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MAGICAL THINKING

Andrew M. Bailey

According to theists, God is an immaterial thinking being. The main question of this article is whether theism supports the view that we too are immaterial thinking beings. I shall argue in the negative. Along the way, I will also explore some implications in the philosophy of mind following from the observation that, on theism, God's mentality is in a certain respect magical.

"God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." – Westminster Shorter Catechism

"Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter." – Grand Master Yoda

1. Introduction

The epigraphs above express two theses I want to work through in this article—roughly, theism and dualism. What I want to know is this: does the first support the second? Can we reason from theism to dualism? Beyond any intrinsic interest, here are two reasons to care about these questions. First: while the conjunction of theism and dualism is common enough, a growing cadre of philosophers *affirm* theism and *deny* dualism.¹ If there is a path from theism to dualism, this is a mistake, perhaps even a grave one. I hope, then, to identify and assess some arguments from theism to dualism. I shall focus especially on arguments from the *simplicity* of dualism, given theism, and the apparent *impossibility* of wholly material thinking beings. Second, a path from theism to dualism would uncover evidence to be accounted for in any final assessment of theism. If theists are indeed saddled with dualism and dualism is implausible, for example, then dualism is a liability. If dualism is instead plausible, and better comports with theism than its denial, then dualism is no liability for theist; rather it *confirms* theism.²

¹I have in mind philosophers like Lynne Rudder Baker, Kevin Corcoran, Hud Hudson, Nancey Murphy, Trenton Merricks, and Peter van Inwagen. For critical discussion, see all the papers in Loftin and Farris, *Christian Physicalism?* For a general sense of how theists (and Christians in particular) might think about materialism, see van Inwagen, "Dualism and Materialism" and Corcoran, "Why Should a Christian Embrace Materialism?"

²Arguments to this effect appear in Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God* and Swinburne, "The Argument from Souls to God."



2. Terms

Pinning down the mental is no easy task. But for now, let us say that something *thinks* just in the case that it either believes, doubts, hopes, or desires that something or other (stands in a *propositional* state, as they say) or is *conscious* (stands in a *phenomenal* state—a state such that there is something it is like to be in it).

Something is wholly material, let us say, just in the case that it enjoys a decomposition into items, all of which have narrowly physical properties and none of which think.³ The idea here is roughly that to be entirely material is to have parts at some level or other that are characterized by fundamental physics, but that do not themselves exhibit any mentality (this second condition rules out various kinds of idealism). Rocks, sheets of paper, and arm bracers, one suspects, satisfy this condition. For they decompose into parts treated by fundamental physics that do not think. Spirits, angels, demons, and gods are rather different; for at every level of decomposition they have parts, proper or otherwise, that either think or are not characterized by fundamental physics.

Human persons are those things to which we ordinarily refer with first person pronouns.⁴ Among human persons are those things we sometimes call “non-cognitivists,” “teenagers,” “politicians,” “foreigners,” and “student-athletes.” You are a human person. So am I.

Materialism about human persons (henceforth, “materialism”) is the thesis that we human persons are wholly material; pure dualism (henceforth, “dualism”) is the competing claim that we are wholly immaterial.⁵ Variations of materialism—on the assumption that brains and human animals are wholly material—include brainism or animalism. Note that I am here concerned mostly with materialism in this narrow sense—materialism about *us* (as opposed to a wider thesis according to which all concrete things are wholly material).

Theism is the thesis that God exists. Theists typically say that God is the almighty creator of the cosmos, knowledgeable indeed, and supremely good. These are intriguing claims, to be sure, and the creation claim shall play a role in the arguments to come. But in this article, I shall mostly focus on another widely affirmed divine attribute. I shall focus on the claim that God is an immaterial thinking thing. The claim has two elements. First, immateriality. This is what theists express, I think, when they say that God is a spirit. Spirits, unlike rocks or body-soul composites, aren’t even partly material. Spirits, if such there be, haven’t got even a bit of matter within them,

³I say a great deal more about how to understand the terms at play in this definition in Bailey, “Material Through and Through.” I also argue that materialism so defined is compatible with the denial of various supervenience and grounding theses. That something is wholly material does *not* entail that all its features supervene on or are grounded in its (or any other items’s) narrowly physical features.

⁴This will do for our purposes. For a more careful treatment, see van Inwagen, “What Do We Refer to When We Say ‘I?’”

⁵I briefly discuss *impure* or *union* dualism below.

crude or otherwise. They are, as Grand Master Yoda notes above, “luminous beings.” Second, thinking. God thinks. This is what theists express, I think, when they say that God believes various things (all truths, for example) or that God desires that none should perish, or that God is sad when people do bad things. I suspect this divine mentality also follows from other features attributed to God. A god that neither hopes nor desires nor believes could not keep promises or be jealous, joyful, patient, holy, just, wise, or good.⁶

3. *Mind for theists*

The theism now in view—the thesis that there is a God, maker of the cosmos, who is wholly immaterial and who thinks—has consequences in the philosophy of mind.

First, it is possible that a wholly immaterial being thinks. Thinking is not reserved only for, say, wholly material or partly material creatures. Arguments for materialism according to which only material beings exist or can think (because thinking requires a brain, say, or because the concept of an immaterial being is incoherent)⁷ are non-starters for the theist.

