Cultivating the Soul, Session 1b

By James Moreland

Speaker 1:

All right. What I'd like to do now is tell you a very very different story than the one I've just told you. I want to tell you the scientific naturalist story. Now. Why am I going to tell you this story?

Because it's gonna be just a little bit painful to tell it to you. Not not not because it's threatening but because there are parts of the story that are a little hard to get a hold of. Well it's because most people believe this is the correct story today. Now I think that this is what I'm about the story I'm about to tell you is maybe part of the story. But what I'm going to try to argue is that it simply can't be the whole story. And I'll try to tell you why I believe that. Before I go any further I mean I might I might as well I'll tell you in advance that what I will be doing in about 5 or 10 minutes and then next time is I'm going to be giving you a case for why I think it is reasonable to believe that you are a mind or a soul.

I am not going to request of you to have any faith whatsoever. I do not think it is a good idea personally to use faith as a substitute for reason and evidence. I think that your theological beliefs should ultimately be decided on the basis of your mind and your reason not on the basis of faith. I don't want to have to defend this right now but let me just say that there is a terrible
misunderstanding about biblical faith and biblical faith is not choosing to believe something with complete disregard of the arguments for and against whatever it is I'm choosing to believe. Biblical faith is trusting what I've got reason to believe is true and according to the Bible, faith is trusting something after reason has done its work in my understanding.

So I'm gonna be laying out for you later a case for why you're more than your body. It'll take the rest of the evening and a little bit of next time. If I've if my case is a good case then you should conclude that you're not your body. If there's a unbeliever in here and you're welcome if you're still considering Christianity you're more than welcome. But I will say to you that you should conclude if you don't conclude that I use you I'd like you to show me where my arguments have gone wrong and I will revise them if you can show me where my arguments are unreasonable or where my inferences are fraudulent or something of that sort. So that's what I'll do. But before I do that let me tell you this other story.

According to the natural story, science and the five senses are the only means we have of knowing anything. [writing on chalkboard] OK.

The only way we have of knowing things are through the methods and the tests of science. If you can't measure something or test it scientifically or come up with some way to quantify it or put a mathematical expression behind it or measure it like I said or work it out in an
empirical test of some sort. And then it's just not real and it's not something you can believe it if you want but anything that is not scientifically testable is ultimately just your kind of you know the private opinions for the faithful.

Right. If I you know Barbara Walters said on 20/20 two Fridays ago when she was they did this. Heaven's Gate piece and it was obvious that the Heaven's Gate people were kind of irrational. Well she concluded by saying "well but Hugh we all know that all of the world's great religions ultimately rest upon things that can't be proven". Right. Now I will tell you I for one don't believe that for a minute. I think you can prove God exists in a certain sense of proof and you can prove the soul's real in a certain sense of proof that is to say provide better reasons for believing it than disbelieving it. And I don't believe that for a minute. But Barbara Walters is not speaking for herself. What do you hear me out there She is speaking for the cultural movers and shakers in this world. And ladies and gentlemen you must understand that whoever controls the limits of knowledge will control the culture. Whoever gets to define what we can and cannot know can marginalize alternative belligerent groups. If you can label a group in the culture as only possessing beliefs and not knowledge then they can be dismissed and ignored in public. If you can say "Well that group over there has a bunch of their own beliefs but what do they know". You understand what I'm saying to you?

If we ever get to the point where we allow and we've gone way too far into this already - If we ever get to the point where we allow our culture to tell us that religion is a matter of belief not
knowledge and and and the limits of knowledge or science. Ladies and gentlemen we will simply not have an audience in the public square any longer. We won't we will not be heard at all. The people at the University who too who have the right to define which are silly research projects and which are the ones worthy of grants. They can control where the culture goes. And I'm suggesting to you that we now live in a day where the people who shape your children's lives and my children's lives and they shape how things are presented on the evening television tell us that scientists are the authorities when it comes to knowledge and perhaps the priests and ministers are authorities on - oh, morality. Right? As long as they don't deal with sexual morality. [laughter] OK.

