough and honest assessment of the special disciplines of the Shariah tradition (e.g., dialectics, rhetoric, logic, legal hermeneutics, ontology, etc.). Reassurances for the faint-hearted may be found in the observation that the mining of heuristically useful models from medieval philosophy now extends well beyond that of contemporary Thomist philosophers.

The essay begins with an assessment of the viability of Richard Swinburne's project to deliver on these very same objectives. Swinburne seeks to prove radical substance dualism through modal logic and, from there, to mount a proof for theism. Returning to the foundations of the arguments against the plausibility of the principle of soul, we look briefly at Jaegwon Kim's criticism of reductionism. After identifying "mind-brain identity theory" as the most potent argument for reductive physicalism, I will seek to test that theory's durability through the application of counter arguments from the work of Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam. While Charles Taliaferro's argument for an integrative dualist model of soul is more effective than Swinburne's, his alternative argument for theism is less so. Finally I suggest three "universal axioms" (*qawā'id kulliyyah*) that may indicate a direction toward proving the plausibility of an immaterial deity from the plausibility of an immaterial (or subtle) mind (or *rational soul*).

The Phenomenon of Consciousness as it Pertains to Mind, Soul, and Theism

The capacity for self-reflexive thought is perhaps the most compelling aspect of human consciousness. It is within this moment of self-reflexivity that a person so often finds a vital provocation that impels him or her to reach out beyond the physical. It is generally accepted that our default intuitive experience of ourselves and the world is dualistic by nature. Our minds are intuitively perceived by us as possessing a life that operates independently of our physical bodies. The tension only arises with the question of whether or not this “folk psychology” can be borne out scientifically or philosophically.¹¹ To give more rigorous shape to these subjective proclivities has been the bane of academic inquiry into the matter of the soul.

Consciousness, the term that looms central to our topic, has proven a notoriously difficult concept to define. Many authors mention it, but few actually make an effort to outline what they mean by it. More often than not, they speak instead of mind, mental properties, and mental events. David Chalmers addresses this observation directly. He cites the illusiveness of the concept itself as the reason for this and says that most authors have sufficed themselves to speak of the

11. “Folk psychology” is a technical term referring to a common-sense view of consciousness akin to that of common-sense philosophy. See John D. Greenwood (ed.), *The Future of Folk Psychology: Intentionality and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

phenomena of consciousness (e.g., beliefs, sensations, purposes, desires, etc). At the same time, he endeavors to provide us with a working definition: “When I talk about consciousness, I am talking only about the subjective quality of experience: what it is like to be a cognitive agent.”¹² Although this does not get us so much further down the path, it is a welcome start. For the purposes of this essay, when we speak of consciousness, we are speaking of the human mind for the sake of treating its related problems.

In the present undertaking, I will endeavor to show that the *plausibility* of theism can be demonstrated from the question of consciousness. In his pioneering 1986 offering, *The Evolution of the Soul*, Richard Swinburne set out to deliver on this very question. Indeed, this question continues to animate his career to this day. To say that he was unsuccessful in his endeavor would be unjust. He has contributed important work to the re-assessment of dualism in general and the philosophical question of the mind and the soul in particular. It may be the case, however, that his project seeks to include too much in its premises before accounting for much of the necessary foundational considerations. The form of substance dualism that he proffers is neither Cartesian nor Thomistic; but it may be more than his project is prepared to sustain. The question of the irreducibility of human consciousness, on the other hand, may prove a more modest yet effective initial bulwark against reductive physicalism. Non-reductionism is currently enjoying ever-growing ranks of fellow travellers, however, not all are prepared to move beyond the safety of its most obvious conclusions. This essay seeks to propose that the irreducibility of consciousness enables the plausibility of further metaphysical outcomes. It may be averred that it is

12. David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

this plausibility inherent in the “problem” of consciousness that could successfully offer some initial philosophical support for theism.