Second, no identity theory will do. Identity theories of the kind I have in mind maintain that, for every mental property or state, there is a physical property or state to which it is identical.⁸ The theist must reject such theories.⁹ For God (or for Christians, at least one person within the Godhead) has some mental properties or states and exhibits no physical properties or states at all.¹⁰

Third, it is possible for a wholly immaterial being to causally interact with the material world. This follows, at least, if God’s creative activity in making the cosmos involves causal interaction. And it would certainly appear to. There are many ways things can causally interact: kissing, punching, stretching, pushing, and so on. Making, as when God called the cosmos into being some thirteen billion years ago, falls among such interactions. Making is a kind of causal relation. Arguments for materialism according to which only material things can interact with the material world¹¹ are also non-starters for the theist.

⁶The point here is most vivid given “theistic personalism.” For more on this view and its apparent contrast with “classical theism,” see Davies, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 9–14.

⁷As in, respectively, Caruthers, *The Nature of the Mind*, 152–153 or Smith and Jones, *The Philosophy of Mind*, 46–49.

⁸As in Place, “Is Consciousness a Brain Process?” or Smart, “Sensations and Brain Processes.”

⁹Theists who deny that there are any properties at all, whether mental or physical or otherwise—nominalists—will have a rather different reason to reject identity theories.

¹⁰What panentheists should say here is an interesting question that extends beyond the scope of this article. For discussion of panentheism and its consequences, see Göcke, “Panentheism and Classical Theism,” “A Reply to Lataster and Bilimoria’s ‘Panentheism,’” Mullins, “The Difficulty with Demarcating Panentheism,” and Lataster and Bilimoria, “Panentheism: What It Is and Is Not.”

¹¹As in Caruthers, *The Nature of the Mind*, 149–152 or Kim, “Against Cartesian Dualism.”

Here's the upshot. A fairly minimal theistic hypothesis is incompatible with a variety of popular arguments or slogans in the philosophy of mind that are broadly materialistic. They encapsulate various flavors and dimensions of materialism. But for the theist, they just won't do. At the end of this article I will suggest one argument for materialism that *is* compatible with theism. For now, I concede that things don't look so good for the conjunction of theism and materialism.

4. Simplicity

In fact, things look downright bad. For the theistic materialist, unlike the theistic dualist, is committed to an unattractive theoretical complexity. To see why, consider this matrix:

	Thinking	Not-thinking
Wholly material		
Not-wholly material		

Metaphysical theories differ over which boxes are filled or unfilled. According to one form of radical eliminative materialism, for example, only the upper-right-hand box is filled; there are only material things, and none of them think.¹² Ontological nihilists say no boxes are filled.¹³

There is something attractive about one-box or no-box theories. They are simple. Of course, one shouldn't, on that basis alone, insist on a one-box or no-box theory. Any reason to think that a box is filled counts against theories according to which it isn't. If you've ever seen a rock (an unthinking material being), for example, you've acquired some evidence against any no-box theory. Simplicity isn't everything. But it is one important factor to be weighed in theory choice. Unfilled boxes confer simplicity benefits on a theory. Filled boxes incur complexity costs.

We may use this framework to build a case against the conjunction of theism and materialism. The theistic materialist says that at least two boxes are filled: immaterial things that think (God), and wholly material things that think (us). The dualist, by contrast, need only affirm that one box is filled: immaterial things that think (God and us).¹⁴ The dualist theist therefore enjoys an important and categorical simplicity advantage over the materialist. Put a little differently: if we can get away with fewer filled boxes, we should. We can get by with fewer filled boxes. So we should. And we, by theism, already know a bit about which boxes are filled—we know that at least one thinking thing, God, is wholly immaterial—so let's

¹²Ramsey, "Eliminative Materialism."

¹³Turner, "Ontological Nihilism."

¹⁴Ordinary dualists and materialists may think that other boxes are filled, of course. They may affirm, for example, that there are rocks (unthinking material beings) or Platonic properties (unthinking immaterial beings). But these affirmations wouldn't follow from dualism or materialism; they are optional auxiliaries independent in their theoretical vice or virtue.

fill that box and be done with it. There's just no need to posit anything at all in that pesky upper-left-hand box.

There's something to this argument. It uncovers a theoretical advantage theistic dualism has over theistic materialism. I do not think the argument is dispositive, though.

First, the simplicity advantage that accrues to dualism is minimal. If we switch the matrix used to measure simplicity, we're in a position to see why:

	Thinking	Not-thinking
Embodied		
Not-embodied		

The dualist and the materialist will agree that *both* left-hand boxes are to be filled. For we are embodied thinking things. Even if we aren't our bodies, we still *have* bodies. And God (or for Christians, at least one person within the Godhead) is a non-embodied thinking thing. God has no body. There is no difference here between dualists and materialists. And so there is no simplicity difference. This little matrix switch shows that simplicity considerations are sensitive to framing. What one wants here is an *argument* that the first matrix (as opposed to, or in addition to the second) is an appropriate measure of theoretical complexity or simplicity. Absent such an argument, dualism's simplicity advantage is not strong.

Second, it is unclear that counting filled boxes is a good way to measure theoretical complexity. Here is an alternative: count, not filled boxes, but filled rows or columns. What we're trying to measure here is *categorical* complexity: how many *kinds* of things a metaphysical theory affirms. Filled boxes indicate *intersections* of categories affirmed by a theory. But it is the categories themselves—filled rows or columns—that indicate complexity. If this is correct, then theistic dualism and theistic materialism are closer to being on a par. They both affirm that the "thinking" column is filled in both matrices. Dualists who think that there are wholly material beings or that we are embodied, furthermore, will agree with the materialist that both the "wholly material" and "embodied" rows are filled. The only kind of dualist who can claim victory here over the materialist is one who denies that there are wholly material objects at all (a certain kind of radical idealist, say); according to this sort of theory, both the "wholly material" and "embodied" rows are unfilled. There is something attractive about radical idealism.¹⁵ But it's not for everyone; I'd wager that most theistic dualists think that we have bodies and that there are wholly material beings. I conclude, then, that most dualists cannot help themselves to this style of argument.

