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SWINBURNE'S ARGUMENT FOR DUALISM

William P. Alston and Thomas W. Smythe

In *The Evolution of the Soul* Richard Swinburne presents an argument for mind-body dualism from the logical possibility of my continuing to exist in disembodied form, whatever is the case with me now. He supposes this to show that I am now, at least partly, an immaterial soul. We show that this argument depends on a modal confusion between "It is not logically possible both that I am only a body and that I continue to exist in a disembodied form" and "If I am only a body it is not logically possible that I continue to exist in a disembodied form."

In *The Evolution of the Soul*¹ Richard Swinburne presents an original argument for body-soul dualism. More specifically, the position for which he argues is that "those persons which are human beings...living on Earth, have two parts linked together, body and soul" (p. 145); "A man's body is that to which his physical properties belong...A man's soul is that to which the (pure) mental properties of a man belong" (p. 145). In case there is any doubt that this is substance dualism, Swinburne elsewhere expresses his position by saying: "a man living on Earth is a substance which consists of two substances, his body and his soul. The body is a material body, but the soul is not a material object or anything like it. (It occupies no volume of space)" (p. 10).

The argument for dualism begins with the claim that bodily continuity is neither logically sufficient nor logically necessary for the survival of the human person. The denial of logical sufficiency is supported by consideration of (perhaps more than logically) possible brain transplant cases. In fission cases, for example, where the two brain hemispheres are allotted to different persons, *someone* enjoys bodily continuity with Smith without being Smith, since there are two persons that enjoy such continuity and they can't both be Smith (pp. 147-51). Bodily continuity is not logically necessary, since it is *logically* possible for one to acquire a completely new body, and, indeed, logically possible for one to exist and have a mental life in a completely disembodied state (pp. 151-52). These attributions of logical possibility are, of course, highly controversial, and have been controverted at length in the literature. Our quarrel with Swinburne, however, lies in the further course of the argument, and we shall not contest the claim that the survival of a human person, P, in a wholly different body, or in disembodied form, is logically possible.



Swinburne proceeds as follows.

...given that for any present person who is currently conscious, there is no logical impossibility, whatever else may be true now of that person, that that person continue to exist without his body, it follows that that person must now actually have a part other than a bodily part which can continue, and which we may call his soul—and so that his possession of it is entailed by his being a conscious being. For there is not even a logical possibility that if I now consist of nothing but matter and the matter is destroyed, that I should nevertheless continue to exist (p. 154).

In short:

- A. It is logically possible that I exist without a body.
- B. If I am now only a body, it is not logically possible that I exist without a body.
- C. Therefore, I am not now only a body.

To be sure, the conclusion of this short version of the argument is not that I am also partly a soul; the term 'soul' makes no appearance. But Swinburne obviously takes it that the only reason for thinking that it is logically possible that I survive without a body is that I might continue to have a mental life without a body, and he also seems to take it as obvious that any disembodied mental life is enjoyed by an immaterial substance, i.e., by a soul. There is a question as to whether anything in this argument, indeed in any argumentation in the book, presents any significant support for this last assumption. What about the putative possibility that a disembodied mental life might take a Humean or a Whiteheadian form? For present purposes we shall set aside any such reservations and take Swinburne to be entitled to both the assumptions in question, and hence entitled to the conclusion that I now consist partly of a soul, *if* he is entitled to the conclusion that I am not now only a body.

But is he entitled to the latter? The argument, as we have represented it, is certainly valid, being an instance of *modus tollens*. And we have accepted the first premise. But what about the second premise? It looks plausible. But we fear that this plausibility stems from a confusion. Look back at what Swinburne says in support of the premise.

For there is not even a logical possibility that if I now consist of nothing but matter and the matter is destroyed, that I should nevertheless continue to exist (p. 154).

The (extremely plausible) thesis put forward here is:

- B1. It is not logically possible that if I am now only a body and the body is destroyed, I still continue to exist.

Or, to bring it more in line with B.,

- B2. It is not logically possible that if I am now only a body I continue to exist without a body.

B1. and B2. are clearly true. There is no possibility of any sort that if I am nothing but a body, I survive the destruction of the body that I am. But B1. and B2. are not the same as B., which asserts not (as B1. and B2. do) that *my being only a body and my surviving without a body* are not jointly logically possible, but rather that *if I am a body, it is not logically possible that I survive without a body*. We have here a modal difference of the sort that has darkened counsel throughout the history of philosophy, what in the middle ages was called the difference between the "necessity of the consequence" and the "necessity of the consequent." B1. and B2. are of the form:

Necessary (if p, then not-q).

This is an example of the "necessity of the consequence." It asserts a necessary implication between p and not-q. In other words it asserts that the conjunction of p and q is not logically possible. But B. illustrates the "necessity of the consequent." It is of the form:

If p, then necessary (not-q).

