

# Saving the Mental, I

By Dallas Willard

Announcer:

The guy that and at Talbot, Talbot school of theology and I see faces here that I'm not familiar with, and I want to welcome you especially for coming out this afternoon in response to our announcement. Dr. Dallas Willard is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California. He was director of the school of philosophy for many years and gratefully, I think he now allows others to shoulder that responsibility. He's the author of several books including two on the Christian life. One is called In Search of guidance that at least was the original title when it first was published and it's been since reissued and edited significantly. What is the title of that now?

Speaker 1:

They kept the title.

Announcer:

In search of guidance again. Yes, and then his other book which many of you will be familiar with is called The Spirit of the disciplines. Now if you're looking for something to test your philosophical incisors you might want to have a look at his book logic and the objectivity of knowledge. He's also written many important journal pieces that you could track down as well. On a more personal note I'd like to say that that Dallas Willard is in my view a remarkably versatile philosopher and that his versatility to a great extent is a function of his profound faith in Jesus Christ and that he is also a gifted teacher.

I don't know what sort of honorific titles he has received at his institution, but I remember as a student there hearing many other students comment informally about his teaching and how

Willard: Saving the Mental, I

effective it was in helping them gain mastery of a difficult subject. Personally in my book he is he's a teacher extraordinary and I owe a great debt to him and I really feel he's been both a mentor and a teacher to me as well as a friend. And I know that he's been all of these things to many people including J.P. and others on his campus. So we're pleased that you had the opportunity today to hear from this man who has marked our lives so deeply. We have two meetings today the topic at this hour is saving the mental cancel do it and then later after our dinner break, and you're encouraged to find dinner on your own, but will break at let's see. What time did we decide? 5:15 and then we'll reconvene at 6:45 when the topic will be spiritual formation. That time we'll have a slightly more informal and discussion oriented format, but I will mention that these sessions are being taped tape recorded and you should be able to obtain copies later on. Dallas, it's really a delight to have an evening we look forward to you this evening.

[Applause]

Dallas Willard:

Thank you Doug. It's a real privilege to be here and you almost wonder if you ought to try after introduction that generous. There's no way you can live up to it, but thank you Doug I do appreciate it and it's great to be down here always down at Biola. Among friends and especially to be here to do some work with young Christian philosophers and scholars and thinking people who are also set for the defense of the Gospel.

Let me just talk to you rather informally for a moment about the subject and parts of the discussion will be a little less formal. So let me tell you what it's about. Before we do it. Periodically in the history of the human race. There has been an attempt to say that the only things that exist are physical or material things. And that is true of the classical world.

Democritus for example is a notable case of someone who tried to say that and more recently for example, in the 17th century 18th century again in the 19th century and then again in the 20th century. It seems like these these very deep alternatives in our ways of thinking have to get up and ride around every few decades in a different garb and materialism for example, in the 19th century, was really an attempt to revive the basic picture that there are only material or physical objects on the basis of what was thought to be new steps forward in science. And they were fundamentally killed off by changes in science and the development or the reassertion of a kind of Kantian view of philosophy at the end of the century. And so for the first 50 years of the 20th century, in this country you've never heard of materialism. Well you heard of it, but it wasn't like something that was around that you should seriously be concerned about. And then in the 50s. There arose a view which came to be known as the identity thesis.

Funny how this language changes there. I picked up a book some time ago in a library that was called the identity thesis and gee this is interesting. It was from the end of the last century and it turned out to be the identity thesis as it concerns space and time. Space and time are identical. Actually identity you see is so important to philosophy because it shows up in so many substantive arguments. Identity is really a way of trying to get rid of something, because if A is identical with B then you apparently one of them is dispensable and in this case the assertion is that the way it's nearly always argued is sensations are identical with brain processes, identical with brain processes and the brain process now is something can be fully described in the terminology of physics and chemistry. And so in the 50s there was a reassertion of materialism and you don't understand, I think that all the way from Democritus and Epicurus on up through Searle's book, the thing that is standing in the shadows haunting the whole discussion is the possibility of a purely spiritual being. And now that's important for us to inject in this venue

Willard: Saving the Mental, I

because, you are deeply concerned about this and everyone should be deeply concerned about these. In particular what is the status of God and what is the status of the human self or soul or mine particularly after the death of the body.

One of the things you will see repeatedly in the authors who are trying to push some version of the identity thesis is references to God and disembodied spirits and ghosts, usually ghost get mentioned in there. And the Church lands and Searle also though he's going to try to save the mental in fashion. Searle also Dan Dennett and others JJ see smart, they're always taking swipes at God. And this is not an accident, because you see if God exists the whole project is shot. Materialism is false if God exists. Conversely if material is true God can't exist. So, it's a kind of healthy instinct that they have. I often like to tease my friends who argue this when they with a look of satisfaction think they have completed the project and now they've settled everything by asking them whether or not they have proven that God doesn't exist, because if it turns out that a human being is just purely a piece of matter and God exist they still haven't gotten what they were after.

