

The Mind Body Problem and Metaphysics: An Argument from Consciousness to Mental Substance, by RALPH STEFAN WEIR, London: Routledge, 2024, 157 pages, Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-032-45768-0.

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The contemporary mind-body debate concerns the nature of mental (or phenomenal) properties. Physicalists maintain that mental properties are properly among the class of physical properties. Dualists, meanwhile, deny this, holding that mental properties are non-physical properties of a fundamentally different kind.

This way of framing the debate, however, leaves out an historically important, though currently neglected form of dualism, which opposes physicalism not only with the claim that mental properties are non-physical, but also by recognising non-physical substances. Contemporary dualism is also known as *property* dualism, on which mental and physical properties are instantiated by the self-same physical object. The classical dualism of Plato, Augustine, and Descartes, however, was a form of *substance dualism*, on which mental properties are not only non-physical features, but also properties instantiated by non-physical substances.

The consensus in the contemporary literature is that while property dualism is a serious option in the mind-body debate, substance dualism is not. It is with this contemporary dogma that Ralph Stefan Weir, in his excellent first book, is centrally concerned. In his view, there is little reason to grant that substance dualism is significantly less plausible than property dualism. In fact, Weir thinks that substance

dualism is actually the more natural view. Moreover, he also thinks that this turns out to be good news for property dualists. For, the central thesis of Weir's book is in fact that *property dualists must be substance dualists as well*.

Weir's book is divided into seven chapters, which follow a helpful Introduction. The first part is largely concerned with arguing that substance dualism does not deserve its bad reputation as an obviously implausible view. The second part is then with arguing for the main thesis that property dualists should be substance dualists, with the central argument, viz. the parity argument, appearing in the sixth chapter.

Much could be said about each chapter, and about Weir's ambitious project as a whole. The book is clearly and engagingly written and applies throughout all of the rigour and precision that characterises the best works of contemporary analytic metaphysics. It will be of considerable interest to anyone working in metaphysics and the philosophy of mind, as well as in surrounding areas like philosophy of religion. It will also be useful to students and teachers of philosophy, especially for courses covering the metaphysics of substance and/or the mind-body problem.

In this review, I want to focus on the parity argument Weir provides in favour of his main thesis, namely, that property dualists should be substance dualists. This will also allow us to examine the conception of 'substance' that Weir prefers.

The central argument for property dualism is a form of conceivability argument, which involves three claims. First, that there is a notion of conceivability, call it Φ -conceivability, such that if a situation is Φ -conceivable, it is metaphysically possible. (Readers familiar with this debate may call to mind Chalmers' notion of positive ideal conceivability, or Goff's notion of transparent conceivability.) Second, that 'zombie-worlds', i.e. worlds physically just like our own, but which are

completely devoid of consciousness, are Φ -conceivable. Third, that if zombie-worlds are metaphysically possible, then property dualism is true.

1 Zombie-worlds are Φ -conceivable.

2 If zombie-worlds are Φ -conceivable, they are metaphysically possible.

\therefore Zombie-worlds are metaphysically possible [from 1, 2]

3 If zombie-worlds are metaphysically possible, property dualism is true.

\therefore Property dualism is true. [from 1, 2, 3]

The main idea driving the argument is that if zombie-worlds are metaphysically possible, then physical properties do not necessitate mental properties, meaning that mental properties are ‘something over and above’ physical properties, just as property dualists maintain. What Weir argues is that if property dualists accept this argument, then there’s a line of reasoning that will lead them inexorably to substance dualism. This is what Weir calls *the parity argument*. The first step is to claim that ghost worlds are Φ -conceivable, where a ghost world is a world with all the actual consciousness-facts but no further facts (and so no physical facts). Since property dualists grant that what is Φ -conceivable is metaphysically possible, they must grant that ghost worlds are metaphysically possible. The second step argues that if ghost worlds are metaphysically possible, substance dualism is true. Thus:

1’ Ghost worlds are Φ -conceivable.

2’ If ghost worlds are Φ -conceivable, they are metaphysically possible.

\therefore Ghost worlds are metaphysically possible [from 1, 2]

3' If ghost worlds are metaphysically possible, substance dualism is true.

∴ Substance dualism is true. [from 1, 2, 3]

Call this the *ghost argument*, which is not yet the parity argument. Rather, the parity argument states that *if* one accepts the zombie-argument for property dualism, then one must also accept the ghost argument for substance dualism as well.

I am inclined to grant that any property dualist swayed by the zombie-argument must grant 1' and 2'. This is trivial for premise 2', which employs the same inference from Φ -conceivability to possibility as the zombie-argument. There is some wiggle room with 1', but resisting would involve claiming that somehow, ghost-worlds are not really Φ -conceivable, whereas zombie-worlds are. Weir makes a compelling case that this move simply won't work out.

I am more sceptical about premise 3', which turns in large part on Weir's neo-Cartesian independence conception of substance. On that conception, omitting a few technicalities, an item s is a substance just in case s is *metaphysically complete*, where an item x is metaphysically complete just in case x could exist by itself. Now if ghost worlds are metaphysically possible, we can imagine a world containing a *ghost duplicate* of you, i.e. a being with all of your phenomenal properties but none of your physical properties. Indeed, we can suppose that this being is the only inhabitant of the ghost world in question. Such a being must be a substance, given the independence conception at play. Indeed, it must be non-physical substance, given that it has no physical properties.

So far, we have the interesting result that non-physical substances are metaphysically possible. But this falls short of establishing that there are non-physical substances in the actual world. What is Weir's argument for this claim?

At this point, Weir introduces the principle that *exact duplicates do not differ in their modal characteristics* (p. 129). There is a real question, however, as to how exactly Weir aims to reach his conclusion using this principle. On one reading, the idea is this. In the ghost-world containing only your ghost-twin, your ghost-twin is a substance composed of the set of phenomenal properties {S}. But the actual world, too, that same set of phenomenal properties is instantiated, namely by you. Therefore, by (P), at least on one natural reading of that principle, we can infer that the thing composed, in the actual world, by all and only those phenomenal properties, call it x , must be a substance too, for being a substance is in effect a modal property, namely the modal property of being such that you could exist by yourself, and by principle (P) duplicates do not differ in modal properties.

The trouble, however, is that this argument simply assumes that there is some item or other composed of the phenomenal properties in set {S} even in the actual world. Yet it is not clear we ought to grant this. Property dualists will say that the only *object* in the vicinity is the human person, or the brain, which has both physical and mental properties, and hence that there is no object all, whether it is a substance or not, comprising all and only the mental properties in set {S}.

Weir, I think, would object to this response on the grounds that it violates a related principle, which we might call (P*). This states that if some (intrinsic) properties $P_1, P_2 \dots P_n$ compose a substance in some possible world w , then those properties are (collectively speaking) metaphysically complete, i.e., such that they need

nothing else in order to compose something, and hence must compose something whenever they are instantiated. Given this further premise, Weir's argument for premise 3' goes through. By (P*), the properties composing your ghost-twin also compose something, call it x , in the actual world. And since your ghost-twin is a substance, principle (P) entails that x itself must be a substance too.

On my reading, commitment to something like (P*) is at least implicit in Weir's discussion of the parity argument. Something like this principle also seems necessary for Weir's ghost argument and hence his parity argument to go through. There is, however, rather little explicit discussion of (P*), nor is it obviously true. So this is one point in Weir's argument where property dualists might push back.

Nevertheless, Weir has produced a compelling challenge to the current dogma that property dualism should be preferred to substance dualism. His book is one that no party to the contemporary mind-body debate can afford to ignore.

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