¹⁵See Segal and Goldschmidt, "The Necessity of Idealism."

Third, there are theistic reasons to doubt that theoretical simplicity indicates truth, especially when measured by unfilled rows, columns, or boxes. Theists believe that there is an almighty and creative God. Many say that God takes pleasure in the sheer variety of creation. With a God like *that* on the loose, a desert landscape is not quite what one should expect. A creative and powerful God interested in bringing variety into being—in seeing to it that all sorts of possibilities are actual—might well fill all manner of boxes, simplicity be damned.¹⁶ Indeed, on this plenitudinous vision of theism, simplicity arguments like the one considered above get things exactly backwards. So long as these boxes *can* be filled, there is some reason to think they are, somewhere and somewhen, filled.

The caveat—so long as they *can* be filled—is important. The theistic case for plenitude given here succeeds only if it is indeed possible for a wholly material being to think.

5. Impossibility

Can material objects think? Maybe not. That would be bad news for materialism. So Alvin Plantinga: “No material objects can think . . . But of course I can think; therefore I am not a material object.”¹⁷ Fair enough. But what reason is there to think that no material object can think? Plantinga appeals to this Leibnizian thought experiment:

It must be confessed, moreover, that perception, and that which depends on it, are inexplicable by mechanical causes, that is by figures and motions. And supposing there were a machine so constructed as to think, feel and have perception, we could conceive of it as enlarged and yet preserving the same proportions, so that we might enter it as into a mill. And this granted, we should only find on visiting it, pieces which push one against another, but never anything by which to explain a perception.¹⁸

Leibniz’s point is that there can be no full and purely mechanistic explanation of thinking. Step inside a thinking machine, and all you’ll find is various parts pushing and pulling, all without any explanation of thought. Leibniz’s point is especially potent when applied to instances of *phenomenal consciousness*—thoughts where there is *something it is like* to have them, such

¹⁶Plantinga, in a rather different context, puts things this way: “Many seem to think of God as like a classical artist, one who prizes economy, restraint, discipline. But perhaps God is more like a romantic artist; perhaps he revels in glorious variety, riotous creativity, overflowing fecundity, uproarious activity. Why else would he create a million species of beetles?” (“What is ‘Intervention?’,” 388). Also: “What are the attractions of economy for Him? Creatures limited in energy, power and time have need for economy; God suffers from no such limitations” (“Science: Augustinian or Duhemian,” 386).

¹⁷Plantinga, “Materialism and Christian Belief,” 106. There are, of course, other arguments that material objects can’t think; see, e.g., Barnett, “You are Simple,” and my reply in Bailey, “You Needn’t Be Simple.” I focus here on the impossibility argument because, as I’ll show, theism itself gives the materialist resources to reject that argument.

¹⁸*Monadology*, 17. This translation is quoted in Plantinga, “Materialism and Christian Belief,” and appears in Leibniz, *Leibniz Selections*, 536. For a similar thought, see also Foster, *The Immaterial Self*, 84.

as vivid sensory experiences or pains.¹⁹ Even if we might find in the thinking machine a satisfying mechanistic explanation for the machine's belief that two and two is four, there can be no such explanation for the machine's being in pain. The point extends beyond simple mechanistic explanations. Other physical interactions—gravity, electromagnetism, and so on—cannot explain thought either. But were materialism true, there would have to be such an explanation. Absent one, it would be entirely mysterious—indeed, seemingly impossible—that a material thing could think.

This impossibility argument has seemed potent to many. Materialists had better have a good reply.

6. Magic

And they do.

A phenomenon is *magical*, let us say, to the degree that is modally and explanatorily independent of the material world. Magic comes in degrees. *Pure* magic swings entirely free of the material world.²⁰ But of course, there might be less pure forms of magic, too—phenomena that depend only in part on, or are explained only in part by, the material world. To be clear, I don't use "magical" as a term of abuse. For one, theists like me believe in magic in the sense at hand. All sorts of facts about God are, to some degree, modally and explanatorily independent of the material world: they can obtain without a material world at all, and are not explained by laws of nature or the activity of electrons or ion channels or gravitational waves or what have you.

Consider now God's thought that the sum of two and two is four. Or God's decision to create the cosmos. Or the pleasure God takes in pure cogitation. These would appear to be instances of mentality. I shall suppose they are. These would also appear to be instances of pure magic. If that's right—and I shall suppose it is—then the theist is committed, not just to the possibility of magic in general, but to the possibility of *pure magical thinking*. There is, as it were, no *how* to these thoughts of God's.²¹ They are not to be accounted for by the firing of neurons or the electromagnetic properties of particles, or anything like that at all. If you ask "*how* does God manage to think?" hoping for a mechanistic or material explanation, you will be frustrated. No such explanation is forthcoming.²² The theist,

¹⁹Block, "Confusion about a Function of Consciousness," 230.

²⁰One way to make things precise here is to identify various flavors and kinds of modal and explanatory relations that might tether the mental to the physical. For a good start, see the remarks in Rasmussen ("Against Nonreductive Physicalism," 335) on *basic mentality*. *Pure* magic involves basic mentality in all three of Rasmussen's senses.