Swinburne’s Effort to Provide Philosophical Support for Theism from the Problem of Consciousness

Swinburne sets out to establish a conception of the mental life and the soul that may be employed for the purposes of demonstrating the existence of God. He outlines his theory of consciousness by invoking a particular interpretation of *substance dualism*. Swinburne outlines his case for soul, mind, and consciousness in his book *The Evolution of the Soul*. A central objective of the work is to demonstrate that an individual “human person” is *identical* to an *immaterial* soul, linked to a *material* body, by arguing that, “for any person who is currently conscious, there is no logical impossibility ... that that person continue to exist without his body.”¹³ Swinburne builds this case on three foundational premises, which serve as the platform upon which he presents his modal argument for substance dualism.

The first of these foundational premises is his definition of the person. In Swinburne’s theory, the human being is, “constituted by a human soul, connected to a human body.”¹⁴ While the body supplies the capacity to act on the world, its relationship to the person is strictly temporary and contingent. “The person is the soul together with whatever, if any, body is linked temporarily to it,” Swinburne writes.¹⁵ While the body is a part, it is only a temporary part and admissible

13. Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 154.

14. *Ibid.*, 26.

15. *Ibid.*, 146.

to human identity, which is strictly the purview of the soul; and so, the dichotomy. A person exists only insofar as he has the capacity for having experiences, a rich mental life,¹⁶ and performing actions.¹⁷

The second foundation of Swinburne's program is the premise that "it is logically possible that persons continue to exist when their bodies are destroyed".¹⁸ The third foundation is the premise that "the continuing existence of some of the stuff of which a substance is made is necessary for the continued existence of the substance".¹⁹ This, Swinburne calls the "quasi-Aristotelian principle". Central to Aristotle's account of substances was that "continuing matter was necessary for the continued existence of a substance".²⁰ The "quasi-" bit comes from Swinburne's proposal that we proceed with "liberalizing Aristotle's account a little".²¹ Aristotle maintained that the stuff of substances was merely matter. Swinburne wants to maintain that we can say that the continuing existence of some of the stuff of which substances are made is necessary for the continued existence of the substance. In the new "quasi-" conception, "some substances are made in part of immaterial stuff, soul-stuff."²²

To further formalize the above reasoning, Swinburne presents his modal argument as follows:

Definitions:

p = "I am a conscious person and I exist in 1984."

q = "My body is destroyed in the last instant of 1984."

16. Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31.

17. Idem, "Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory," in *Personal Identity*, ed. Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 44.

18. Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, 147.

19. Ibid., 153.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 153-54.

r = "I have a soul in 1984."

s = "I exist in 1985."

x ranges over all consistent propositions compatible with $(p \& q)$ and describing 1984 states of affairs.

Premises:

1. p
2. $(x) \diamond (p \& q \& x \& s)$
3. $\sim \diamond (p \& q \& \sim r \& s)$

Conclusion:

$[\sim r$ ("It is not the case that I have a soul in 1984.")]

The above premises can be elucidated as follows: Premise 2 implies that given all 1984 states of affairs (x), inclusive of both my being conscious in 1984 (p), and my body being destroyed in the last moment of 1984 (q), it is possible (\diamond) that I continue to exist into 1985 (s). Premise 3 implies that it is not possible that I am conscious in 1984 (p), and my body is destroyed in the last moment of 1984 (q), and—despite these states of affairs—I continue to exist into 1985 (s), while at the same time, I do not have a soul in 1984 ($\sim r$).

The majority of Swinburne's critics have focused on his dualism, and specifically his modal argument for substance dualism.²³ For example, Alston and Smythe (1994) highlight a problem in premise 2 of Swinburne's modal argument. By substituting the original terms, it can be demonstrated that

23. Foremost amongst this group have been William Alston and Thomas Smythe, "Swinburne's Argument for Dualism", *Faith and Philosophy*, 11/1 (1994): 127–33; Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "An Objection to Swinburne's Argument for Dualism", *Faith and Philosophy*, 13 (1996): 405–12; Graham Oppy, "Swinburne on 'Mental' and 'Physical'", *Religious Studies*, 34 (1998): 483–95; William Hasker, "Swinburne's Modal Argument for Dualism", *Faith and Philosophy*, 15/3 (1998): 366–70; and Kent Reames, "A Response to Swinburne's Latest Defense of the Argument for Dualism", 16/1 (1999): 90–97.

