

Sanctification: Transformed Into the Image of Christ

Lesson 21

The Mind Brain Debate

I. Introduction

- a. Thus far we have laid a theoretical foundation for accepting the notion that the automatic functioning of the cognitive process of perception is linked to the Biblical concept of the “old man”.
- b. We have noted that the existence of **mental models** which are created within the brain at the point of interpretation, are at the root of much sinful behavior.
- c. Further, we can logically assert that these mental models may be **recognized** by the believer and consciously controlled with some exertion and conscious effort.
- d. If mental models produce automatic patterned behavioral responses and these patterned responses can be controlled, it raises the question of by what means one is able to control brain functioning. The answer is by the exercise of **free will**.
- e. The discussion of free will, as a function of the **mind**, and distinguished from the brain, is one of the more difficult philosophical and scientific issues and touches upon religion, ethics, and science in significant ways.
- f. That there is a distinction to be made between the mind and the brain and that within this distinction lays the key to controlling and altering one’s automatic behavior is **fundamental** to the experiential sanctification process.
- g. We have good theoretical and Biblical reasons to suggest that that there is a distinction to be made between the brain and the mind, but just how the mind operates as distinct from the brain is **not** understood and is at the heart of a raging debate.
- h. While this debate has been going on for at least **2500** years with no end in sight, for us to understand the nature of the debate we need to survey the history of it and examine the particular issues raised by each of the sides in this argument.

II. Greek History of the Mind Brain Debate

- a. Alcmaeon of Croton, an associate of the Pythagorean School of philosophy proposed that conscious experience originates in the stuff of the brain. He theorized that all **sensory** awareness is coordinated by the brain.
- b. So powerful and enduring has been Alcmaeon’s hypothesis about the seat of mental life being centered in the brain that even today most neuroscientists take for granted that there is **no distinction** between the brain and the mind.
- c. Hippocrates, fifty years later adopted his notion of the brain as the seat of sensation, saying that “the eyes, ears and tongue and feet do whatever the brain **determines**.”
- d. Aristotle and the Stoics rejected this notion and instead placed the perceiving -thinking function in the **heart**. There was little further philosophical development of these questions until the 1600’s.

III. The Age of Enlightenment

- a. The eighteenth century, the age of the **enlightenment**, was both a culmination and a new beginning.
- b. By this time Newton had discovered a fundamental cosmic law which was verifiable by mathematical **proof** and applicable to the minutest object as well as to the universe as a whole.
- c. It was during this period that the father of modern philosophy, Rene Descartes theorized that mind and brain both exist and are able to interact by some mechanism. This became known as “Cartesian **Dualism**”.
- d. Descartes proclaimed an entirely mechanical understanding of everything **except** humans. This opened the door to the French physician La Mettrie, who attempted, through scientific experiments to show that humans are nothing but automatons.
- e. All this philosophical and scientific activity generated fresh currents of thought which challenged the long-held institutionalized belief systems of the **Church**. Religion was being supplanted by secularism and science.
- f. For the first time in 1700 years the Western world view shifted away from Faith as the foundation of understanding and shifted to reason and the scientific method. This was the new path to the discovery of **truth**. It was the dawning of the age of the humanist.
- g. These so-called enlightened philosophies made **extravagant** claims; chief among them were the notions that:
 1. Reason stands alone on its own merits and need not be undergirded by **faith**
 2. Mankind is **perfectible** and progress is inevitable as man applies his knowledge
 3. Confidence in the ability of science to discover **causality**, and the principles governing nature, man and society
 4. Assault on the authority of the **Church**
- h. From the point of view of Scripture, the sentiment expressed by the scientists and philosophers that embodied the *age of enlightenment* was **no different** from those who sought to build the tower of Babel. Gen 11:4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. KJV
- i. For more than **three** centuries after Descartes published his thesis, philosophers and scientists have continued this battle over which entity, mind or matter, was the basic stuff of this world.

IV. The Argument Today

- a. Today, scientists “**know**” as well as anything can be known that all mental life springs from neuronal processes in the brain. Most adhere to the doctrine that the mind, as separate and distinct from the brain does not exist.

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- b. The reason for this confidence is that brain **imaging** technologies are able to pinpoint which brain sections are active during any given mental activity. For many neuroscientists, therefore, the problem of origins of mental activity is solved.
- c. The ability to map whole worlds of conscious experience from recognition of faces to feeling joy, fingering a violin string, smelling a flower can be traced to their respective cluster of **neurons** in the brain. This is a triumph of Materialism.

V. Materialism Defined

- a. Materialism is a set of related theories which hold that **all entities** and processes are composed of — or are reducible to — matter, material forces or physical processes.
- b. All events and facts are explainable, actually or in principle, in terms of body, material objects or dynamic material changes or movements. In terms of brain functioning this means that chemical and electrical neuronal activity **explains all** mental processes.
- c. The crux of the debate from a Materialist point of view is focused on the issue of the **interaction** between an immaterial mind and a material brain. In their view, it is impossible for the immaterial to cause a response in a material object.
- d. So entrenched is the philosophy of the Materialist in neuroscience today that anyone who even asks the question of whether consciousness, emotions, and thoughts, etc arise from nothing but the electrochemical activity of neurons is branded **unscientific**.
- e. The philosophical **acceptance** of Materialism has given rise to the commonly accepted notions of our day that homosexual persons and alcoholics and even morbidly obese people have genes which cause their aberrant behavior.
- f. It is indisputable that a diseased or damaged brain **can cause** unwanted and uncontrollable behavior. What is not proven is that genes lie at the root of causation among those whose behavior is sinful.

VI. The Problems of the Materialism Position

- a. The problem with this Materialistic viewpoint, from a scientific position, is that there are as many remaining **mysteries** regarding brain functioning as we have answers. For example,
 1. What kind of internal **experience** is generated by the neuronal activity captured on a brain scan?
 2. Where does the **content** (the pictures and meaning) of conscious thought reside?
 3. How does electrical and chemical activity produce internal **imagery**?
 4. How do we explain the capacity to **observe** one's self and inner experience?
 5. How is it possible for one to **decide** to not do an action for which the brain is calling?
- b. For the Bible believing Christian, the Materialism theory is problematic in that it **denies** any beings or processes can be independent or distinct from material causation. Therefore:
 1. Materialism denies the **reality** of spiritual beings and spiritual awareness.
 2. It denies that consciousness exists apart from brain activity and the notion of free will gives way to biological **determinism**.
 3. It labels the experience of mental or psychic states or processes, or consciousness a **hallucination** or a miss identification of material processes.
- c. Since it denies the existence of spiritual beings or forces, materialism by definition is inimical with Biblical theology and creationism and is philosophically **aligned** with atheism or agnosticism and the theory of evolution.
- d. **If** we accept Materialism then the choices we make, the reactions we have and the emotions we feel are nothing but the results of a machine governed by the rules of classical physics and chemistry. Therefore, freedom of the will is an illusion.

VI. Application

- a. If Materialism could be proven scientifically, what problems would be created for the Bible believing Christian in the following areas?
 1. What we believe about God
 2. Belief in miracles?
 3. The idea of experiential sanctification?
 4. The TRUTH claims of the Bible?
 5. The concept of free will?
 6. The righteousness of Gods' judgment for sin
 7. The need for personal salvation?