But look. Are you going to let your culture tell you that the only way the only place Jesus can speak is when he talks about ethics? Are you going to let people tell you that if Jesus says you're a soul and a scientist says you're your brain the scientist is right and we've got to reinterpret what Jesus said if because if we don't we're irrational you believe that you're going to let your culture tell you that? I hope not! I hope not. But we live in a culture that tells us science and the five senses seeing touching tasting smelling and hearing is all there is. If you can't see it touch it tasted smell it or hear it, It's not real or if it is real. Or if it is you sure can't know it's real. You may choose to believe in it if you want. That's it.

Now science is all there is to people, to many modern folks. Religion is superstition. So science tells us a story. This would be kind of the first point. And it tells us a story which we'll just call a
creation myth. A creation myth. I don't mean it, I don't mean anything by myth that's meant to be demeaning. By myth I just mean an account of how everything came about right. And what's the story going to look like? What is the scientific story about how everything that's real came about - look like, what does it look like. It starts with a big bang which by the way may have happened but it won't let anybody ask what banged the bang right. That's not, that's out of bounds. [laughter] That's religion again right. Go ask your priest for that. Which being translated means the only answer that anybody gives is superstition. So let's don't ask the question but we got a bang here.

And what do we get belched out of the bang. What gets belched out of the bag. Matter in what form? In the form of energy. What does this energy eventually do? It starts forming what? [audience mumbling responses] Well it starts forming mass. Yes, it starts forming atoms and elements. If you if you'll humor me on that I mean hydrogen electrons protons neutrons and it forms helium and hydrogen and eventually carbon and oxygen and that sort of stuff. OK. You with me on that? Now what do these guys do eventually? They do a tinker toy routine and they link up with each other, don't they? They link up with each other and they form real big things like stars and galaxies and so on. So far we okay on this and then on one of these things. Some of the Tinker Toys have things happened to them maybe it lightning hits it or something of that sort and the Tinker Toys rearrange in a real interesting structure and you get a set of tinker toys that can produce other tinker toys. It's called a cell. Single celled organism and then these Tinker Toys start forming more complicated tinker toys until we've got a room filled with tinker toys.
Now on this view I just wish that we had eight weeks because there's a lot I'd like to say about this. You want to pray for something. I should be finding out tomorrow whether InterVarsity Press is going to accept a book proposal that I and one of my professors at the University are going to write which is gonna try to offset this Christian movement toward the denial of the soul and I think IV's interested in the book so I'm hoping and praying they'll take it. Because I aye this tinker toy thing is troublesome. I'm not denying there may be Tinker Toys, you understand. I'm not denying that there might not be atoms and electrons you could talk me out of it - I've never seen one and you know there's but heck maybe there are. The problem is not is just I think there is more to us than very interesting tinker toys. But you understand this story. Let me say something you might not get but it's a bottom up story. It explains it explains how big things come by talking about their parts and the rearrangement their parts. OK so everything ultimately in the world everything that happens in the world ultimately depends on what's at the bottom.

Yeah and and things appear water gets wet because the parts rearranged out here. You understand that. So big scale things you can see like wetness and gold being yellow and malleable and that sort of thing ultimately depend on how the little parts are structured. Now you see the things that do the causing are on the bottom the bottom things cause things on the top to happen. That means a little small parts are what cause the larger objects that have those parts to have the features they have. You see that the reason a tree is what it is or a mountain is what it is or a chunk of gold is what it is, a big chunk of gold is because of the parts in their arrangement down there. You can't have any room for free will in a deal like that folks because anything that
happens about what the big guys is completely determined by the hardware and the inputs on the 
bottom including homosexuality and everything else it's all a matter of your genes and your 
inputs right. But course they don't stop off on that when it comes to being homophobic because 
homophobic is something you're responsible for right. Lesbianism is caused by the parts but not 
homophobia. It's a little bit of an odd way to get off the horse in the middle of a river but we 
won't we won't hold other folks to being consistent. We'll try to but we don't expect our pagan 
friends to do it. It's in their best interests not to be rational. It is not in our best interests. And 
don't you ever forget that. It is not in their best interest to let their reason guide their lives. It is in 
ours.

We happen to think that behind the material universe there is a great big [writing something on a 
board] and that reason is a good thing because it's friendly. For those guys reason showed up real 
late in the scheme of things it probably shouldn't be trusted unless you can press it into the 
service of your agenda. It is still an interesting thing for you to think about. Now, we end up 
getting a view of things. Now once we get this myth in place remember this is the Tinker Toy 
Story. Everything depends upon the tinker toys and how they're structured.

