

The dualist criterion

Today: Richard Swinburne's argument for the dualist criterion of personal identity

Review: the psychological and physical criteria

Psychological criterion (v2): X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if X is psychologically continuous with Y and there does not exist a different person who is also psychologically continuous with Y

- personal identity = psychological continuity + uniqueness

Physical criterion (v2): X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if enough of Y's brain continued to exist, and is now X's brain and there does not exist a different person who also has enough of Y's brain

- personal identity = physical continuity + uniqueness

Swinburne thinks that both of these criteria are false.

Changing bodies

"There seems to be no contradiction in the supposition that a person might acquire a totally new body (including a completely new brain)"

B is X's body just in case:

1. X can move parts of B "just like that," without needing to do anything else first
2. X learns about states of the world via their effects on B

Surviving without a body

"Equally coherent ... is the supposition that a person might become disembodied. A person has a body if there is one particular chunk of matter through which he has to operate on and learn about the world. But suppose that he finds himself able to operate on and learn about the world within some small finite region, without having to use one particular chunk of matter for this purpose."

- i.e., you know about the objects in this room and are able to move them just like that
- isn't the room your body? Not if we assume that you can gradually shift which part of the world you are able to observe and control just by choosing to do so—b/c not limited to interacting with the world through a particular chunk of matter

Surviving without apparent memories of your past life

Could a person exist without apparent memory of their previous experiences?

- We ordinarily think a person can completely forget some of the things they have done (amnesia)
- Seems we can perfectly well imagine coming to have a new body and a completely new set of memories

“Those who hope to survive their death, despite the destruction of their body, will not necessarily be disturbed if they come to believe that they will then have no memory of their past life on Earth; they may just want to survive and have no interest in continuing to recall life on Earth. Again, apparently, there seems to be no contradiction involved in their belief...”

Who you are is not determined by the natural laws

“In 4000 million BC the Earth was a cooling globe of inanimate atoms. Natural laws then, we assume, dictated how this globe would evolve, and so which arrangements of matter will be the bodies of conscious men, and just how apparent memories of conscious men depend on their brain states. My point now is just that what natural laws in no way determine is which animate body is yours and which is mine. Just the same arrangement of matter and just the same laws could have given to me the body (and so the apparent memories) which are now yours, and to you the body (and so, the apparent memories) which are now mine. It needs either God or chance to allocate bodies to persons; the most that natural laws determine is that bodies of a certain construction are the bodies of some person or other, who in consequence of this construction have certain apparent memories. Since the body which is presently yours (together with associated apparent memories) could have been mine (logic and even natural laws allow), this shows that none of the matter of which my body is presently made (nor the apparent memories) is essential to my being the person I am. That must be determined by something else.”

There's a fact of the matter about which body and apparent memories are mine now, and which body and apparent memories will be mine in the future. But nothing about what the physical world is like seems to determine which body is yours or which body will be yours in the future.

- What, then, determines which body and apparent memories I have at any given point in time?
- Answer: it must be something nonphysical

The dualist criterion

Dualist criterion: X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if X's soul is Y's soul

Classical dualism

Classical dualism: there are two kinds of stuff—physical stuff, and immaterial stuff.

“[A] person living on Earth consists of two parts—a material part, the body; and an immaterial part, the soul. The soul is the essential part of a person, and it is its continuing which constitutes the continuing of the person.”

“This way of expressing things has been used in many religious traditions down the centuries, for it is a very natural way of expressing what is involved in being a person once you allow that a person can survive the death of his body.”

The dualist criterion

Dualist criterion: X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if X's soul is Y's soul

Swinburne's argument

1. It is possible for a person to continue to exist without her body and without any memories of her past life.
2. If it is possible for a person to continue to exist without her body and without any memories of her past life, then classical dualism and the dualist criterion of personal identity must be true.
3. Classical dualism and the dualist criterion of personal identity are true.

Evaluate the argument in small groups.

Problem 1

What evidence do we have that we have immaterial souls?

- There doesn't seem to be an empirical evidence that we have souls, so why should we believe that we do?

“To say that a person has an immaterial soul is not to say that if you examine him closely enough under an acute enough microscope you will find some very rarefied constituent which has eluded the power of ordinary microscopes.”

Problem 2

If classical dualism and the dualist criterion are true, then it seems like it should be possible that people could switch bodies and apparent memories all the time. But if it's possible, then how do we know it isn't happening all the time?

- How would Swinburne respond?

Problem 3

Locke thought that it is only fair to punish someone for some past action if they remember performing it

Suppose a convicted murderer swaps bodies with an innocent UF student. If the dualist criterion is correct, then the person who is now in the body of the UF student is the person who committed the murders, and the person who is now in the body of the convicted murderer is innocent. If we learned this, does that mean that we should throw the UF student in prison, and release the convicted murderer?