

How do Things Persist through Changes of Parts and Properties?

18 Of Confused Subjects which are Equivalent to Two Subjects: an Excerpt from *The Port-Royal Logic**

Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole

It is important, in order to understand better the nature of what is called the subject in propositions, to add here a remark which has been made in more important works than this, but which, since it belongs to logic, may find a place here.

It is, that when two or more things which have some resemblance succeed each other in the same place, and, principally, when there does not appear any obtrusive difference between them, although men may distinguish them in speaking metaphysically, they nevertheless do not distinguish them in their ordinary speech; but, embracing them under a common idea, which does not exhibit the difference, and denotes only what they have in common, they speak of them as if they were the same thing.

Thus, though we change the air every moment, nevertheless we consider the air which surrounds us as being always the same; and we say that from being cold it has become warm, as if it were the same, whereas, often that air which we feel cold is not the same as that which we find warm.

This water, we also say, in speaking of a river, was turbid two days ago, and, behold, now it is clear as crystal; while it is impossible it could be the same water. *In idem flumen* (says Seneca), *bis non descendimus, manet idem fluminis nomen, aqua transmissa est.*¹ [Epistole, lviii.]

We consider the bodies of animals, and speak of them, as being always the same, though we are assured, that at the end of a few years there remains no part of the matter which at first composed them; and not only do we speak of them as the same body, without considering what we say, but we do so also when we reflect expressly on the subject. For common language allows us to say, — *The body of this animal was composed ten years ago of certain parts of matter, and now it is composed of parts altogether different.* There appears to be some contradiction in speaking thus; for if the parts were altogether different, then is

* From Thomas S. Baynes, LL.D, trans., *The Port-Royal Logic* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1851).

it not the same body. This is true; but we speak of it, nevertheless, as the same body. And what renders these propositions true is, that the same term is taken for different subjects in this different application.

Augustus said that he had found the city of Rome of brick, and had left it of marble. In the same way we say of a town, of a mansion, of a church, that it was destroyed at such a time, and rebuilt at such another time. What then is this *Rome*, which was at one time of brick, and at another time of marble? What are these towns, these mansions, and churches, which are destroyed at one time, and rebuilt at another? Is the *Rome* of brick the same as the *Rome* of marble? No; but the mind, nevertheless, forms to itself a certain confused idea of *Rome*, to which it attributes these two qualities – being of brick at one time, and of marble at another. And when it afterwards forms propositions about it, and says, for example, that *Rome*, which was brick before the time of Augustus, was marble when he died, – the word *Rome*, which appears to be only one subject, denotes, nevertheless, two, which are really distinct, but united under the confused idea of *Rome*, which prevents the mind from perceiving the distinction of these subjects.

It is in this way that we have cleared up, in the work² whence we have borrowed this remark, the affected perplexity which the (Calvinist) ministers delight to find in that proposition – *This is my body*, which no one would ever find, following the light of common sense. For, as we should never say that it was a proposition very perplexed, and very difficult to be understood, if we said of a church which had been burned and rebuilt – *This church was built ten years ago, and has been rebuilt in a twelvemonth*; in the same way, we could not reasonably say there was any difficulty in understanding this proposition, – *That which is bread at this moment is my body at this other moment*. It is true that it is not the same *this* in these different moments, as the burned church and the rebuilt church are not really the same church; but the mind conceiving the bread and the body of Jesus Christ under the common idea of a present object, which it expresses by *this*, attributes to that object, which is really twofold, and only a unity of confusion, the being bread at one moment, and the body of Jesus Christ at another, just as, having formed of that church burned and rebuilt, the common idea of a church, it gives to that confused idea two attributes, which cannot belong to the same subject.

Hence it follows that, taken in the sense of the Catholics, there is no difficulty in the proposition, *This is my body*, since it is only an abridgment of this other proposition, which is perfectly clear, – *That which is bread at this moment is my body at this other moment* – and since the mind supplies all that is not expressed. For as we have remarked at the end of the First Part, when we use the demonstrative pronoun *hoc* to denote something which is presented to our senses, the precise idea formed by the pronoun remaining confused, the mind adds thereto the clear and distinct ideas obtained from the-senses, in the form of an incidental proposition. Thus, when Jesus Christ pronounced the word *this*, the minds of the apostles added to it, *which is bread*, and as they conceived that it was bread at that moment, they made also the addition of time, and thus the word *this* formed also this idea, – *This which is bread at this moment*. In the same way,

when Christ said *that it was his body*, they conceived that *this was his body at that moment*. Thus the expression, *This is my body*, formed in them that total proposition, *This which is bread at this moment is my body at this other moment*, and the expression being clear, an abridgment of the proposition which diminishes nothing of the idea, is so also.

And as to the difficulty proposed by the ministers, that the same thing cannot be bread and the body of Jesus Christ, since it belongs equally to the extended proposition – *This which is bread at this moment is my body at this other moment* – and to the abridged proposition – *This is my body*; it is clear that this is no better than a frivolous wrangling, which might be alleged equally against these propositions – *This church was burned at such a time, and rebuilt at such another time*. They must all be disintegrated, through this way of conceiving many separate subjects under a single idea, which occasions the same term to be taken sometimes for one subject and sometimes for another, while the mind does not perceive this transition from one subject to another.

After all, we do not here profess to decide the important question touching the way in which we ought to understand these words – *This is my body* – whether in a figurative or in a literal sense; for it is not enough to show that a proposition *may* be taken in a certain sense, it ought to be further proved that it *must* be so taken. But as there are some ministers who, on the principles of a false logic, obstinately maintain that the words of Jesus Christ cannot bear the catholic sense, it is not out of place to show here, briefly, that the catholic sense has in it nothing but what is clear, reasonable, and conformed to the common language of all mankind.

Notes

- 1 “We do not go into the same river twice; the name of the river remains the same, but the water has passed by.”
- 2 *Traité de la Perpétuité de la Foi*, by Arnauld and Nicole (Paris, 1672).

19 Identity through Time*

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According to Bishop Butler, when we say of a physical thing existing at one time that it is identical with or the same as a physical thing existing at some

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