Right. OK. A lion is a lion because of his Tinker Toys. Well golly day we turn out with a view 
then that everything, i.e., all and I'm going to use some terms here now that I'll clarify - all 
substances if you want to put in subs - just put things - all substances properties and for 
properties you just might want to put character trait or attribute characteristics [writing] and
events are physical are physical. Let me say it again. All substances. Everything. All substances, properties, and events are physical. Only thing that exists is physical.

OK now let's just try to get a handle on this for a minute. A substance we'll all say more about this later but let's just say a substance is a thing like like a dog or a cat or a billiard ball or a chunk of gold or a table or chair. For our purposes. Now a substance can have properties. Properties are the attributes that substances have. I would say of the chair that's a substance that has the property of weighing 15 pounds. It has the property of having a certain shape. Here's a billiard ball that's a substance that has the property of being round. It doesn't have the property being square. It has a property of weighing 16 ounces and being colored black let's say. You understand that so a property is something a substance has a substance as a thing that has properties. A substance is just an object or a specific particular object and it has attributes. So far we okay on that?

An event we'll just say is a happening of some kind. An event would be for example the billiard balls bumping another billiard ball. Right. That's an event or the flashing of lightning would be an event not the lightning but the flashing of the lightning. That's an event. That seem fair to you? How many of you were lost at this point. Just raise your hand if you're if you're having trouble with what I'm saying about substance, property, and event that you'd maybe be too embarrassed to raise your hand.
I'll say it. But let me say it again. I don't want to bore you. OK. And if I’m boring you by going over this somebody tell me. But I think I'd better. I want to just make sure you get this. Is that OK. If I do it again? You understand that the world is composed of things that have properties and things happen to these things. They undergo events. Right. So the world is filled with things a carbon atom as a thing. It's a substance. A proton's a substance, a chunk of gold is a substance, a tree's a substance, you're a substance. Right? And so on and in these these different substances have features or attributes and they they they undergo events like like a billiard ball might undergo an event of moving or bumping into something or being squashed or something like that right?

Now. On this on this story the only substances that exist or physical substances. Right? There aren't any immaterial substances. Well wisdom is an attribute it's not a substance. It would be an it would be a property. [inaudible comment]

And what you're not following now.

Speaker 2: No I am

Speaker 1:
Well hold it, hold that thought. Let's just say that the only substances that exist are physical substances now the only properties that exist or physical properties. And now you might say what about wisdom? Heck of a question. If I were a scientific naturalist I would I would say what wisdom is turns out to be a certain type of behaviour and all that behaviour is your body movements of a certain type. OK so what is wisdom. It's behaving in a certain way and all the behaving is as certain events when your body moves. It might doing that might be doing this event when you're asked a question about something you might be giving the event of giving a real good sound which would be the right answer let's say. Now you understand that wisdom really isn't that. Right? And the problem is going to be what sort of the thing is wisdom and behaviour.

Right. But but that's what they're gonna do. They're going to try to say well wisdom is nothing but certain kinds of behaviour and a culture and that's physical. And the only events that exist are physical.

Now let's talk about you on this view you are a computer you're just a physical object you're your brain and your central nervous system. You're a very complicated computer. I understand that I can describe you completely using only physical attributes. Right? Now what's a physical attribute. It's the attributes of chemistry and physics and kind of common sense. So if I want I give if I give your weight and your size and shape and your location in the room and if I describe all the chemical and physical properties that characterise your body and your brain and all is in
your brain and all the movements and the different things that happen in your brain. That's you. I haven't left anything out. That's the story here. You understand this story? Am I communicating this story to you?

Now see this is what's so funny about the story is if I described all the bodies and brains and central nervous systems in this room suppose God said Take this down. I'm now going to tell you where every subatomic particle in this room is. And I'm going to tell you everything about every subatomic part. So he describes every body and brain and every nervous system in the room. And He lays the room out. He says in this part of the room there is a physical object with such and such a brain and it's doing certain things right now. And so. So we have all that. You know what. We still would not have a clue where you were. Not one clue. Not not a single idea where you were. We can know everything about your body we would want to know. We would not know anything about you. I'll show you that later.