So there are interesting connections here that need to be alive in your mind. Actually I'm going to come back to them towards the end of the course of the course. Not going to be that long. Towards the end of the, of the hour. Let me, let me lead into Searle by first of all saying I think one of the great things about John Searle is he he finds it very hard to deny things that are obvious and that's not true of every philosopher he does. Sometimes he overdoes it and he gets a little shrill in this current book I think, but that's a good trait. If you're going to deny something that is obvious at least you ought to do it with great difficulty and I want you to know that in criticizing him as I'm going to do in a moment I really do think highly of him. I think he's one of our better philosophers and when he considers this issue of the existence of the mental. I'm going

to talk in that rather vague way for a while now. The existence of the mental. When he considers this issue, he just can't understand how anyone could suppose that there is nothing mental.

Beliefs, ideas, feelings of pleasure and pain usually in this discussion we don't get very elaborate so we wind up discussing sensations. You often would wonder if anything mental has happened to some philosophers other than having sensations, but these are the, I guess the simple cases and the idea is if you can take care of these you can take care of anything though I think that doesn't follow it all, doesn't follow at all. And in any case Searle is very clear that you can't really just deny the mental and in his the position he's taking. He wants to assert that there is an irreducible mental aspect to reality and irreducible mental aspect to reality. And so now the question that I've set for the lecture. Saving the mental, can Searle do it? You want to understand he really does want to do it and I want to answer the question for my point of view before I get so tangled up into the analysis that I don't get back to it. And the answer to the question as far as I'm concerned is, not in the way he's trying to do it. It can be done, but not in the way he's trying to do it. I'll try to explain later on why I think that's true, but he is intent on saving the mental he's intent on saying there is something mental that you cannot get rid of in reality. Now what, what is it that is mental that you can't get rid of in reality and here we need to draw a distinction that is founded in category analysis because in one sense of the word he doesn't want to save the mental. In the position known as substance dualism and that is to radically different kinds of substances. Mental and physical mental and physical. Okay.

Now there's another version. And that is called property dualism and that is to say that there are two radically different kinds of properties. Now surprisingly Searle wants to reject both of those, but I want to just tell you he doesn't succeed. He is a property dualists. He is a property dualist, but he is so spooked by what he takes to be as he says over and over, our world view.

Our scientific worldview. That he will not say that there are radically different kinds of properties. In fact he wants to say, he wants to make this very strange kind of assertion. He wants to say yes, there are mental properties which are also physical. There are mental properties which are also physical. And the real trick now is to understand how you can say a thing like that.

We know it's very clear why he wants to stay at and I want to come back to that later because at the end of the discussion I want to talk about what is really driving him and the world view that he supposes is scientific and in what sense there might be a scientific review in his sense which is none at all. So I want to come back to that, but let's just try now to understand how he tries to take this position of holding that there are irreducible mental properties. No no mental substances, okay? That's out of the question. That's a Cartesianism in an obscene sense for him is to suppose that there would be two kinds of substances. Now I want to quit early enough for you to ask questions and see if any of this like these are distinctions and so on you later want me to ask you want ask to go in to try to do that.

So, how does he put this together? He wants to say that mental phenomena are caused by neuro physical physiological processes in the brain. They are caused by neurophysiological process in the brain and are themselves features of the brain. That's on page 2 of the book in case you decide you can give references quotations I make. I don't know that you want to, but I can give you references if you want. Perhaps afterwards rather than take the time for them now. That's on page 2. So he says, "Mentally events and processes are as much a part of our biological history. Natural History as digestion. Mitosis, meiosis or enzyme secretion. Thus both biologic consciousness and bile and intentionality are biological processes caused by lower level neuronal processes in the brain and neither conscious nor intentionality is reducible to something else." That's on the introduction Roman numeral twelve. See this is, he rightly takes it that the identity

thesis denies this. The identity thesis wants to say that there are features of the brain that emerge from its finer structure, but these are not irreducibly mental. When Searle says something as irreducibly mental I don't have time to note up that package, but the main feature that he is referring to is what is called intentionality. For example an idea or belief is of or about something.

When you say what are you thinking when somebody says nothing, that's never literally true. Because you can't think without thinking of something and this feature, and Searle does a real good job of discussing this and I don't want you to lose, I don't want you to think I'm trying to bomb this book. It's got a lot of really good work in it and especially its criticisms of the attempts at materialism are extremely good, and it's not going to carry Dan Dennett and the others away, but it will certainly give them something to chew on. But this is the feature intentionality. Just think *ofness* and *aboutness*. Now, for example this this red marker is not of or about anything. Right? I mean it has relations it's over the table it came from some factory somewhere. It's in my hand and I'm using it, but it's not of or about anything. Your idea of the marker is of or about something. That feature of *ofness* or *aboutness*, it isn't the only mark of the metal now, but that when we talk about irreducibility to the metal. Let's just understand for our discussion here that that's what he's talking about. You cannot get rid of that feature and still describe everything about reality that you need to describe to say what's going on. And I give you that sentence again. You cannot drop intentionality in this sense and describe everything that's going on in reality.