Swinburne's argument potentially entails contradictions which lead his model into trouble.²⁴

Likewise, Stump and Kretzmann (1996) proceed to test the validity of Swinburne's argument by introducing counter examples to his logical framework. They illustrate that some of his sets are not exclusive enough, permitting counter examples that, while fitting within his conditions, will defeat his own conclusions.²⁵ Stump and Kretzmann go on to say that merely introducing an additional restriction to the framework, for example, non-conflict with s also, in addition to the previous two restrictions [on x], one of which was (a) non-conflict with p and q , will not work either; as this also renders Swinburne's argument invalid. This is because, once we have added restriction (c) to the other two restrictions on x ,²⁶ it will render our observation of $\{\sim\Diamond(p\&xq\&\sim r\&xs)\}$ to be indicating that $\sim r$ is incompatible with the whole group $(p\&xq\&xs)$, as opposed to just the incompatibility of $\sim r$ with $(p\&xq)$ alone. In this case, $(p\&xq)$ alone do not entail r , which was Swinburne's original aim.²⁷

Whatever the case may be with regard to the *validity* problems with Swinburne's modal argument, I feel they are secondary to more fundamental concerns about the quality of his premises. In general, for Swinburne's argument for substance dualism to constitute a sufficient grounds for both a theory of consciousness and the move to theism, he will have to show that he has accounted for a set of specific substantial

24. Alston and Smythe, "Swinburne's Argument for Dualism", 132–33.

25. For example, x_1 = "God destroys my soul at the last instant of 1984" does not violate Swinburne's original restriction (a) that substitutions for x must be compatible with $(p\&xq)$, or (b) that it describe only 1984 states of affairs.

26. The new "fix", restriction (c), states that any substitution for x must also be compatible with s .

27. Stump and Kretzmann, "An Objection to Swinburne's Argument for Dualism", 406.

concerns about the premises upon which his argument seeks to build its subsequent validity.

Three types of problems plague the modal argument generally. It is first of all premised on a number of undemonstrated assumptions, which quite often lead the author to assume a number of “ontological leaps”. Second, there are problems of claims to *necessity* where there is no binding link between a proposition and its conclusion. Third, and perhaps the fatal flaw, is the problem of circularity endemic to this modal argument.

The complex concept of soul cannot be so easily assumed from consciousness, and the leap to post-mortem existence has been *logically* promised to no one. How is it that we can assume (in *natural* or *analytic* theology) the terms of post-mortem existence; or for that matter, survival after death? In order to support this assumption he would have to go beyond “invoking” his quasi-Aristotelian principle²⁸ to demonstrating it. This he has not done.

Problems of necessity address Swinburne’s frequent employment of theoretical thought experiments (as well as numerous “if” clauses), that lead him into what Zimmerman has identified as “conceivability to possibility” fallacies. Just as Swinburne suggests, in support of his argument, that it is conceivable that I am not identical with my body, “it is conceivable in the same way that I be identical with my body, or some part of it.”²⁹ In another example, to return to the quasi-Aristotelian principle, which states that it is necessarily the case that a substance cannot persist along with the complete loss of all of its parts, it could easily follow that it is not such that I may possibly survive my own death. So, contrary

28. Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, 153–54.

29. Dean Zimmerman, “Two Cartesian Arguments for the Simplicity of the Soul”, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 28/3 (1991): 222.

to the modal argument, “I am *not* now possibly such that I survive the destruction of my body and persist as an unextended thing.”³⁰ There are too many alternative possibilities, and conceivability does not necessarily entail ontological possibility. What is fatal to Swinburne’s argument is that “he intends to go directly from the fact that it is *conceivable* that I survive my death to the conclusion that I am *possibly* such that I survive my death”.³¹

The more problematic episode of Swinburne’s modal argument is its endemic circularity.³² Swinburne is seeking to demonstrate an immaterial element to my “I” in 1984. To do this, he must assume the quasi-Aristotelian principle. Meaning, to execute the proof, I must have an immaterial component in 1985 after the destruction of my body, in order to draw conclusions about states of affairs in 1984; namely, that I have an immaterial component. In other words, his conclusion is a condition for the soundness of his proof. It would seem to me that his modal argument is more an exercise in *illustrating* his pattern of thinking about substance dualism, than *proving* substance dualism.