But this is a very sad story. Because if this story is true there's no freedom and responsibility. Whatever you do is just like a computer dependent upon your hardware and your inputs your environment and your genes. Any comments on this on this so far? Any questions about the story? This is believed by a lot of people.

Speaker 3:
Yeah well that's the rationale...they don't have to own up to their mistakes, they only have input, bad input.

Speaker 1:
Right. I agree. And you know the only people who have to own up to their mistakes are those that don't hold politically correct views. But you're right. There is going to be a real difficult time in this kind of you to talk about freedom of the will for example. We will raise that issue. But anything else you'd like to say about the story or about what I've said so far.

Yes sir.

Speaker 4:
This would be a popular view in the naturalist's...

Speaker 1:
Yeah. Thank you for mentioning that. This is what I'm about to say to you I think is very very critical for you to try to think about. This is a great question. The claim has been made in a certain sense it's true but in another sense I'll show you that it isn't true. But it's a very important point. He says well look you're you're claiming that this is the dominant story but is it really? Don't you think the vast majority of Americans have some sort of belief in another's realm or something. I mean polls show that and they believe in the New Age maybe reincarnation.
See my view is I don't think the vast majority of people do believe in God. I really don't. Now when I say believe you have to understand that people act on their beliefs. They almost never act and keep inconsistent and you understand. How do people view this is what I think is so interesting. How do people actually view religions like New Age or whatever. Don't they view it as something that you're free to create and make up any way you want as long as it helps you? You understand in other words the primary test of a person's religious beliefs are you're free to believe whatever you want as long as that helps you.

Now that is exactly equivalent to saying that my beliefs aren't real because nobody who takes a belief to be real about something real would think that you could just make up anything you want and that's OK. Take a belief about the podium here. You know nobody would say if you believe this will fly you to Las Vegas or to Hawaii. It will if you believe it for you it wouldn't work for you because people would say man if you believe that you've got the wrong beliefs pal. Now why would someone not say you can believe anything you want about the podium and as long as it works for you that's fine because they know that they believe you can have false beliefs about the podium because they know podiums are real. You understand?

When people start thinking though that you can come up with whatever you want to believe about God. And it really doesn't matter what you believe about him. What matters is that it's a part of - it helps you with your beliefs. What God now is is an idea in my mind. And when you're
playing with ideas in your mind you are free to create whatever you want right. So my view is that I think you're right. But what I find interesting is that the cultural treatment of religion even by practitioners of a lot of religions like New Age view their religious practices as free creations that are relative to their community that you can believe it if it helps you but it doesn't matter if they test with reality and that is what.

And why do people think that those religious claims are able to be created and change that will? Because they're not scientific. And THIS is what's real. And religion is kind of well you can fiddle with it do what you want with it. So I actually think that that underscores this because this has bullied us into thinking nobody knows anything about God anyway so go ahead make up your own story and if it helps you that's fine. Right? I think people. Yes?

Speaker 5:
...[inaudible] always based on reason?

Speaker 1:
Which beliefs?

Speaker 5:
Scientific.

Speaker 1:
No. No. Let me let me clarify what I mean now. OK. This is very important for me to be clear these aren't based on reasoning and logic any more than theological beliefs. The point. The problem with this story is not that there are Tinker Toys and that they don't rearrange. I think they do. The problem with this story is that it is claimed to be the ONLY story. It's claimed that all you need to explain living things is this story. I'm going to show you late next week that there are a bunch of things that we all know to be true of ducks and cats and you and me that this story can't even touch. And we know they're true. We know they're true. Now remember the claim remember this: The story is a scientific story. The claim that this is the only story is not a scientific claim that is a philosophical claim about science. You understand what I just said?

The claim that there are tinker toys - you understand what Tinker toys mean - atoms and molecules - so maybe I should say Tinker Toys and Atoms or molecules - the claim that there are tinker toys and they rearrange the form things - that's a scientific claim. The claim that that is all that's going on is not a scientific claim. It is a philosophical claim and it's that claim that I find to be irrational. I'm willing to give people their tinker toys but I'm not willing to say that that's all there is and it's not just that I'm not willing to say it. I don't think it's reasonable to believe it. And I'll tell you why. I'll give you a real quick teaser.