Let's try to make that as clear as possible by the specific issue here. If you were to take a chemical process in the brain and you were to give every possible description of that from the viewpoint of chemistry and physics. That you could, you would still not know what it was of or

about. Nothing would be said about that. Now of course other interesting things like truth and so on kind of get lost here too, they have to be reinterpreted too, but let's just understand that's what we mean when we talk about. He often speaks of intrinsic intentionality. And he means that these mental events would have that property if no one was considering them. And he distinguishes that from extrinsic intentionality, especially as it applies to such things as the stuff in the bowels of a computer, which we call information. But as Searle says, "It wouldn't be information if we did not know how to deal with it. It would just be you know some little arrangement on this Silicon chips or something of that sort." That wouldn't be information. So you see that is extrinsic intention and he also holds the same view as purposiveness in nature. When we talk about things in nature giving biological explanations we talk about things in nature and we talk about how purposive they are, well that also is a kind of extrinsic intentionality. In other words, if we just describe them physically we would never pick up on the purpose, we just see that one thing leads to another and so on.

Okay, now so, we have a situation then where Searle once not to be a materialist, but he's dead set on not being a dualist as well. On page 13 he talks, he says, "The view that consciousness, mental states, etc... exist in the most naive and obvious sense and play a real causal role in our behavior has nothing specially to do with Cartesian dualism" On page 13. So that kind of gives his view now. Now in order to make his view a little more precise lets draw a few distinctions. On page 87, Searle talks about two kinds of explanation and on that page uses, I think that's the page he uses the case of water in a kettle put on the stove and it's boiling now okay. So, yeah, right in the middle of the page there. Two kinds of explanation and this is. The reason we have to talk about this is so we can explain why he's going to say you can have mental

properties which are also physical. That's what we're doing now for the next few minutes. And in order to explain that you have to see what he says about explanation.

So he says, "Now suppose you put the pot on the stove and it's come to a boil" and suppose now someone says, "Why is the water boiling." And you can give there what he calls a macro macro explanation. That's perfectly satisfactory. You can say, "Well it's boiling because I put it on there and turned the fire on. It's been there for several minutes and that's why it's boiling." That's what he calls a macro macro explanation. And you know we can just speak English here between us friends. That just means from a large to a large. It means, here's a, if you wish a kind of gross event. I'm putting the pot on the stove. I'm turning the stove on. Stand there and wait. Okay, now there's another kind of an explanation and that is what he calls a micro macro explanation. And with that kind of. Also he calls these left right explanations. We can say horizontal explanations, but there's also a micro macro explanation, here is. Why is the water boiling? Well because the kinetic energy transmitted by the oxidization of hydrocarbons to the H<sub>2</sub>O molecules has caused them to move so rapidly that the internal pressure of the molecule movements equals the external air pressure which pressure in turn is explained by the movement to the molecules of which the external air is composed. So that's why it's boiling. And this is a micro macro explanation because we take the crude phenomena, the water going like that in the pot and we try to explain it in terms of the tiny parts of the water.

Now all the sophisticated argument aside, if you can just get that simple idea of a micro macro explanation then I think we can go on to his view of consciousness and the brain. And what he wants to say is that, the brain is going to be the macro and micro is going to be something like the cell structure of the brain, ultimately down to molecules and atoms and so on, but the cell structure of the brain particularly, the nerve tissues that make it up. And so this is

going to be. He also calls this a bottom up explanation. In an interesting metaphor in its own right. Has built into it a whole set of assumptions about what's up and what's down. And for those with interest such as you may have you keep that in mind cause this causation stuff is pretty tricky. And I once had a student some years ago, teaches now not Purdue, who wrote a paper on the identity thesis in which he proved panpsychism is proof simply this, that chemical processes and mental processes are identical so there aren't any chemical processes. Everything's mental.

