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To whom it may concern,

I write to confirm that Christoffer Skogholt (810625-1435) presented a paper at the conference "The Soul" held at Saint Anne's College in Oxford, organized by the Centre for Theology and Philosophy at Nottingham University, in June 2013.

The purpose of the conference was to draw together philosophers, theologians, anthropologists and scientists from around the world to debate the nature of the soul in relation to consciousness, mind and material life.

Skogholt's paper was titled "An Evolutionary Argument Against Reductionism" and discussed the relationship between reductionism in philosophy of mind and an evolutionary understanding of the origin of our cognitive faculties. The paper argued that if our cognitive faculties are to be deemed useful for gaining knowledge about the world reductionism in philosophy of mind – understood as the position that mental events have no causal powers – cannot be true, if our cognitive faculties have been formed by the processes of evolution.

Before a paper was accepted its abstract was reviewed by a conference committee, and the accepted abstract can be seen over the page.

Yours sincerely,

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Abstract Title: An evolutionary argument against reductionism

Christoffer Skogholt student - Department of theology, and Department of Psychology, both Uppsala University

In his famous "evolutionary argument against naturalism" Alvin Plantinga argues that the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable - in the sense of producing for the most part true beliefs - given that metaphysical naturalism is true and given that our cognitive faculties are formed by the evolutionary process, is low.

Plantinga's way of putting this is that the probability (P) that our cognitive faculties are reliable (R) given that Naturalism & Evolution is true ($N\&E$) is low, so: $P(R|N\&E)$ is low.

Central to Plantinga's argument is the notion of a defeater. A defeater is a belief that undermines the probability of some other belief being true. If I believe that my cognitive faculties are unreliable, then I have a defeater for every belief I hold. I have reasons to doubt their veracity, just as I have reasons to doubt more or less everything that a person that I think is a constant liar says.

So the belief that one's cognitive faculties are unreliable is a universal defeater in that it calls into doubt all beliefs that are formed by these cognitive faculties, including the belief that naturalism and evolution is true. So if one agrees that $P(R|N\&E)$ is low, and one believes $N\&E$, one has a defeater the belief that $N\&E$ is true and under those circumstances, holding both N and E is a self-defeating position. Plantinga wants to show that naturalism really is self-defeating in this way.

Crucial to this argumentation is his conviction that given naturalism our beliefs can't affect our behavior in virtue of their semantic content, but only in virtue of their neurophysiological properties (semantic epiphenomenalism). If that is the case, then the semantic content of our beliefs is irrelevant to our behavior.

But if our belief-producing faculties are irrelevant for our behavior, in so far as the content is concerned, then the evolutionary processes have not been forming them as to make them more truth-producing than falsehood-producing, since natural selection can't act directly upon our beliefs but only on our behavior.

I argue that what Plantinga's argument shows is not that $P(R|N\&E)$ is low, but that $P(R|N\&E\&rd)$ is low, where "rd" means reductionism and reductionism means that our beliefs don't affect our behavior in virtue of their semantic content.

*For those that advocate strong emergence, that the mind is an entity emerging from the brain, but has real causal powers, as Philip Clayton does in *Mind and Emergence* (2004) Plantinga's argument is very useful since it seems to show that it is necessary for our beliefs to be able to affect our behavior for our cognitive faculties to be reliable given that $N\&E$ is true.*

In other words: if you believe in evolution and also that no intelligent being has been an additional efficient cause in the process of evolution then you cannot also rationally believe in reductionism, since that implies that the probability that your cognitive faculties are reliable is low and that means you would have a defeater for this (and every other) belief.