²¹My claim here is not that *all* of God's thoughts are pure magic (perhaps God is essentially omniscient and so every belief God has about the material world is modally tethered to facts about the material world). Rather, I say that at least some of God's thoughts are not so tethered.

²²The absence of any mechanistic or material explanation does not imply that there are no other kinds of explanations for God's thoughts, and in that sense there may yet be a *how* to things. For all I've said here, for example, a divine functionalism might be true: God might think because God has certain (non-physical, of course) properties that stand in just the right causal relations.

furthermore, embraces this magical thinking with open arms. The independence of God's mentality from the material is not an unwelcome or costly consequence to be hidden away or discounted.

Theism invites a magical philosophy of mind. And this theory undercuts the impossibility argument. Here's why. Leibniz and Plantinga and many others have wanted to know *how* a composite material object could manage to think; is it by pushing, or pulling, or what? *How* does it all work?

There is no (mechanistic or material—a qualification I'll suppress in the sequel) *how*. We are wholly material beings, to be sure, and in exactly the sense described at the outset of this article. We are made only of unthinking items treated by fundamental physics; if you made a list of all our parts no soul or ghost or spirit would appear on it. But our thinking is magical. It is modally and explanatorily independent of the material world. Our thinking does not succumb to explanation in terms of the workings of the material world. It cannot be explained by the motions or shapes or charges of particles. Or fields. Or gravitational waves. Or anything like that at all. It is magic. There is no *how*.²³

This is a mysterious view.²⁴ Of course it is. It is inevitable that some will scoff. The naturalist—who maintains that there is no magic, and that magical theories are off-limits or otherwise intellectually naughty—will scoff for familiar reasons. But this article isn't addressed to naturalists. I instead address fellow theists who heap scorn on magical thinking. The scornful theist I imagine here will insist that thinking demands an explanation, and that the answer given here—that thinking could be magical—incur a grave theoretical cost.

This retort is almost irresistible. And yet, it is wrong. For the theist, magical thinking is a mystery already accepted. The theoretical costs accrued by its mysteriousness have, if you like, *already been priced in*. For God's thinking is magical. It is already possible, *by the theist's own lights*, that something should think even though its thoughts are not to be accounted for by the workings of the material world. So though the claim that magical thinking incurs some grave theoretical cost may be a strike against theism, it is not, *given theism*, a strike against materialism.

²³Corcoran ("Why Should a Christian Embrace Materialism about Human Persons?") describes a view according to which materialism is true but physicalism is not. In his words, "I believe that human persons are *entirely* composed of physical stuff, but deny the claim that there are no human person facts over and above compositional and related structural facts" ("Why Should a Christian Embrace Materialism about Human Persons?," 286). The thesis developed in this section—magical materialism—is Corcoran's view on steroids. Not only are there facts about human thinking "over and above" bare physical facts, the former are in every sense *independent* of the latter.

²⁴Though it involves mystery, the thesis that thinking is pure magic is distinct from *mysterianism*. According to that view, it is (in principle or necessarily) a mystery how the workings of material parts should give rise to thinking, though they nonetheless do. A magical view, by contrast, holds that the workings of material parts do not give rise to thinking in the first place. See Rowlands, "Mysterianism."

The upshot of all this is that the theistic materialist has an interesting and dialectically potent reply to the impossibility argument. That argument presupposes that, if we are wholly material, there must be some explanation of our thinking in terms of the workings of the material world. It is open to the theistic materialist to reply that our thought is like God's—magical and therefore not explained by or modally tethered to the workings of the material world.

7. *Mystery*

Given theism, the impossibility argument doesn't succeed. But it does suggest another argument for dualism. To understand that argument, it's helpful to first consider an important reply to the impossibility argument by a theistic materialist.

According to Peter van Inwagen, dualists and materialists stand in parity. What Leibniz's thought experiment shows us is that *thinking* is mysterious—apparently impossible—not the hypothesis that a *material* being thinks. For it is equally mysterious—apparently impossible—that an *immaterial* being should think.²⁵ Since this is a problem that equally plagues both dualists and materialists, it is no reason to reject materialism.

Even if van Inwagen is correct—if it is mysterious, apparently impossible—that an *immaterial* being should think, materialism isn't yet off the hook. For Leibniz's insight can still be used in an argument for dualism that has special force given theism.

That argument unfolds as follows. An important dimension of the choice is the multiplication, not of entities, but of *mysteries*. Positing more mysteries—things that sure look impossible—than is necessary is a theoretical vice. On the assumption of theism, dualism has an important advantage here. The dualist affirms just one mystery—that immaterial things can think (God and us). But the materialist affirms *two*: both that immaterial things can think (God), and that material things can think as well (us). Two mysteries are worse than one. Point to the dualist.²⁶

The argument can be strengthened. The deepest mystery here is that something could think *by way of the activity of its parts*. That is the mystery

²⁵van Inwagen: "It seems to me that the notion of a physical thing that thinks is a mysterious notion, and that Leibniz's thought-experiment brings out this mystery very effectively. We must remember, however, that our present question is not whether the physicalist is faced with a mystery; our question is whether dualism is to be preferred to physicalism. If thinking is a mystery for the physicalist, this fact will be relevant to our question only if it can be shown that the dualist is not confronted with the same mystery or some corresponding mystery. And, I believe, the dualist is. For it is thinking itself that is the source of the mystery of a thinking physical thing. The notion of a non-physical thing that thinks is, I would argue, equally mysterious. How any sort of thing could think is a mystery" (*Metaphysics*, 235). See also Corcoran and Sharpe, "Neuroscience and the Human Person," 133.

