

Plantinga's argument for substance dualism

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1 The replacement argument

Plantinga's replacement argument is in some ways similar to the conceivability argument, in that it involves an imaginary scenario. But it is different in that it does not involve imagining some phenomenal change with no corresponding physical change.

The argument can be laid out simply as follows (where 'B' is a name for my body):

1. I have the property of possibly existing without B.
 2. B does not have the property of possibly existing without B
 3. Leibniz's law.
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- C. $I \neq B$.

This form of argument is not new — what is new is the argument for the first premise. He gives two versions of the main argument. One is based on replacement of macroscopic parts:

Now it seems possible-possible in that broadly logical sense—that medical science should advance to the point where I remain fully dressed and in my right mind (perhaps reading the South Bend Tribune) throughout a process during which each of the macroscopic parts of my body is replaced by other such parts, the original parts being vaporized in a nuclear explosion-or better, annihilated by God. But if this process occurs rapidly-during a period of 1 microsecond, let's say-B will no longer exist. I, however, will continue to exist, having been reading the comic page during the entire process.

The other focuses on replacement of microscopic parts:

It seems entirely possible that the cells of which my body is composed be rapidly-within a microsecond or two-replaced by other cells of the same kind, the original cells being instantly destroyed. It also seems entirely possible that this process of replacement take place while I remain conscious, thinking about dualism and marveling at some of the appalling arguments against it produced by certain materialists? Then I would exist at a time at which B did not exist.

Two possible materialist replies:

- B can gain and lose parts, so B would continue to exist after the replacement.
- Even if a conscious being would result from the replacement, it would not be me – I would cease to exist at some time during the replacement.

2 Leibniz's argument against thinking material things

Plantinga quotes the following argument from Leibniz:

17. 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. This must be sought for, therefore, in the simple substance and not in the composite or in the machine.

Materialist reply: it is mysterious how a physical system could think; but it is at least this mysterious how an immaterial soul could think. Plantinga's reply:

But here there is an important dissimilarity between dualism and materialism. The materialist thinks of thought as generated by the workings of an underlying reality - i.e., by the physical interaction of such physical things as neurons; the dualist, however, typically thinks of an immaterial self, a soul, a thing that thinks, as simple. An immaterial self doesn't have any parts; hence, of course, thought isn't generated by the interaction of its parts.