

## Sunday Message from Fr William for the First Sunday of Advent 2023

*The 'Other World' continued from 26.11.23*

Freedom: that essential dynamic of the 'other world', that essential experience of the 'other world'. How do biology and Spirit each contribute to, or even diminish, the experience of freedom? Remember that question? (from 29 October 2023)

We start in this world. Even without the Spirit breathed into Man from the 'other world', the human body, the human organism, is truly remarkable. With each new experience, and with each new activity, neurons in the central nervous system make multiple new connections with each other. These neural connections, or 'synapses', are reinforced by repetition of the experience or activity, and reinforced by their intensity. This is the building of memory.

In this, human beings are not essentially different to other animals. The building of neural networks through experience and activity is going on in all animals all the time. To this extent, like us, they build memory. The difference between them and us is, again, not an essential or qualitative difference, only a difference in degree. Different species have different levels of complexity in the neural networks of their nervous system. And human beings are top of the scale for complexity.

Like fingerprints, like retinas, the neural network of each human being is unique. This unique neural network of each human being, and in particular the unique memory system stored in each unique neural network, constitutes the core of their unique personal identity. ☺ Cognitive output, ie thoughts that an individual might have, and any resulting action, depends therefore not only on sensory input, but also on the unique neural network of the individual. To put it another way, each human being will process information in a unique way; in a way that reflects their unique memory.

So what of freedom, and our experience of freedom? The extent to which cognitive output and any resulting action is determined by you, by your personal identity, by your unique neural network – to that extent it is your thought and it is your action. The extent to which cognitive output and any resulting action is determined by external factors, ie an overwhelming experience – to that extent cognitive output, and any resulting action, is, on balance, more the product of those external factors. What we experience in each case is more or less freedom to choose how to think and how to act. But that freedom is never absolute. Our neural network, and therefore our personal identity, is always balanced against the external factors, and therefore cannot be the sole determinant of our thoughts and actions.

I said 'that freedom is never absolute'. But remember, we're still talking here only about this world. Also I'm conscious of the fact that I'm giving you here an entirely deterministic account of these human experiences of memory, of personal identity and of freedom, and you're not going to let me get away with this. So we'd better take a look also at alternative, non-deterministic, accounts of these human experiences.

*to be continued...*

*Wilson*

Sunday, 3 December 2023