And these are by no means the same, as can be seen from the fact that given B1. (or B2.) and p, we can derive only the non-modal conclusion, q, whereas from B. and p we can derive the modal conclusion, "It is necessary that not-q" or "It is not possible that q."²

For a more intuitive demonstration of this non-equivalence, consider another example of a pair of propositions of these respective forms.

E. If I am a bachelor, it is impossible that I am married.

F. It is impossible that if I am a bachelor I am married.

E. is the analogue of B., F. of B2. Although F. is clearly true, it by no means entails E., which is, clearly enough, false. F. simply draws out the semantics of 'bachelor,' while if E. were true, my in fact being a bachelor would carry with it the *necessity* of my unmarried state. But surely I can be unmarried without necessarily being so.

Since Swinburne's support for B. consists of citing B1., it looks as if the argument rests on the classic modal fallacy just exhibited. But perhaps B. could be recommended on its own merits. Let's consider that. What is to be said for "If I am now only a body, it is not logically possible that I should survive in disembodied form," once we see that it is distinct from "It is not logically possible both that I am now only a body and that I survive in disembodied form" (and B1. and B2., its conditional equivalents)? At the most intuitive level, what is questionable about B. is that it is incompatible with the apparently unexceptionable thesis:

D. Even if I am only a body, it is logically possible that I am partly a soul as well.

For if my being only a body allows for the logical possibility that I am a soul as well, it equally allows for *the logical possibility* (though not the actuality) that I survive disembodied. So let's look at D. Is it indeed logically possible for a purely bodily person to be partly a soul?

Let's note that the concept of logical possibility with which Swinburne is working is that of the absence of contradiction—explicit or implicit. And it seems most implausible to suppose there to be any contradiction in the supposition that I am partly a nonphysical soul, even if in fact I am only a body. Clearly Swinburne could not make any such supposition. If we cannot form a coherent, consistent concept of my exemplifying Cartesian (or Swinburnian) dualism, then Swinburne's project is doomed from the start; dualism for human beings would not even be a consistently conceivable alternative. But if it is conceivable that I am partly a soul, why would it cease to be conceivable if in fact I am only a body? How could that fact affect what conceivable possibilities there are for me? Thus we are in an unassailable position in arguing *ad hominem* against Swinburne here. He must acknowledge that my being purely bodily does not exclude the *logical possibility* of my being partly a soul, and hence does not exclude the logical possibility of my surviving disembodied. Thus he loses B. and with it his argument for dualism.³

Nor is the argument against B. only *ad hominem*. It seems as clear as anything could be that there is no logical contradiction involved in supposing Jones, who in fact is purely material, to consist partly of an immaterial soul, assuming the latter is consistent in itself. How could the contradiction be exhibited? Until there is a promising suggestion for this, we can ignore any such suggestion.⁴

So far we have not mentioned the point that Swinburne takes his argument to require the "quasi-Aristotelian assumption" that "the continuing existence of some of the stuff of which a substance is made is necessary for the continued existence of the substance" (p. 153). This is only "quasi-Aristotelian," because Swinburne allows "immaterial stuff, soul-stuff" (p. 154) to count as "stuff of which a substance is made." He takes this assumption to underwrite the claim that I can survive the death of my body only if I am partly a soul, for the latter is needed to provide the "immaterial stuff" that must persist if continuity is to be achieved. Does factoring in this assumption vitiate the above criticism?

Not at all. If the quasi-Aristotelian assumption has any bearing on the matter, it is by way of undergirding the acceptable B1. It has no tendency to support B. Though the requirement of some continuing stuff reinforces the idea that being only a body is not jointly possible with surviving the death of the body, it has no tendency to show that being only a body makes it *logically impossible* to survive the death of the body. For it does nothing to

weaken our argument that since even if I am only a body it is still logically possible that I am also a soul, then being only a body does not carry with it the logical impossibility of surviving in a disembodied form.

In an appendix Swinburne sets out his argument more formally.

p = 'I am a conscious person, and I exist in 1984'

q = 'my body is destroyed at the end of 1984'

r = 'I have a soul in 1984'

s = 'I exist in 1985'

x ranges over all consistent propositions compatible with (p,q) and describing 1984 states of affairs ('(x)' is to be read in the normal way as 'for all states x...').

The argument may now be set out as follows:

p Premiss (1)

(x) Poss. (p.q.x.s) Premiss (2)

not-Poss. (p.q.not-r.s) Premiss (3)

Therefore, not-r is not within the range of x.

But since not-r describes a state of affairs in 1984, it is not compatible with (p,q). But q can hardly make a difference to whether or not r. So p is incompatible with not-r.

Therefore r (p. 314).

Before assessing the argument we will have to straighten out some kinks. 'x' was introduced as a variable for propositions, but '(x)' was explained as 'for all states x.' We might straighten that out by devising a translation scheme for going between states and propositions. It is clear, in any event, that in the argument, 'x' will have to range over propositions, since it appears in a propositional location in premise (2). So premise (2) will have to be read as something like this.