Well if it's an identity, it's an identity isn't it, but you see the assumptions begin to slip out there. Turns out it's like, what was it? Some people are more equal than others. Everyone's equal, but some people are more equal than others. So this bottom up stuff that kind of gives you an idea whose more equal than others. Okay, so now the picture is going. Let me just read a nice quotation or two here for where you from page 89 and 90 of the book. And he's got built into this now. I mean the two supposedly solid theories on which all of this is based is the kinetic theory of matter and evolutionary theory of living forms. Supposedly that's the solid basis for it all. And so here's what he says, "The products of the evolutionary process organisms are made of subsystems called cells and some of these organisms develop subsystems of nerve cells which we think of as nervous systems. Furthermore, this is the crucial point, some extremely complex nervous systems are capable of causing and sustaining conscious states and processes." The language that Searle uses really does get a little ontologically sloppy, so I just pause over some of it. Note the language the nervous system is capable of causing and sustaining conscious states and processes. See, Searle talks a lot about properties and emergent properties, but even he knows though he doesn't really talk about it in a good way, he should clear all this up, he doesn't. Even he knows that properties don't just emerge. You don't have properties floating by. You have

states or events involving properties. And so now his language here is state and process. So conscious states and processes, that's what really shows up and these conscious states and paradigmatically have this property of intentionality. Others too, but I won't have to mess it up and I mean just think of this.

So now you got a state and it has this kind of property. So it's a state of consciousness. That means it's of or about something. Furthermore, and this is the crucial point. Sorry I read that specifically, here we go. Specifically, certain big collections of nerve cells, that is brains, cause and sustain conscious states and processes. So that's going to be the theory now. And these properties are going to be counted as emergent properties, not because they sort of come out of nothing supposedly, but they are irreducible to what they come out of. That's going to be the theory. He's going to call them emergent properties and, but they're not reducible now. You can't reduce them. They're radically different in kind and brains, when he says brains cause and sustain conscious states and processes, he really doesn't mean that brains do it. He means that something like the finer structure of the brain.

Okay, so now, I want to give you a picture that will help you get it. If you got the picture of the pot and the boiling water and the molecules and their behavior causing the boiling. You have to think of the brain as kind of boiling and out of it is coming thoughts, thoughts. I want to give you a funny piece of language from the 19th century that was intended seriously that might help you do it. An old philosopher in the 19th century by the name of Watt (unclear). He said the brain secretes thought like the liver secretes bile. This was a kind of catch phrase of 19th century German materialism, no wonder it disappeared, but it certainly left some nice things behind. Also a very famous philosopher the name Ernst Haeckel of that period, also significant as an educator it turns out. Wrote a book called the puzzle of the universe or something like that.

Which has recently been republished for some strange reason. Actually now people are republishing a lot of stuff because they're out from under the copyright and the publisher can get all the money. That's about the only reason you could think. See this picture here now and now, now I want to force it a little bit because this really does turn out to be important for understanding I think in criticizing Searle. He really does want to locate consciousness in the brain or on the brain. It's not quite clear how to how we want to do this, but he says over and over and there's absolutely no reason whatsoever for saying this except he thinks that consciousness itself causes things like the waving of the hands and the jaws and the motions of the body and so it kind of interestingly taken in by a Cartesian mistake. He thinks that in order for a mental event to cause the body to do things, it has to be located up here in the head where the nervous system as it were starts, at least on its way out. You know. And so, Searle once you actually talks as if somehow it were it would be sort of appropriate to talk about the brain as if it were boiling, the phenomena of thought is located there. Kind of oozing out and coming into emerging and coming into existence.

Notice what he says here, I'm still on the bottom of 89. Going to use this and the next page or two as a kind of central focus in case you want to look into it later. Now he says something very interesting, I'm going to reread the sentence I just read, "Specifically, certain big collections of nerve cells that his brains cause and sustain conscious states and processes." We do not know the details of how brains cause consciousness. On Page 91 he says, bottom of 91, "We are at present." See now, every little word counts you know because you pick that up immediately. You see we are present. The idea is that, well we are going to do better. We are at present very far from having an adequate theory of the neurophysiology of consciousness, but, back to the bottom of 89, "Nevertheless, even though we don't have even though we're very far,

even though we don't know the details of how brains cause consciousness." You know, you want to understand the logic here because otherwise you will say, "Well then why are we saying that they do." And course the logic here is they have to, they have to.

One of the, well I'll save that for later. Here's what he says, "But we know for a fact that this occurs in human brains. We know for a fact that it occurs in human brains." So on page 90 there's an italicized summary of his view. "Consciousness in short is a biological feature of human and certain animal brains. It is caused by neuro biological processes and is as much a part of the natural biological order as any other biological features such as photosynthesis, digestion, or mitosis." This is the first stage, really it's the whole game, but he says this is the first stage and understanding the place of consciousness within our world view. That's really the purpose of the book is to locate consciousness in our naturalistic world view.

I think I've said it now alright. So this you know this isn't a double aspect view of consciousness as it's often called. This is as pretty straightforward causal theory. There are conscious states, there are physical states. Conscious states are not one way of describing physical states and physical states are not one way of describing conscious states. They're different. They are, have to be different because their cause it related in terms of cause and effect and the cause and effect though is partially simultaneous they do, they don't run exactly in the same time, but in any case they are clearly.