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RECENSIONS ET COMPTES RENDUS

PHILOSOPHIE

Joshua R. FARRIS, **The Creation of Self: A Case for the Soul**. Lanham MD, Iff Books, 2023, 21,6 × 13,9 cm, 328 p. ISBN 13-978-1-80341-086-9.

One of the final scenes of the 1993 drama “What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?” features Arnie Grape, an intellectually disabled teenager portrayed by Lionardo DiCaprio, and his morbidly obese mother on her deathbed. This heartbreaking scene vividly demonstrates something profound and commonsensical about the soul and personhood on two fronts: first, it shows that human persons, including those with mental incapacities, possess a deep awareness and intuition of what constitutes human conscious life, including the capacity for long-term mourning and loss, as opposed to non-conscious entities (matter and, as far as we can tell, at least for the moment, artificial intelligence) and lower-level organisms such as arthropods, and a vastly more profound nature than even organisms with a higher level of consciousness (apes, dogs, dolphins, elephants, etc.). And second, it is based on not only the realization of this truth but also the fact itself that the unique and distinct person that is loved, although virtually physically identical in terms of material composition, is no longer present after the moment of somatic death, i.e., their soul, which is fundamental to their personhood. This person is no longer unified or integrated with their body. Thus, the human person ceases to exist as a body-soul composite being. And yet, there is no significant difference in the material structure of a person who is alive or who has just died (whether healthy or ill). This is something that scientific materialism or any form of physicalism cannot explain, at least not satisfactorily or reasonably. Counter-arguments presenting the loss of consciousness at death in vegetative states do not work since a level of consciousness exists to maintain bodily functions. Furthermore, individual cells are still alive and participate in chemical reactions that convert glucose into energy. For a corpse, these cell processes and bodily functions have stopped; the cells are dead or dying; the heart has ceased to pump blood; and the lungs are incapable of oxygenating blood. Furthermore, the fact that people have regained full consciousness and returned to normal cell and bodily functions makes such cases wholly distinct from somatic death. Explaining this divide between a living person and a corpse, particularly at the moment of death, is as intractable a problem for physicalist philosophers of mind and consciousness researchers as it is for materialist origin of life researchers to explain the origin of the information that provides functionality for a cell’s operation and its capacity for self-replication. Furthermore, it cannot be based solely on the existence and particular arrangement of proteins, lipids, and glycans.

Joshua Farris's book *The Creation of Self: A Case for the Soul* (henceforward *TCS*), unlike reductive materialism and the plethora of naturalistic views, provides a plausible explanation and solution to this intractable problem for naturalism that I presented above and the various other conundrums concerning the connection between the body and the soul (the mind and the brain) and the nature of each. The book supports the notion that consciousness is the most veritable and fundamental thing we know, more so than the external physical world, since we require it to perceive and reflect on anything, rendering reason impossible without it. Nevertheless, as basic as it is to existence, it remains one of the most difficult questions facing modern science and philosophy.

The book consists of an introduction and four parts, each of which is comprised of one to five chapters. It also includes a foreword written by well-known philosopher of mind Charles Taliaferro and an afterword written by noted philosopher of science Stephen C. Meyer. Farris defends the idea that "the soul is the carrier of personal identity, not the body, and not even the body-soul strictly speaking" (13). His views of the soul in general are Cartesian, i.e., "the core of personhood is the soul" (13). His perspective is also that the soul is "nearly synonymous with a mind or a spirit" (10). More specifically, he formulates a particular variety of neo-Cartesianism:

Neo-Cartesianism retains the core conception developed by Descartes, but I take it a step further in that I argue that there is not simply a soul that we can little about (beyond saying that it is a thinking, experiencing thing), but that we can supply a sufficient designation to the soul that carries a primitive particularity central to what it means to be a person. (13)