You take a physical object like this podium and you take its parts away and put new parts here. You start tearing this podium down piece by piece and you put in its place a completely new set of parts and you will no longer have the same podium. OK. You break this down and you let's
say you take those and Green Jello and put it here. You take another part off course on the
ground put frozen green jello there and again and you got a bunch of parts down here and you
reconstruct these parts to form a new podium over here and there you got a frozen green jello
podium. You understand what I'm saying? Which is the original podium that one or this one. It's
this one because it's made out of the same parts. This is not the same podium this is made of
green jello.

Now what we learn from that is that physical objects like just normal scientific objects are not
able to lose all parts and gain new parts and still be the same objects. If they lose some of their
parts and gain new ones strictly speaking they're not strictly the same object. Well you are
literally though the same person from one moment to the next even though you constantly are
losing body parts and gaining new ones. And if you are literally the same person that walked in
here an hour and a half ago even though he's undergone part rearrangement while you've been in
here and probably lost a few and gained some parts then you are not a material object because if
you are a material object you don't have an enduring self. You become a series of momentary
stages and there's no person that endures from one tenth of a second to the next because as long
as you're gaining and losing part you're literally a new phys- you're a new hole from one moment
to the next.

And then there would be no possibility of you being responsible for that. OJ Simpson could
have said it wasn't either did it because I'm strictly speaking literally a different object and he
would have been right. You shouldn't fear going to the dentist because literally it will not be you that will go it will be a duplicate. That's sort of like you. But we'll have new parts. Now I'm not - this is not a joke. I'm dead serious about this. You take the podium and you take some of its parts away and put new parts even if you just take one part away and put in only one part. It's not the same podium - if you mean by the podium the whole object. You okay. If you mean by suppose I carried this off and you say well the rest of it's the same object except for the podium minus this parts the same sure! But it hasn't lost any part that's fine but if it loses parts and gains parts it's a different object. The only reason you're inclined to say the podium apart from the piece I tore off is still at least the same 95 percent podium is because you haven't let me take any of its parts away.

If physical objects lose parts and gain new ones they're not the same physical object but you are the same self throughout your life you are literally the same self. You might have new abilities but I would say that you're the same self with new abilities and you then you were with you as the old self without those abilities. And if that's true of you and you know it is because you are aware of your own continuity through time. If you just introspect inside your life you're aware that you continue through time to exist it's the same "I" mean you ain't your brain and you ain't your body. That's just a teaser. I'll develop it more next time. OK let's have a let's have one more and then we'll close up for the evening. Yes

[inaudible audience question - maybe about Christians who don't believe in souls]
Computers only have on and off switches that have electrical circuits that run through them. They don't know where that current goes through the capacitors. That's all a computer does doesn't read anything it doesn't add anything but we talk that way. Well that's the way they talk. So they'd say there is no soul. Well what happens when you die? You cease to exist. What about life after death? Well at the Resurrection God recreates you from nothing all over again. OK. Now the question then becomes well how is it "I" that God recreates because after all I don't know that I would have any part in common with the thing that died.

You understand that especially if there was a new body. Right. Because don't you think that you could eat some of the body parts of previous people if their chemicals decompose and go into vegetables and you eat the vegetables and got some of their parts. Well you got problems here right now. You understand that there would be problems with which person I am if I am a mass of particles. Right there's a problem here folks. And what's gone wrong is that persons aren't masses of particles. Persons aren't as arbitrary as material things in this story but that's the story they'll tell.

They'll say well God recreates us ex nihilo out of nothing at the resurrection and they'll say as long as that person has your memories that's good enough to say it you. Is it good enough to say that whatever God created had your memories would make it you? Of course not. Couldn't you
lose all of your memories and still be you so your memories aren't necessary for you to be you are they. Couldn't God create another creature and just kind of create and give them all your memories? Would that be possible - would that make him you? Of course not. Of course not. You aren't your memories. You're the thing that has the memories. You are a substance which we'll talk about next time.

Hey it'll get easier and better [audience laughter] so don't leave me now. I was here early tonight too by the way. Thank you so much for coming. I really appreciate you being here. Thank you. See you next week.