The move from consciousness to theism is central to Swinburne’s project. His clearest treatment of this is presented in his *The Existence of God*. In this treatment, Swinburne seeks to erect an argument for the existence of God from consciousness specifically. However, the structure of the argument is effectively an extension of his argument from fine-tuning.

The premise of the argument is that consciousness is “improbable”. “The value of humans lies in their conscious life—in their acquiring beliefs, having thoughts, sensations, desires,

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Both Hasker (1998) and Zimmerman (1991) will highlight other circularity problems with the modal argument.

and (through free choice) executing purposes. How probable is it that, if there is no God, human bodies would give rise to conscious life typical of humans?"³³ The very open-ended remit of this premise would imply that almost any sufficiently "complex" theory of consciousness would suffice to mount the "fine-tuning" argument from consciousness. Swinburne has effectively relieved us from investing at all in his model of consciousness (and soul) presented in *The Evolution of the Soul*.

Swinburne's model of consciousness suffers from clear shortcomings in both its structural validity and, more fundamentally, in its substantial premises. The details of his modal argument are, furthermore, irrelevant to his own model for proving theism from consciousness. The flaws alluded to above render it insufficient as a foundation for providing philosophical support for theism. Swinburne has attempted to include too many premises into his model so to make it thoroughly unwieldy without first accounting for its undemonstrated assumptions. I would be inclined at this point to suggest that, for our purposes, a more modest program may yield more success. It would have to be a program that accounts for the very foundational problems that challenge both the concept of consciousness, as well as any attempt to justify theism from it.

The Apparent Intractability of Consciousness

We have just encountered a very ambitious dualism. The natural contrary to dualism is monism. Given this choice, we may very well find ourselves opting for an alternative form of dualism. For now, however, we will suffice ourselves with

33. Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 192.

looking to establish the irreducibility of consciousness to the physical. The biggest opponent of metaphysical theism and the irreducibility of consciousness is the hypothesis of *reductive physicalism*. It is “physical” because it accords special explanatory authority to physics; namely, that physics is sufficient to explain all events and phenomena. Furthermore, physicalism claims the *causal-closure* of the physical. The concept of causal-closure has been articulated in the following terms: “[a]t every time at which a physical state has a cause, it has a fully sufficient physical cause.”³⁴ Ontological *reductionism* obtains when the expressions of an original theory, the reduced theory, are shown to have logical equivalents in the expressions of a second, reducing theory; or, when the explanatory effectiveness of the reduced theory is shown to be sufficiently accomplished by the reducing theory.

There are numerous shades of reductionism and physicalism. *Epiphenomenalism* and *eliminative materialism* are such radical theories and require such peculiar tenacity on the part of their advocates that it makes them less of a priority for treatment. At the same moment, *non-reductive physicalism*, *supervenience*, *dual-aspect theory*, and *property dualism* cannot be effectively treated until identity theory has been thoroughly appraised. Each of them is either premised on, or in some way finds its way back to, identity theory. It is for these reasons that I feel that *mind-brain identity theory* constitutes a more formidable priority for the case for theism.

Mind-brain identity theory holds that mental events are not only correlated with brain events, but that these mental states are *identical* with their associated brain states. The mental is effectively reducible to the physical. It is meant to be

34. E.J. Lowe, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27.

analogous to the claim that lightening is identical to electric discharge and that water is identical to H_2O .³⁵

The identity theory does not deny the existence of mental properties. When it states that a mental event m is identical to, or the very same thing as, a physical state p , it has not denied the existence of m .³⁶ For example, the statement “George Eliot is identical with Mary Ann Evans” is not to deny that George Eliot exists. The identity theory seems to admit *appearances*. It does not say that “non-physical things are really physical, but that insofar as it *appears* that there are non-physical things, these things are physical”.³⁷ Otherwise, it would be eliminative materialism, which fundamentally denies the mental. What identity theory does deny is mental properties and mental substances that are conceived by either the property dualist or substance dualist as being irreducible to the physical. For the identity theorist, while mental events are acknowledged, they are ultimately to be explained in physical terms. The identity theorist is a *reductionist*; the eliminativist is not. Both agree that all things are ultimately physical, but the identity theorist holds that some physical things are mental.