The book is deeply ensconced within the science-theology interaction. Farris intersects various domains of philosophy and theology, including philosophy of mind, consciousness studies, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, and theological anthropology. Throughout his book, he assembles a cadre of robust, rigorous, and plausible arguments that form a case to demonstrate why one should favour a particular theistic perspective to explain conscious life and the soul. In so doing, he first tears down a wide range of competing views, including materialism, emergentism, Thomism (neo-Thomism/neo-Aristotelianism), and the widely discussed and resurgent view of panpsychism. Essential to his argumentation about the nature of the soul, he explains in detail why these perspectives fail to explain the fundamental essence of what it means to be a human person. Farris argues that souls are essentially simple and that "they are not event-products of some such complex process in biological evolution" (210).

The second major component to the book's thesis is his defense that souls are direct creations from God, a view known as creationism (not to be confused with how God brought the universe and organisms into existence, and in a certain amount of time, as argued by Young Earth Creationists and Old Earth Creationists). The most innovative aspect of the book is his defense of divine creationism through the use of the principle of sufficient reason (211-213).

Farris also distinguishes this position from traducianism (a position that does not require direct intervention from God, whereby the soul's creation is dependent on a natural generation alongside the body) and emergentism.

Many researchers in scientific fields and philosophical camps either deny or neglect the role of theology in such discourses. Farris does not fall into this trap, as do many scientists, philosophers, and theologians. In fact, Farris shrewdly addresses the concern of many academics, particularly those of religious persuasion, who would rather not accept the existence of the soul, lest they be labelled anti-scientific. Instead, he recognizes the vital role of theology, philosophy, history, and even common sense (232) in such debates. He emphasizes scientism, which arbitrarily excludes the study of one of the most fundamental aspects of reality: the mind. Often times, advocates of methodological naturalism prefer conclusions that fly in the face of evidence and lead to scientism and metaphysical naturalism. He rightfully argues that methodological naturalism is far too stringent. Methodological naturalism says more about the demarcation of science than anything else, preventing further progress into enigmatic questions glaring at it in the face.

Related to the problem I raised at the beginning of this review, Farris delves into a Christian theology of Hope. At the end of Part III, in Chapter 10, "Why we are Not Animals: Where Aristotle and Thomas went Wrong," he discusses disembodied hope (separation of soul from body) and re-embodied hope (reunification of the soul to an incorruptible body). He presents two competing philosophical views. He argues that a Cartesian dualist explanation is more convincing than a Thomistic explanation for the persistence of the soul, as he states:

My persistence as a soul requires that I be essentially identical to my soul or that the essential part of me that carries my personal identity is my soul. The basic logic is as follows: If I'm not identical with my soul, I don't persist if only my soul does. Further, I show that persistence of personal identity x (the soul) requires z feature (primitive thisness). Y (Thomist soul) almost certainly does not have z feature. Thus, x is probably not y. (187 –188)

Farris's study is persuasive and takes the commonsensical view that we are much more than our mere physicality. He successfully demonstrates the distinctiveness of human persons and, by extension, that it is not unreasonable for sane and rational persons to believe in beings such as God, angels, demons, and the existence of minds, souls, and spirits. A naturalist view, however, arbitrarily and mistakenly excludes the true fundamental nature of minds. Furthermore, Farris's work clearly demonstrates that metaphysical naturalism's offspring, methodological naturalism, has led science down blind alleys by arbitrarily excluding uncomfortable explanations that invoke minds, whether temporal or eternal. He also gives assurance that, based on the evidence, one need not worry about contradicting established orthodoxy in science.

Farris's work has deep implications for metaphysics, moral philosophy, and political philosophy. It ultimately strikes a chord with questions revolving around meaning, hope, and the afterlife. These are questions that cannot be ignored and wished away if Farris is indeed correct in his argumentation. Thus, if you're seeking to deepen your understanding of the mind-body problem, the complexities of research in consciousness studies, and, most of all, are ready to explore a reasonable solution to the recalcitrant problem of mind in a physical world, then you will greatly benefit from reading *TCS*.