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Professor Paul Kurtz  
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No answer received  
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Dear Professor Kurtz:

I have seen some of your writings in the Skeptical Inquirer, and it has occurred to me that you may be the sort of philosopher who would be able to help me with a certain question. If you can't answer it yourself, you can most likely refer me either to another philosopher or to a discussion of the problem in the literature.

I have always been a Materialist, but recently I have come up against a certain difficulty in reconciling consciousness with a strictly materialistic view of the human mind. In the first place, it is clear that there can be no scientific explanation of consciousness, since there is no way of defining "consciousness" operationally in terms of the concepts used by science. (For that matter, there doesn't seem to be any way at all of defining "consciousness". Yet we all claim to know what we mean by it and we all claim to experience it<sup>1</sup>.) **But the facts obtained through research on the brain tend to indicate that all human behavior, thought, and feeling are determined by chemical and electrical events that occur in the body -- principally in the brain.** In my youth, therefore, I concluded that while I was aware of certain sensations, and while the fact that I was aware of these sensations could not be explained in materialistic terms, nevertheless it was the laws of physics and chemistry that determined what sensations I was aware of, and moreover the fact of my awareness affected

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1, One can provide for one's own use anostensive definition of one's own consciousness. There is something that I directly experience and I can associate with it the word "consciousness" even if I can't explain to another person the meaning of this word. See Footnote 2.

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dept. has only so much money. To get the money they either have to raise taxes or increase the tax base. Your friend won't want to raise taxes. As for increasing the tax base, that can only be done by bringing in more people and industry so that cities like San Antonio get bigger and worse. Well, wait. That argument leads into ramifications that are probably beyond your friend's limited capacity to absorb abstractions. Probably it would be best to keep the argument simpler still: You can't "separate the good from the bad" because you can't have paved roads without having big cities too. Why? Because it would be impossibly expensive to pave all those roads with picks and shovels. To do it you need machinery. And you can't have machinery without those poor bastards slaving away on the assembly lines in Detroit and in the steel mills in Pittsburgh and so forth. The more roads you pave the more machinery you need, and the bigger the cities have to get.

Still, the best you can hope to do with someone like that, I think, is create enough confusion in his mind so that he stops whining for a paved road. Fact is that most people are animals. Except with issues that are of such immediate and obvious practical importance that they can't evade them (and sometimes even with such issues), what they think is what enables them to most easily avoid any psychological conflict. This applies to intellectuals and others supposedly "thinking" people as well as to the average man.

I doubt that the pigmies have any guilt, conscious or otherwise, about killing animals. **Guilt is a conflict between what we're trained not to do and impulse that lead us to do it anyway.**