Furthermore, it is germane to our purposes to note that identity theory takes either of two forms, type-identity theory or token-identity theory. The type-identity theory claims that each type of mental event will be identical with a given type of brain event. For example, every time, anywhere, anyone has a pain, their brain will be in a particular type of physical state. On the other hand, instead of dealing with general, uni-

35. The identity theory was first put forward by U.T. Place, “Is Consciousness a Brain Process?”, *British Journal of Psychology*, 47(1956), 44–50; and J.J.C. Smart, “Sensations and Brain Processes”, 68 (1959), 141–56.

36. Tim Crane, *Elements of Mind: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 53.

37. *Ibid.*, 54.

versalizable categories, the token-identity theory is concerned with particular instances. According to this theory, any particular token mental state, such as a pain being felt right now in a particular part of a subject's body, is identical with some token physical state, such as a particular instance of neuronal activity presently obtaining in her brain.

We have observed that identity theory is premised upon reductionism. But as it so happens, reductionism is generally considered to have now fallen out of vogue. Tim Crane notes, "there is a general feeling in current philosophy of mind that reductionism is a Bad Thing (*sic*), and it is more reasonable to be anti-reductionist, even once the distinction between reduction and elimination if (*sic*) made."³⁸ Jaegwon Kim concurs with this point:

Reductionism of all sorts has been out of favor for many years. Few among us would now seriously entertain the possibility that ethical expressions are definable, or reducible in some broader sense, in terms of "descriptive" or "naturalistic" expressions.³⁹

In Kim's estimation, reductionist strategies tend to be rigid and narrow. Their inherent desire for tidiness and orderliness may stem from their mantras of "parsimony", "simplicity", and "economy". This appears out of step with the intellectual style of our times; we look for richness and diversity, and view the real world as often messy and resistant to overly simplistic interpretation.⁴⁰ "In fact, the word 'reductionism' seems by now to have acquired a negative, faintly disreputable flavor—at least in philosophy of mind."⁴¹

38. Ibid., 55.

39. Jaegwon Kim, "The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism", in *The Mind Body Problem: A Guide to The Current Debate*, ed. Richard Warner and Tadeusz Szubka (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 242.

40. Ibid., 243.

41. Ibid.

As we have observed, mind-brain identity theory is already standing upon shaky premises; namely, its dependence on reductionism. What type of diagnostic might we apply to assess mind-brain identity theory's internal coherency? Let us propose two tests for the sea-worthiness of the theory. First, for identity theory to remain sustainable, it will have to prove that its identity reduction holds in every particular instance. We will refer to this as the *token*-diagnostic. Second, it will have to prove that its identity reduction is necessary; namely, that it holds across all possible worlds. We will refer to this as the *type*-diagnostic.

In the first test, where the reduction of the mental to the physical must hold in every particular instance, it breaks down when the principle of *variable realizability* is applied to it. The identity theory must show that two entities that share the same mental state must also be in the same physical state. If it can be shown that even one case where common-sense classification signals the genuine sharing of a mental predicate between two entities, but whose physical configuration is different in both cases, then the identity theory has collapsed.

Hilary Putnam, in his now famous argument against brain-state theory, offers the cases of an octopus and a mammal. Both entities undoubtedly experience "pain" and "hunger". Both "pain" and "hunger" are *physical-chemical* states, or psychological predicates.

Thus, if we can find even one psychological predicate which can clearly be applied to both a mammal and an octopus (say "hungry"), but whose physical-chemical "correlate" is different in the two cases, the brain-state theory has collapsed.⁴²

42. Hilary Putnam, "The Nature of Mental States", in *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. David Chalmers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77.

Here we have an instance where the physical state has been variably realized in two different capacities for a single psychological predicate. Putnam does not propose that the coherency of brain-state theory is impossible, but that it is highly unlikely.