²⁶So Plantinga: "Suppose we take Christian theism seriously. Then we are already committed to the existence of a thinking immaterial being: God himself . . . The appearance of impossibility in an immaterial object's thinking, if there were such an appearance, would therefore be an illusion" ("Materialism and Christian Belief," 120.)

materialists must affirm and that dualists deny. It is a price that the materialist must pay and that the dualist need not. Thus Plantinga:

“How does an electron manage to have a charge?” is an improper question. There’s no how to it . . . The same is true of a self and thinking: it’s not done by underlying activity or workings; it’s a basic and immediate activity of the self. But then the important difference, here, between materialism and immaterialism is that if a material thing managed to think, it would have to be by way of the activity of its parts.²⁷

Point, again, to the dualist; or so the mystery argument goes.

In reply, I’ll contend that the theistic materialist has some interesting and dialectically potent resources with which to resist. In fact, I’ll show that, on theism, a version of the mystery argument can be turned into a case *for* materialism.

Dualists who would press the mystery argument face a dilemma. Our thinking is either magical on their view, or it is not. If it is magical, then the dualist can hardly complain when the materialist resorts to magic as well. If it is not magical, then the materialist may appropriate the very explanatory or modal relations that the dualist herself countenances (tethering our thinking and the activity of the material world). In neither case does the materialist invoke more or deeper mystery than does the dualist. So in neither case does the mystery argument succeed as an argument for dualism over materialism.

That’s my reply in a nutshell. I’ll now work through the dilemma’s horns more carefully.

Let us suppose that dualism is true, and that the thinking of human beings is magical. We think, to be sure. But we do not think by way of the activity of the parts of our bodies. There is, rather, no *how* to things.

The mystery argument attempts to saddle the materialist with a mystery: that material things think by way of the activity of their parts. The magical reply is by now familiar. It goes like this: No. Material things like us can think, to be sure, but there is no *how* to it. Our thinking is, as the dualist says, magical.

The magical dualist here under consideration cannot consistently reply that magical thinking is bad or implausible or otherwise intellectually off-limits. Magical thinking is a component of her own view. For dualism to enjoy a dialectical advantage here, there would have to be an asymmetry between these two theses:

Soul Magic. People (who are not wholly material) think, but not in any sense by way of the activity of the parts of their bodies. You have a brain, sure; but in no sense at all is your thinking modally or explanatorily tethered to that brain or the activity of its parts. Your thinking is, instead, magical.

Body Magic. People (who are wholly material) think, but not in any sense by way of the activity of the parts of their bodies. You have a brain, sure; but

²⁷Plantinga, “Materialism and Christian Belief,” 117.

in no sense at all is your thinking modally or explanatorily tethered to that brain or the activity of its parts. Your thinking is, instead, magical.

I propose that Soul Magic and Body Magic—mysterious though they may be—are on a par when it comes to mystery. Perhaps they are quite badly off here, so badly off as to not even count as theories. But they are in this respect the same. *Both*, I think, have a sheen of apparent impossibility or puzzlingness. Given this symmetry, there is no argument here for dualism against materialism.

Some dualists sound like they affirm a magical view of thinking, that there's no *how* to things when it comes to thinking of an immaterial self or soul. They sound like they opt for the first horn of my dilemma. But there is another horn to consider. Perhaps dualism is true, but our thinking is still modally or explanatorily tethered to the material. In another context, Plantinga correctly notes: "Localization studies show that when certain kinds of mental activity occur, certain parts of the brain display increased blood flow and increased electrical activity . . . mental activity is also in a certain important way *dependent* on brain activity and brain condition."²⁸

Plantinga is not alone here. A common refrain among contemporary dualists is that their view is fully compatible with the apparent truth that the activity of our minds is somehow generated by the activity of various parts within our bodies (and in particular, our brains). A few quick examples demonstrate the point. So E.J. Lowe:

In these terms, then, the dualist may be construed as holding that a person is not to be identified with his or her body, nor with any part of it, such as the brain. On this view, a *person*—*not* the person's body or brain—feels pain and has desires, even if it is true to say that a person feels pain or has desires *only because* his or her body or brain is in a certain physical state.²⁹

Charles Taliaferro:

I not only sense and perceive, but think and form judgments *with my brain*, not in the sense that my brain is a mere tool in these activities.³⁰

William Hasker:

On the other hand, the commissurotomy and multiple personality evidence, along with much, much else, strongly suggests that the *source* of conscious experience is to be found in the brain and nervous system . . . And there is a great deal more evidence that shows the role of the brain in *generating* conscious experiences of various sorts.³¹

J.P. Moreland:

Consider, for example, the discovery that if one's mirror neurons are damaged, then one cannot feel empathy for another. How are we to explain this?

²⁸Plantinga, "Against Materialism," 22, emphasis original.

²⁹Lowe, "Substance Dualism," 441, emphasis original.

³⁰Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God*, 117, emphasis added.

³¹Hasker, "Persons and the Unity of Consciousness," 183–184, emphasis added.