- (2) For every consistent proposition, x, that is compatible with (p,q) and asserts a certain state of affairs to obtain in 1984, it is possible that (p.q.x.s).

Interestingly enough, Swinburne introduces this more formal version of the argument by saying: "It may be useful, in case anyone suspects the argument of this paragraph [the argument discussed above] of committing some modal fallacy, to set it out in a more formal logical shape." Our objection to the earlier version was precisely that it did commit such a fallacy. Can we find that same fallacy, or some other modal fallacy, in this latter version? If there is such a fallacy, it will be connected with (2). (1) is quite innocent, and (3) is simply the denial of joint logical possibility for pure materiality and con-

tinued disembodied existence, a denial we have already endorsed. So let's scrutinize (2).

What (2) claims is that my surviving the destruction of my body at the end of 1984 is jointly consistent with *any* proposition concerning 1984 that is internally consistent and consistent with both my existence in 1984 and the destruction of my body at the end of that year. But why suppose that? How about the proposition 'I am purely material in 1984,' or, for that matter not-r, 'I do not have a soul in 1984'? To be sure, Swinburne thinks that both these propositions are incompatible with (p.q), but that is the conclusion of the argument; it cannot be taken for granted in a premise. If these propositions were inconsistent, that would prevent them from being substitution instances of 'x,' but if Swinburne thought that, he could argue for dualism in a much simpler way. And in any event, he displays no tendency to support such a charge of inconsistency. Does 'describes some 1984 state of affairs' apply only if there actually obtains a 1984 state of affairs so described? But then we can tell whether a given proposition falls within the range of x only if we know whether that candidate is true; and that doesn't seem to be the game here.

In the absence of some other reason for accepting (2) it is tempting to suppose that a modal confusion is responsible for its attractiveness. If one does not distinguish

- (2A) Given p, q, and any consistent proposition about 1984 that is consistent with p and q, it is logically possible that s.

from

- (2) p, q, s, and any consistent proposition about 1984 that is consistent with p and q, are jointly logically possible.

Then (2) can seem very plausible. For (2A) is extremely plausible, and if it is not distinguished from (2), that plausibility will transfer to the latter. The plausibility of (2A) has, in effect, already been noted. (2A) says that, given p and q, no matter what is the case in 1984 (provided it is consistent with p and q), it is still *logically* possible that I continue to exist (in a disembodied state, naturally) in 1985. Even if I am a purely material being in 1984, it is still *logically* possible that I exist in a disembodied form in 1985, just because it is *logically* possible that I am not purely material in 1984 (even though in fact I am).

But though (2A) seems to be clearly true, that provides no support for (2), for they are quite different. The difference is analogous to the one we noted earlier in connection with the informal argument, for it has to do with the placement of a modal operator. (2A) is of the form:

- H. If p.q.x, then poss. (s).

Whereas (2) is of the form:

- I. Poss. (p.q.x.s).

In other words, (2A) tells us that if three propositions are true, then it is logically possible that a fourth is true, whereas (2) tells us that all four are jointly possible. But a proposition of form H. by no means entails a corresponding proposition of form I. To see this, consider the following substitutions.

p = I am a normal adult male at time t.

q = I am unmarried at time t.

x = There are no legal barriers to my getting married just before t and remaining married through t.

s = I am married at time t.

Clearly, if p.q.x., then it is logically possible that s. But equally clearly, p.q.x.s are not jointly logically possible, since q and s contradict each other. Thus the truth of (2A), assuming it is true, provides no basis for accepting (2). If this particular modal assimilation is behind Swinburne's espousal of (2), his argument is indeed in trouble.

Thus we cannot establish substance dualism this easily. Once we steer clear of modal confusions, the mere logical possibility that I survive the destruction of my body does not entail that I presently have the wherewithal to do so.

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NOTES

1. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986.

2. An historically famous deployment of this distinction is found in Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. I, Ch. 67, sec. 10. Here Aquinas points out that even if it is necessary that if God knows that Socrates is seated at time t, then Socrates will be seated at t (necessity of the consequence), it by no means follows that if God knows that Socrates is seated at t, it is necessary that Socrates is seated at t (necessity of the consequent). And so fatalism does not follow from divine omniscience.

3. On a different conception of logical (or metaphysical) possibility a case could be made for saying that there is no possibility of a purely bodily person being partly a soul. If being purely material is an essential characteristic, if a purely material substance is essentially that, then in no possible world would that substance be anything other than purely material. But this is not Swinburne's notion of logical possibility, which is tied to the absence of contradiction. To save his argument in this way, he would have to revise radically his conception of modality.

4. Let's note that many materialists insist on the logical possibility of immaterial mental existence. Indeed, the whole thrust of the currently popular "identity theory" is that the identity of mental and physical events (states) is a factual, contingent matter, not a matter of logical, conceptual, or semantic necessity. See, e.g., J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes," *Philosophical Review*, LXVIII (1959) and David M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968).