Thus it is at least possible that parallel evolution, all over the universe, might always lead to one and the same physical “correlate” of pain [or hunger]. But it is certainly an ambitious hypothesis.⁴³

In the second test, identity theory must show that if its *type*-identity is going to survive, it must prove to be logically necessary. If psycho-physical identity statements are true (e.g., “pain” = “C-fibre firing”), they must act in the same manner as proper names, referring to the same referents in every possible world. Therefore, the statements should be considered as logically necessary. But the two terms of a psycho-physical predication, one mental and the other physical, are not necessarily connected with one another. It is generally recognized that the relationship is contingent, being based on empirically observed events; namely, it is clearly possible to conceive of one of the terms as obtaining independently of its associate term. Therefore, those identity statements are not logically necessary, physicalism does not maintain across all possible worlds, and physicalism is false.

In the Third Lecture of his *Naming and Necessity*, Saul Kripke applies his concept of rigid designators to the Mental and the Physical. In this program, the identity thesis is standardly put forward as contingent by nature. Some relationships—of reference and naming—however, are necessary (like proper names, for example); being necessary and

43. Ibid.

so obtaining across all possible worlds. The person, Richard Nixon, for example, is Richard Nixon in any possible world as opposed to “the 37th president of the United States”. The first is what Kripke calls a rigid designator, the second is not. Other words operate, like proper names, as rigid designators; for example, psychological states such as “pain” and “C-fibre firing”. As rigid designators, they should apply to exactly the same things necessarily across possible worlds. If it is the case that in the actual world “pain” is identical with “C-fibre firing”, then, according to this reasoning, there is no possible world in which the statement is not true. This means that it is true in every possible world and such an identity is necessary and not contingent. However, Kripke points out that it is obvious that such identity statements cannot be necessary. For example, it is obvious that there could have been C-fibre firing without pain; as well as the contrary. He has also indicated that if it is conceivable that in some possible world they are not identical, then they cannot be identical in this actual world.⁴⁴

If identity theory cannot withstand these tests, then it is false. The falsity of identity theory would entail that mental events are not identical with brain events. “There is no way of avoiding this conclusion: if entities are not identical, then they are distinct, however else they may be related. There are two kinds of thing, not one: this is dualism, like it or not.”⁴⁵

44. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 148–51.

45. Tim Crane, *Elements of Mind* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57.

From an Irreducible Phenomenon SAECULARIS, to an Irreducible Phenomenon DIVINAE

With the collapse of identity theory and effective inability of reductionist theories to claim the field for themselves, we find ourselves left with an irreducible phenomenon that insists on explanation. But how will the problem of explanation be addressed? The options that present themselves appear to be three: avoidance, adaptation, resolution.

Some authors have been willing to accept the irreducibility of consciousness. Colin McGinn, for instance, has famously asked, “How can mere matter originate consciousness? How did evolution convert the water of biological tissue into the wine of consciousness? Consciousness seems like a radical novelty in the universe, not prefigured by the after-effects of the Big Bang; so how did it contrive to spring into being from what preceded it?”⁴⁶ For McGinn, the reality of consciousness is inaccessible because our senses are geared only to the spatial world.⁴⁷ For David Chalmers, existing physicalist theories are not sufficient to explain consciousness because the remit of those theories is only to the extent of structure and dynamics. Consciousness goes beyond structure and dynamics requiring new methods.⁴⁸ Those authors who have sufficed themselves with the “intractability” of consciousness, however, may not actually be the supporters of alternative metaphysics that some might assume. In McGinn’s case at least, he seems to believe that the physical source of consciousness is just beyond the reach of our cognitive abilities. It may be the case that we never gain access to this hidden detail. He is, however, convinced not merely that there is such [a mechanism of mind-body] interaction, but that there is some deep

46. Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 13–14.

47. Idem, *The Problem of Consciousness* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 11–12.

48. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 121.

noumenal feature of the world in consequence of which consciousness depends necessarily on the brain.⁴⁹ Until such a time as these more effective methods present themselves, authors who follow this line have sufficed themselves to *avoid* seeking further explanation.

Other thinkers in the philosophy of mind have sought to *adapt* to a new landscape that is no longer so enthusiastic about physicalist reductionism. They have sought solutions in middle-of-the-road theories between extreme eliminativism and radical dualism. However, theories like dual-aspect, property dualism (non-reductive monism), and supervenience are all ultimately physicalist theories.