. . . [On] substance dualism, a feeling of empathy is an irreducible state of consciousness in the soul whose obtaining *depends (while embodied) on the firing of mirror neurons*.³²

Eric LaRock and Robin Collins:

Moreover, most contemporary dualists hold to a naturalistic approach [on which] . . . the human soul derives certain properties from the human brain . . . Very few, if any, noteworthy dualists have denied that “soul” *causally depends in a very detailed way* on the physical.³³

Finally, William G. Lycan (a dualism-friendly materialist):

What dualist ever said or even implied that the mind is dependent on the brain for nothing more than sensory experience as input and volitional executions as output? Descartes himself knew very well that the mental *depended in a detailed way* upon the brain.³⁴

The dualists I’ve quoted differ in their vocabulary, but they all seem to affirm that *some* dependence relation holds between mind and body (and in particular, the brain). The relation may be contingent. It may only be one of efficient causation. It may be strictly limited to cases involving embodied human persons. And it may carry only a partial rather than a full explanation, as when the activity of a brain *contributes to* or *helps* to generate thinking activity in a soul. But it holds nonetheless. Our thinking is not magical; it is tethered.³⁵

Where *souls* are those wholly immaterial things we are supposed to be, I’ll put the general thesis of the second horn of my dilemma—an abstraction of what the dualists above seem to agree on—as this claim:

Tethered Soul: When an embodied human soul is in a mental state *m*, the parts of her body are in a physical state *p* such that she is in *m* at least partly because the parts of her body are in *p*.

The idea here is simple. When you think, it’s at least partly a result of (partly rooted in, partly grounded by, a contingent consequence of, etc.) activity in your body. Our thinking is not pure magic. It is at least partly tethered. Thus tethered dualism.

I’ll now advance two materialist-friendly replies. The first will rebut the mystery argument by appropriating the central insight of tethered dualism. The second will suggest a turn of that argument that supports materialism over dualism.

³²Moreland, “In Defense of a Thomistic-like Dualism,” 107, emphasis added.

³³LaRock and Collins, “Saving our Souls from Materialism,” 138–140, emphasis added. See also Collins, “Scientific Case for the Soul,” 233–235.

³⁴Lycan, “Redressing Substance Dualism,” 29, emphasis added.

³⁵Koons offers a useful taxonomy of various tethering relations the substance dualist might opt for (“Against Emergent Dualism,” 378–383). On the intended reading, Tethered Soul captures the disjunction of all of these. If any explanatory or modal relation at all binds thinking in a soul to the activity of various parts in the item in which it is embodied, then Tethered Soul is true.

First: an *appropriation*. It is open to the materialist to affirm a thesis *very much like* Tethered Soul, and so to eschew pure magic, just like the tethered dualist:

Tethered Body: when a human person is in a mental state *m*, her parts are in a physical state *p* such that she is in *m* at least partly because those parts are in *p*.³⁶

The materialist opting for Tethered Body may appropriate anything the dualist says on behalf of Tethered Soul. If Tethered Soul successfully captures the sense in which our thought is not magical, so too does Tethered Body. If Tethered Soul is sufficiently robust as to count as a genuine theory and not mere mystery-mongering (unlike Soul Magic and Body Magic say), then so too is Tethered Body. Tethered Soul and Body have the same theoretical virtues. And if Tethered Body has any theoretical vices—trading in mystery, for example—so too does Tethered Soul. Affirming Tethered Body, then, incurs no extra theoretical cost to the materialist. The mystery of Tethered Soul is no better than the mystery of Tethered Body. So reflection on these theses provides no argument for dualism against materialism.

Second: a *turn*. Tethered Body enjoys a significant advantage over Tethered Soul; reflection on this fact doesn't just undermine the mystery argument. It supports materialism over dualism.

According to tethered dualists, you think at least partly because some things disjoint from you have certain physical properties. Somehow, though the parts of your body are not parts of you, your mental life is generated by the activity of those items. That thought should come into being this way—leaping across the divide from body to soul, as it were—is a great mystery. Dualists who affirm Tethered Soul take on a cost.

We can illustrate with a variation on Leibniz's thought experiment. Step inside a huge and complicated contraption. Pulleys, levers, cogs, and spinning wheels surround you. It is a wonder to behold and would fill the heart of any machinist with delight. But the hypothesis that these mechanical workings could explain the thought of the machine as a whole is incredible. Now consider a second hypothesis: something *else* thinks because of those mechanical workings—some immaterial item that shares no parts at all with the machine. The first hypothesis is incredible. That is Leibniz's point. The second is *more* incredible. It has all the mystery of the first hypothesis and more to spare. For it says that activity of some physical items can explain, not the thinking of the machine, but something that doesn't even overlap the machine.

I do not claim that the revised thought experiment is a knock-down argument against dualism. It isn't. Nor do I claim that it is always bad

³⁶Union dualists who think we are partly material and partly immaterial (composed of body and soul, say) can affirm Tethered Body. So the turn I offer here counts as no strike against union dualism. That is as it should be, for my primary target in this article is, as noted at the outset, the *pure dualist*. For objections to union dualism, see Bailey, "The Priority Principle," 168–170.

to posit some immaterial thinking thing, as the second hypothesis does. Whatever theoretical costs to such have already been priced in for the theist, after all. Rather, adding that a soul's thinking is tethered to and explained in any way by the activity of a body incurs an additional theoretical cost. It is the extra *tie* here that is the problem, not the soul as such.

The cost of affirming Tethered Body alone, I submit, is comparatively modest. For Tethered Body does not require that any explanation or tethering tie can make the leap from the parts of one thing—a body—to another thing altogether—a soul. It says, instead, that the tethering tie binds the properties of a thing's parts to the thing itself. That something could think because *its* parts have physical properties strains credulity at least a little. I grant this. But that something could think because things that *aren't* its parts have physical properties strains credulity even more.

