

**FEATURE: Where Did We Get a Mind and a Conscience?
(Fifth in SERIES of 6)**

VOICE: Astronomically speaking, man is insignificant. Most of us are less than two meters tall. That's microscopic, when compared to a universe that extends out billions of light years.

PROF.: Astronomically speaking, *man is the astronomer!* Humans are the ones who *observe and analyze* the universe. The human mind is more amazing than any galaxy!

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

VOICE: Seventeenth-century French mathematician, physicist and philosopher Blaise Pascal [BLEZ pas-KAHL] wrote, "All bodies¹ – the firmament, the stars, the earth and its kingdoms – are not worth the least of minds. For it knows them all and itself too, while bodies know nothing."

PROF.: In his book, *Letter to an Influential Atheist*, author Roger Steer says, "Consider how well the mind performs in everyday situations."
Addressing British atheist Richard Dawkins, he writes, "You and every reader of this letter can analyze what you are reading, agree with what you believe to be true, reject what you know to be false, doubt any overstatement, warm to that which rings true in your experience. You may be forming subtle judgments about the quality of my writing, the nuances of my standpoint, the originality of my insight, the profundity² or otherwise of my thought. You may feel that at times you can 'read between the lines'."

VOICE: We can recognize what a person is implying, without his spelling them out in words.

1 Heavenly or astronomical bodies, such as stars and galaxies.

2 Depth of wisdom.

PROF.: Steer uses more than fifty words to describe abstract characteristics that come through the mind. He lists emotions such as happiness, fear, joy, pleasure and self-respect; the ability to recognize intellectual skills such as intelligence, intuition and discernment; aesthetic judgments including beauty and charm; and recognition of moral values such as right, wrong, integrity, modesty, cruelty and kindness.

Then he contrasts these qualities with Dawkins' atheistic worldview: “According to your worldview this capacity of the human brain to handle with ease a vast range of emotions has evolved from mindless matter...by a process of cumulative natural selection.”

VOICE: That would mean the brain developed with no purpose.

PROF.: In Dawkins' worldview, “There is no Creator who created matter with all its potential...; who wills that matter should...have such properties; ...and who sustains us moment by moment.”

He asks Dawkins how an atheist explains the human mind's ability to understand these abstract concepts. He points out, “The Christian believes that, being created in the image of God, humans have the capacity for creativity, a potential even for nobility.”

VOICE: Then why don't humans always behave creatively and nobly?

PROF.: The first human couple disobeyed God. This caused all their descendents – the entire human race – to be born without the moral perfection that God built into the original humans. This explains their tendency to miss the mark and behave shabbily³ or much worse. There is a tension between the bad part of man's nature and the good part – a battle between what the Bible calls “the flesh” and “the spirit.”

VOICE: Is there any way a person can enable goodness to win that battle?

PROF.: Yes. Through God's Spirit, a follower of Christ can demonstrate some of the Spirit's fruit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”⁴

VOICE: Those are qualities which God can enable us to achieve.

3 Unworthily; in a way that has “gone down hill” from the goodness the first humans had.

4 Galatians 5:22-23.

PROF.: Richard Dawkins was Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University in England. Steer contrasts Dawkins with a former scholar at Oxford. John Henry Newman wrote about the power and uniqueness of the human mind.

He thought that one of the first things the human mind does is to *take hold of* what meets the senses. He believed that this was the main distinction between use of the senses by humans and animals. Animals see sights and hear sounds. But the human intellect takes sights and sounds and *unites them to make sense of the world*. It *seizes and unites* what the senses present to it.

VOICE: Explain what you mean by the human intellect taking and uniting what the senses detect.

PROF.: In a book entitled *The Idea of a University*, Newman wrote that the human mind “discerns in lines and colors, or in tones, what is beautiful and what is not. It gives them a meaning, and invests them with an idea. It gathers up a succession of notes into the expression of a whole, and calls it melody; it has a keen sensibility towards angles and curves, lights and shadows, tints and contours.

“It distinguishes between rule and exception, between accident and design. It assigns phenomena to a general law, qualities and effects to a cause. In a word, it philosophizes. Science and philosophy...are nothing else but this habit of *viewing*...the objects which sense conveys to the mind, and [arranging] them into a system...”

VOICE: That idea of the human mind putting sights together into a systematic whole, reminds me of an incident that the Bible book of Mark reports. A blind man came to Jesus, and Jesus cured his blindness. At first, the man said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” (Mark 8:24). Jesus touched the man again, and he saw things clearly.

PROF.: That makes sense in the light of twenty-first century neurology. At a scientific conference in Scotland, one specialist interpreted that biblical incident this way: The eyes were healed when Jesus first touched them. But the mind couldn't integrate the images it received from the retina, until the optic cortex of the brain became functional.

That's another instance where our modern scientific knowledge helps us to understand and appreciate the Bible.

VOICE: That's another complexity that seems logically explained by the idea of wise Creator.

PROF.: Galileo agreed. He wrote, “When I consider what marvelous things and how many of them men have understood...I recognize and understand only too clearly that the human mind is a work of God, and one of the most excellent.”

- VOICE: Another thing that impresses me about the mind, is the *conscience* – our internal sense of right and wrong.
- PROF.: Steer writes to Dawkins, “As a materialistic atheist, you ask yourself how...to identify what is good and what is evil... What is goodness? How can [we] be confident of what is right and what is wrong?
“The...first day of a new year, you make a resolution to live a more disciplined life, to be...more discriminating in your TV viewing and spend more time with your family. You will aim to be a kinder, more considerate person.
“In your less worthy moods, however (if you are anything like me), you are aware of your capacity to manipulate people, to be irresponsible, untrustworthy, hypocritical, selfish. After a succession of selfish acts, your conscience troubles you to the extent that you lose sleep and cannot face your food. Although you would love to feel at peace again, you experience the annoying sensation of ‘being unable to forgive yourself’ – an uninvited sense of self-loathing.”
- VOICE: How did humans get a conscience?
- PROF.: As soon as people began to think about deep issues, they believed that there is something mysterious about the conscience. Socrates, for example, believed that he had a divine voice within him. He valued his conscience because it seemed somehow to be telling him how he ought to behave.
Some of the early Christian fathers spoke of conscience as the voice of God within – as a sort of moral sense, through which, when we exercise it, we become aware of the presence of God. ...Immanuel Kant thought of conscience as “the awareness of the universal claim of the moral dictates of reason.”
- VOICE: The Apostle Paul spoke of the conscience. In the second chapter of the Bible book of Romans he wrote that people who had never been told about God's law, know intuitively what is right and wrong. In his words, when they “do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.” (2:14-15).
- PROF.: Roger Steer concludes this chapter by telling Dawkins, “I think that your atheistic worldview, which depends so heavily on natural selection for its understanding of our responses to reality, has great difficulty in accounting for the curious...phenomenon of conscience.”
- FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

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