The third approach represents those thinkers who seek a metaphysical *resolution* to the problem of consciousness. Most authors writing along these lines are advocating an *integrative dualism* that systematically accounts for the problems associated with both Cartesian as well as Platonic dualisms.

From here, it might be suggested that any preferred resolution to this problem is influenced by a person's personal proclivities. On this reasoning, it might be claimed that certainly someone who is pre-disposed to theistic belief will look for a resolution to the problem of *intractability of explanation* regarding consciousness in the direction of theism. This may very well be the case. We are all dyed by our own subjectivities. And on that same account, a person who has resolved never to accept theism at any cost can be expected to resist any conclusion that might align with it. It may be the case, however, that when it comes to matters involving metaphysics philosophical theology can provide more reasonable, more elegant solutions. Solutions of this type may even clear Ockham's razor more deftly than the cumbersome weight of

49. Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, xii.

awkward heavy lifting we need to bear in order to support concepts like non-reductive physicalism, supervenience, and dual-aspect theory; not to mention identity theory and eliminativism.

In the direction of theism from the phenomenon of consciousness, Charles Taliaferro seeks to apply his model of integrative dualism to an understanding of God's existence. He calls this *integrative theism*. He proposes to articulate a version of theism that "takes God's transcendence seriously and yet also insists upon his proximate indwelling in the world".⁵⁰ He cites the possibilities available in "classical theism" to maintain that "the world is very much like God's body, even though this analogy must be very carefully hedged".⁵¹ He justifies his "partial divine embodiment" from the fact that human embodiment involves volition and cognition, which might by analogy relate to God's omnipotence and omniscience. "The cosmos is expressive of God's creative, conserving agency and is present to God's mind insofar as God knows of its aspects. I therefore do not think it is at all inappropriate to see Divine agency and awareness as constituting a kind of partial embodiment."⁵² In order to sustain this model of theism, he constantly hedges and supplies emergency maintenance to vigilantly prevent "panentheism creep". Immanence and infinite are always uncomfortable bedfellows. The stated benefit of the model is Taliaferro's concern for divine passibilism. He is concerned for the "immanent, ultimately passionate presence of God in the cosmos".⁵³ The metaphor of the universe as "God's moral body" is meant to emphasize God's

50. Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 247–48.

51. *Ibid.*, 248.

52. *Ibid.*, 249.

53. *Ibid.*

“affective identity” in relation to the world, enabling God to identify with the joy and suffering of His creatures.

Two questions arise here. First, to what degree does the idea of passibility that requires an affective and embodied identity not subject an infinite, perfect, omniscient, and omnipotent being to the flux of the created world? Second, if there is such a need for “hedging”, for example, constantly qualifying “partial” embodiment, would not every empathetic end achievable through partial integrative embodiment be equally and just as robustly achievable through exquisitely subtle omniscience and delicately responsive omnipotence?

While Taliaferro’s *framework* for divine presence follows on so seamlessly from his model of integrative dualism, in the case for theism, I feel the *work* insists on too much temporal *frame* for the infinitely divine. Whereas Swinburne’s delivery system (Swinburnean substance dualism) for theism from consciousness was fragile if not frail, his model for a proof for theism was more successful (the argument from fine-tuning); although his case hardly offered a role for his substance dualism. In return, Taliaferro’s integrative dualism constitutes a sound delivery system; when he moves to theism, the program becomes more awkward.

So where to from here? Perhaps a more finely calibrated ambition may provide us with stable grounding from which to build a further metaphysical architecture. It is my contention that the foremost challenge to theism is not whether or not it is up to the task of constructing formidable proofs, but addressing the claim that it is implausible. For this reason, I believe that a more modest, reasonable, soundly successful case for theism from consciousness is the case for plausibility.

The establishment of irreducibility in regard to consciousness is more telling than we may realize. It significantly loos-

ens the ground under the feet of physicalism, reductionism, naturalism, and causal closure. The case for plausibility of theism from the irreducibility of consciousness points to three significant outcomes.

One: *If a discrete irreducible phenomenon does not have a physical explanation, then it must have a metaphysical explanation.* There is no middle-territory between the physical and the meta-physical. And much of the claims of religion that find an uneasy friction with the modern mind are based on meta-physical principles.

