

TRULINCS 23038076 - LUMMUS, ALLAN CRAIG - Unit: BAS-T-A

FROM: 23038076

TO: ~~@PrisonMinistry~~ The

SUBJECT: mp76 Reading Dennett

DATE: 09/25/2014 06:38:01 PM

mp76 Reading Dennett: Materialism, Dualism and Religion 9.25.14

I finished Daniel Dennett's Darwin's Dangerous Idea (and previously Consciousness Explained and Freedom Evolves), both give a clear critique of dualism and in favor of materialism with its unitary conception of reality. What I liked most is its stand in-between a simplistic (he calls it greedy) reductionism of skinner and company that explain all of reality by a single factor and various forms of dualism that offer various extra material entities or causes that effect the real world. The latter both includes all religions with their Gods, spirits, souls, etc and interestingly enough a humanist variant which seeks to enthrone the human mind or consciousness itself as a God-like causal actor (Stephen Jay Gould and Noam Chomsky are examples of the latter).

Dennett's view is that consciousness and all its various manifestations (Culture, religion, Art, Creativity, Enlightenment) are all rooted within a single material reality. Not reducible to a single synapse firing, but certainly tied to a complex interplay between brain neurology and in the learned tools of the mind (culture, language, history, etc) which begins and inseparable from the brain's biological functioning. Our ideas about the supernatural and the natural (Gods, sprits, souls, Heaven, Hell, Reincarnation on one side and the body, earth, and the senses on the other) are all very real components in our consciousness and interacting to produce experiences that shape how we view the world and interact with it. Dennett's materialism takes the world of culture and the mind very seriously and freely celebrates the wonderful products and personal experiences that result from these human creations. But in the end all of these are still materially produced, transmitted and rooted.

I was talking with a friend about why I thought reincarnation did not make sense to me. He expressed the idea that because so much is beyond our minds to understand, we should not rule out reincarnation. While agreeing that one cannot prove it does not exist, one should not automatically accept that set of ideas associate with reincarnation. After explaining how I saw the world, he said I was a materialist. I flinched, not because it was not accurate, but because for religious people materialism has lots of associated subjective valuations. One is the assumption materialism means Dennett's greedy reductionism (BF Skinner's behavioral science or EO Wilson's early version of Sociobiology). Humans can and do choose to act over and against the influence of our genetic heritage. We are not simply animals in larger bodies. Our consciousness has evolved a very sophisticated set of tools (culture, language, history, etc) to operate in the world. I don't need to rely on any extra material sources (soul, sprit, God) to explain the wonderfully mind-blowing diversity. The fact that we cannot connect all the dots to explain how every manifestation is produced from the first neuron to the creation of an art object or a child's recognition of her mother's face doesn't mean that it is still not a materially produced process needing no extra ultimate source or cause.

But my view of a unitary materialist world is in the end just a theory that I choose. I cannot prove that my life is superior only that it makes sense to me and gives my life meaning. So how do I choose? I choose the one that makes the most sense to me and helps me live a happy meaningful life. What I like about mindfulness (Filtered through my gurus who have I have mentioned on other posts) is that meaning and happiness lies in what I do in the present (as conditioned by what happened in the past and as it influences my and others future). There is no ultimate cause to make it the only right answer, but a choice that can be tested each moment by my own experience. My tests have confirmed the theory of a unitary material world with an ever evolving human culture and personal consciousness.

allan lummus #23038076 | pobox 1010 bastrop, tx 78602 | mindful prisoner | betweenthebars.org