It is mysterious indeed how Tethered Body could be true. Materialists may well be stuck with that mystery. Too bad for materialists. Dualists opting for the second horn, however, are stuck with Tethered Soul—and that is worse. I conclude that tethered dualists don't have a case against materialism in the mystery argument. Indeed, by their very own lights, that argument reveals a weakness in dualism and a relative strength in materialism.

Since the mystery argument does not succeed in showing dualism over materialism in the case of either horn of my dilemma, I conclude that the argument does not succeed at all.

8. Impossibility (again)

I'll now briefly consider a variation on the impossibility argument. This variation takes the first horn of the dilemma I discuss above. The dualism in view insists on Soul Magic. I've claimed that the materialist can follow suit and insist on the parallel thesis, Body Magic. Since these theses are equally mysterious, I've claimed that dualism finds no advantage here. But that may have been a bit quick. Consider again a line quoted above: "The important difference, here, between materialism and immaterialism is that if a material thing managed to think, *it would have to be by way of the activity of its parts.*"³⁷ If Plantinga is right about this, there is still an important asymmetry between Soul Magic and Body Magic. There is antecedent reason to think that bodies are not magical. Everyone—even dualists and theists—can reasonably expect, that is, that the features of composite bodies generally enjoy at least partial explanation in terms of the features of their parts. Body Magic (but not Soul Magic) violates this reasonable antecedent expectation, and so incurs a significant theoretical cost. There is, after all, an asymmetry here between dualism and materialism, and all of this cuts against the view that material things can think after all.³⁸

³⁷Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," emphasis added.

³⁸Thanks to Joe Han and to referees for pressing points in this neighborhood.

I have no decisive refutation of this objection. But here are three replies.

First, this objection offers solace only to dualists willing to embrace Soul Magic. It applies only to the first horn of my dilemma. If the quotations given above in discussing the second horn are any indication, though, this is an unattractive minority position.

Second, the objection requires significant development and qualification before it can command assent. A general requirement, for example, that *every* property of a composite body must be explained by the properties of the composite's parts is implausible. A little statue that sits on my desk has the feature *being a gift from a student*; and yet that property doesn't appear to be explained by the parts of that statue. At best, the requirement would appear to only apply to *intrinsic* properties of composite bodies. One would then want an argument that the relevant mental properties are intrinsic. And with that qualification in place, the requirement will then amount to a ban on *strong emergence*.³⁹ An intriguing ban, to be sure, but also one in need of supporting argument. A reminder of the dialectical context strengthens my point here. It is the dualist, recall, who is trying to demonstrate that material beings cannot think. So the dualist really would seem to owe some arguments on behalf of the contentious premises of her demonstration, such as a ban on strong emergence. And those arguments had better not presuppose naturalism, or they will be unavailable to the theistic dualist most especially in view.

But perhaps the requirement isn't supposed to come from any argument. Perhaps it is basic and obvious. Well, it doesn't seem basic or obvious to *me*. And it's unclear to me that it should seem basic or obvious to anyone. The material world is significantly stranger than many might have guessed. This is an important lesson from twentieth century physics. In a world as odd as ours, what grounds do we have to insist that it follow neat rules about the explanation of wholes by their parts? Perhaps composite bodies have powers, even mental powers, not wholly explained by the physical features of their parts, that are beyond anything we'd expect given a strictly Newtonian physics.⁴⁰

9. *Magical materialism*

A peculiar view—magical materialism—has played an important role in this article. The view is more than peculiar. That the thinking of material beings could be pure magic, without any explanation from or modal ties

³⁹Where strong emergence, to a first approximation, is the claim that some wholes exhibit intrinsic properties that are not deducible even in principle from the properties and relations of their parts. Both "emergence" and emergence are difficult to pin down. Chalmers, "Strong and Weak Emergence" offers a helpful statement of what they might come to in both weak and strong varieties.

⁴⁰My suggestion here is consonant with *neutral monism*, on which see Stubenberg, "Neutral Monism." To be clear, my reply does not take the form "neutral monism, therefore not-this-dualist-objection." Rather, its form is "the dualist who would make this objection needs to rule out neutral monism, which is a significant dialectical burden."

to the material world is a brazen and even astonishing thesis. So I'll briefly explain why I take it seriously.⁴¹

One reason is implicit in the arguments so far. Magical materialism has an advantage when it comes to Leibniz's thought experiment. Magical materialists can give a precise diagnosis of where arguments in that neighborhood go wrong. They presuppose that there must be some *how* to things. But there isn't. The magical materialist thus has a tool by which to resist a powerful argument for dualism.

The point can be extended. The hard problem of consciousness is notoriously hard.⁴² The magical materialist can give a simple and compelling explanation of why this is so. It is hard to give an elegant explanation, or any explanation really, of consciousness in physical terms because consciousness is not like the rest of the natural world. Consciousness is independent and magical. The magical materialist need not, let me emphasize, dogmatically *insist* on magic. There may be some pleasing, elegant, and unified structure to the connection between the physical and the mental, a structure some simple equations can capture. Perhaps so. Every once in a while, after all, a Newton stands tall and demonstrates that apparently complicated and disparate phenomena are in fact united under elegant and simple laws. Were a convincing theory of tethered thought to emerge, all would then be light. And the magical element of the view would then be refuted or subject to serious qualification. But materialism would remain intact.