Two: *If the immateriality of consciousness or a conscious substance is demonstrated, then the credibility of God as an immaterial entity is further plausible.* The possibility of divine transcendence follows from the establishment of the existence of a phenomenon or entity that is irreducible to the physical.

Three: *If mental causation on the physical can be successfully demonstrated, then divine causation on the physical world appears more likely.* With advances in quantum theory, the outdated idea of a proximity or adjacency requirement for causation has been dismissed. If the terms of the analogy are moved from conceivability to possibility, then the analogy obtains.

These three principles build, by means of analogy, on the irreducibility of consciousness to the physical. They seek no more than to establish the plausibility of theism on solid terms. In this regard, I have been operating on the assumption that sufficient-plausibility is enough to constitute a support (of sorts) for theism. Not support in terms of formal proof, *per se*, but instead, support in a divergent reversal of preventing the door of plausibility from being closed. In this less ambitious, yet significant fashion it looks to ensure that the door is still left open for theism.

Concluding Observations

In the preceding essay I have sought to demonstrate that there exists no compelling reason to surrender to physicalist explanations of the universe. Arguments in the philosophy of science and mind against the plausibility of a human soul are surmountable. The terms of debate in the field continue to be hotly contested. Defensible and acknowledged secular positions abound that constitute “fellow travellers” for the critical theist. When the soul is equated with one of its primary faculties, “intellection” (i.e., mind, consciousness), arguments against the reducibility of mind to the physical brain serve to support the conception of the soul as a body-independent entity. Furthermore, irreducibility and the possibility of non-physical categories continue to support the plausibility of a transcendent deity.

Further, Kalam theological treatments of related matters will have to demonstrate its awareness of the problem of reductionism. It continues to be imperative that an Islamic discourse demonstrates a capacity to identify which cosmological assumptions opposing arguments are coming from. Has it already assumed a physicalist monism, namely, nothing exists but physical (material) things and that physics is sufficient to explain all phenomena; or does it say that all things are physical, but some physical things are mental (property dualism); or does a discourse permit that physics is not sufficient to explain all reality?

The notion of the causal closure of the physical (CCP) continues to be a challenging condition to the acceptability of theories that have some intersection with questions of causation. This is closely related to the problem of causal over-determination. While CCP is not fully conclusive—its validity still debated in some secular circles—more work needs to be done to establish a Kalam theological position in this regard.

While much work continues to be done on the historical and descriptive development of “Islamic psychological” doctrines in the mode of oriental studies, more needs to be done to develop a working definition of *rational soul* and mind for theological discussions. There are numerous, and at times, conflicting conceptions of soul, spirit, and intellect, in the mainstream Sunni Kalam sources. Which form of dualism (one tends to assume it would be integrative in nature) would faithfully represent the principles stipulated by the sources, as well as constitute a durable vehicle for engaging contemporary debates? The hope has been that these inquiries serve to stimulate new debates and critical inquiries in the fertile field of Kalam theology.

This essay seeks to delineate points of entry for Muslim theological reasoning into conversations in the field of philosophy of mind. By equating the Kalam principle of soul with its foremost faculty, intellection, Muslim theological reasoning lends itself well to these modes of inquiry. By looking at the work of Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam, the collapse of “reductionism” is shown to give way to the concept of a non-physical mind, as well as an indication toward the sustainable plausibility of theism in general. The essay demonstrates that contemporary obstacles and challenges to the theological principle of a human soul are surmountable, and adds to mounting scholarship in the field that calls into question the physicalist interpretation of the universe.

JIHAD HASHIM BROWN is a Senior Research Fellow at Tabah Foundation. After receiving degrees in Psychology and Near East Studies from Rutgers University, New Jersey, he went on to pursue Islamic Studies with prominent religious authorities in Syria and Morocco for a decade. He also holds a graduate degree from the University of Cambridge in Philosophical Theology. Brown has appeared frequently on numerous media outlets in the Middle East and the US, and has served as a consultant to various governments and institutions, on issues relating to Islam and international relations. He lives with his wife and children in Princeton, New Jersey.