It may be objected that magical materialism is just plain old absurd, outrageous, or unacceptable. I have no quarrel with this objection. For I suspect that any coherent position in the metaphysics of mind is absurd or outrageous or unacceptable.⁴³ Maybe the complaint is that magical materialism is an irresponsible refusal to inquire rather than a proper theory. "It's magic" sounds goofy and more like "angels did it" than "there are lawlike relations between the mental and the physical, which laws are captured by the following simple equation."⁴⁴ Dialectical context matters

⁴¹For further arguments in support of magical materialism from the impossibility of certain kinds of tethering and from our capacity for moral responsibility, see, respectively, Bailey and Rasmussen, "How to Build a Thought" and "A New Puppet Puzzle."

⁴²Chalmers, "Facing Up." So "it is not an exaggeration to say that the history of "standard" physicalism, that is, the largely reductive physicalism preceding the contemporary emphasis on emergence, has been one of persistent failure" (Loose, et. al., *Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, 5).

⁴³For thorough argument to this effect, see Schwitzgebel, "Crazyist Metaphysics of Mind."

⁴⁴Churchland's complaints about dualism can be easily modified to target magical materialism: "Compare now what the [magical materialist] can tell us about the brain, and what he can do with that knowledge . . . Can the [magical materialist] tell us anything about the internal constitution of mind . . . ? Of the . . . elements that make it up? Of the laws that govern their behavior? Of the mind's structural connections with the body? Of the manner of its operations? Can he explain human capacities and pathologies in terms of its structures and its defects? . . . [Magical materialism] is less a theory of mind than it is an empty space waiting for a genuine theory of mind to be put in it" (*Matter and Consciousness*, 19).

here, though. The context of these arguments essentially involves dualism and theism. If *those* views are to be taken seriously and count as genuine theories, it is no less reasonable to give magical materialism a careful look. It might just be true.

I've focused in this section on the magical element of magical materialism. There is a materialism element too; it deserves attention. Since theists cannot help themselves to many of the usual arguments for materialism, I'll say why a theist might be tempted to embrace materialism at all. If theists should be materialists at all, I think it is on common sense grounds like these:

I have a height. I have mass, I take up space, and I've been seen. I've even been touched. These are obvious truths. They are obvious to non-philosophers, at least. And if they're true, I am a material object. For only a material object can have a height, a mass, take up space, and can be seen. And only material objects can be touched. I am not alone in having a height, a mass, taking up space, and being seen. So human persons are material objects.⁴⁵

You might take this argument to begin with premises about sentences we ordinarily affirm or are disposed to affirm. That would not be a strong argument. Ordinary speech includes all sorts of sentences that aren't serious bits of metaphysics. A stronger argument would begin, not with a premise about what we say, but rather about, well, us. A premise like "we have each been seen and some of us occasionally bump into each other." Such a premise will, on reflection, seem true to many. And in a speculative metaphysical conversation where magical thinking, dualism, or theism are on the table, we can't ask for much more than that.

The point is this. At least one case for materialism is compatible with theism. And if there's anything at all to this line of thought then theists have some reason to think that we are material beings.

10. Conclusion

In this article I have tried to figure out whether theism gives special support to an argument for dualism over materialism. I wanted to know if we could reason from the first epigraph to the second. The answer is, so far, no. There is no path from Westminster to Dagobah. The simplicity, impossibility, and mystery arguments are unsound and unconvincing. Reflection on God's magical thinking in fact provides the materialist with unexpected resources to resist these arguments. Theism turns out to be a surprisingly hospitable context for magical materialism. For all its faults, magical materialism has much to recommend it. Some questions remain open. For all I've said, there are other, better arguments from theism in

⁴⁵For discussion of this kind of common sense argument for materialism see Hershenov, "Persons as Proper Parts of Organisms," 31, Kaczor, "Notes on Diachronic Personal Identity," 4-5, Merricks, *Objects and Persons*, 85-86, Murray and Rea, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 264, Nida-Rümelin, "Argument for Subject Body Dualism," 192, Olson, *The Human Animal*, 95-97, Taylor, "Chisholm's Idea of a Person," 46, and van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 260.

general to dualism.⁴⁶ And there may be even better arguments from *specifications* of theism (from Christian theism, for example) to dualism.⁴⁷ But at least three initially plausible arguments have turned out to be unconvincing: a happy result for theistic materialists.⁴⁸

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⁴⁶For an argument from the very concept of a spirit—a starting point theists will find antecedently plausible—to dualism, see Moreland, "A Conceptualist Argument" and my reply in Bailey, "Concept of a Spirit." Yet another argument from theism to dualism goes like this: if theism is true, then *property dualism* is true. And—key step—if property dualism is true, then we are wholly immaterial beings. So we are wholly immaterial beings. Arguments for that key step appear in Schneider, "Why Property Dualists Must Reject Substance Physicalism" and Zimmerman, "From Property Dualism to Substance Dualism"; I contest the key step in Bailey, "Material Through and Through," §6.

⁴⁷Industrious scholars are on the job, exploring connections between dualism and the Christian doctrines of incarnation, the *imago dei*, and resurrection. See, *inter alia*, all the papers in Farris and Taliaferro, *The Ashgate Research Companion*.

⁴⁸I cannot name all who helped me with these ideas—that would be most everyone I know. But I extend special thanks to Joshua Rasmussen and Bradley Rettler for generous discussion over the years. Every thought here bears their fingerprints. Thanks also to Peter van Elswyk, an audience at University of Western Australia, and an audience at Shieva Kleinschmidt's California Metaphysics Conference. I dedicate this article to Alvin Plantinga and Michael Rea, for believing: not in my philosophies, but in me.

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