

In Defense of Weak Dualism

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Abstract

In this article I build on Gertler's recent version of the disembodiment argument to defend a modern and "weak" dualism. The hardest part in disembodiment arguments is to imagine oneself disembodied if that was even possible. In my article I avoid this weakness by introducing body swapping argument. In my novel argument we don't need the problematic image of disembodied self, it's sufficient to imagine one's consciousness in another body, an image too easy to imagine that it became a movie cliché. The weakness in this modified argument is that it proves a weaker version of dualism. Namely, it proves that the mind can't be reduced to a specific physical property other than materiality itself. Hence, either physical is fundamentally mental, or mental isn't physical.

Introduction

Traditionally dualists have used different versions of the disembodiment argument to prove dualism. The argument briefly goes like that: Assuming conceivability entails possibility, and from the fact that we can conceive experience a feeling or thought -say pain- without a body, we can conclude that pain -or any experience- is not identical to the body or any material object thus it's immaterial and dualism is true.

The biggest problem in this argument is that it's not easy -if at all possible- to imagine oneself disembodied, what we typically do is imagining ourselves in another place outside our bodies, but this "other place" is also material. Maybe extreme dualists need the disembodiment argument to defend stronger claims about immaterial soul, but as I argue in this essay, it's enough to imagine oneself experiencing the same pain in another kind of material body to prove weak version of dualism, which is Naturalistic Dualism as defined by Gertler: "Physical events, like the firing of C-fibers, cause mental events like pain" ¹. Or in modal logic terms: The causal relation between body and mind isn't metaphysically necessary because a world where this relation doesn't hold is conceivable thus possible.

In this essay I will present a modified argument using the attainable body swapping thought experiment. Then I will briefly discuss its conclusion by differentiating two mind-body problems: The metaphysical problem, and the scientific or epistemological problem. Finally, I

¹ Gertler B. [In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism](#). Reason and Responsibility, 13th edition. 2007.

will defend the validity of the metaphysical problem against dismissing it in favor of the epistemological problem.

The Body Swapping Argument

I borrowed the disembodiment argument from Gertler² and modified it to use body swapping instead of disembodiment:

P1: Using concepts that are sufficiently comprehensive, I can conceive of experiencing pain in a different body (not necessarily biological) without C-fibers (or any specific physical state).

P2: If, using concepts that are sufficiently comprehensive, I can conceive of a particular scenario occurring, then that scenario is possible.

C1: It is possible that pain occurs in a different body without C-fibers (and without constraints on its physical states).

P3: If pain was identical to a physical state (like C-fibers firing), then it couldn't possibly occur in a body without this physical state.

C2: Either pain is identical to a necessary state of any physical object or pain is not identical to any physical state.

The conclusion of this argument is different from the original argument. It allows for the possibility that the physical state which is identified with pain is the sheer materiality of the body. This, if true means that physical is fundamentally mental and anything in the physical world can experience pain. Which is more repugnant -to a physicalist- than dualism.

Discussing the validity of P2 is out of scope of this essay and has been well defended by Gertler. So, I will focus on P1. But first Let me shed some light on how the argument work.

To prove that pain isn't identical to C-fibers firing, one can imagine replacing one's brain with an electronic brain and still feeling pain without any C-fibers firing. If a physicalist identified pain with running a specific physical Turing machine, we can imagine body swapping with a teddy bear without any program running. Even if pain was identified with movements of atoms, we can imagine experiencing the same pain in a body made of quark soup. Since there is no constraint on the physical body we imagine ourself in other than being physical, there is no physical state immune to this argument other than physicality itself.

² Ibid

Now let's consider P1. The body swapping scenarios and conscious teddy bears are already movie cliches so imagining body swapping with a teddy bear and feeling pain is obviously too easy. But are we doing so using sufficiently comprehensive concepts? The thought experiment relies on three concepts:

- (i) Pain: Since we only care about metaphysical possibility, we don't need to comprehend any nomological facts of the concepts. The well-known experience of feeling pain is enough for our purpose. For example, the fact that a tranquilized body can't feel pain is irrelevant because we don't want to disprove that C-fibers firing causes pain. We only prove the possibility of other world with the same physical laws but different physical-mental laws in which other physical state, like inhibition of C-fibers because of tranquilizers, causes pain.
- (ii) Physical body: The details of the different body are also irrelevant, as any generic physical body will work.
- (iii) Being in body: This is a hard concept to comprehend, and the most vulnerable part in the argument. I can't claim that I know clearly what it's to be in my body, not to mention other imaginary bodies. But we can avoid this problem by considering the experience of pain produced by the other body regardless of the subject experiencing it.

This concludes the proof. Next, I will discuss the conclusion of it.

Conclusion

The body swapping argument proves that physicalism is false, thus a non-physicalist view must be true. According to the argument at least the weak Naturalistic Dualism is true, but stronger dualism claims could be true instead, it could even be the case that monism is true, and the world is fundamentally mental. In the rest of this essay, I will briefly defend the weakest claim entailed by the argument, Naturalistic Dualism.

Naturalistic Dualism is "weak" because it agrees with physicalism in the view that mental states are perfectly correlated with physical states. However, it holds that mental states are different than and irreducible to physical states. To elucidate the need for this extra claim I will differentiate between two kinds of mind-body problems:

- (i) **Metaphysical mind-body problem:** Is concerned with the questions about the nature of the mental state, like what is pain? Is it equivalent or reducible to physical state or not? The body swapping argument proves that mental is not reducible to physical.
- (ii) **Epistemological mind-body problem:** Which focuses on the more practical and scientific question about whether we need mental -fundamentally nonphysical- states or objects

to give a complete description of the world (i.e., all the physical objects, but not the mental experience or perception of the world). Or as Block puts it in one of his interviews: "Physical is what doesn't require mentalistic concepts to talk about... And [the question is whether] conscious is something we can define without using mentalistic terms"³. A naturalistic dualist will agree with physicalists here while maintaining a metaphysical dualism view by noting that the mental experience is dropped from any such description.

A physicalist objection to naturalistic dualism is to discard the metaphysical mind-body problem in the name of the epistemological one. The metaphysical question can be dismissed as a meaningless question, or as Putnam described it: "The wrong way to look at the matter"⁴.

Many metaphysical questions are nonsensical misuse of language indeed, but the mind-body problem isn't, because mind isn't a transcendental imaginary object nor a product of using -or misusing- language. We have direct access to it, it's even closer to us than the physical world. And this mental experience is more than the physicalist causes and effects of it.

Reducing the metaphysical mind-body problem to the epistemological problem is like searching for the key under a streetlight instead of looking for it in the dark park where the key was lost.⁵

³ [Ned Block - Does Consciousness Defeat Materialism?](#) on Closer to Truth YouTube Channel

⁴ Putnam H. [The nature of mental states](#). Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers, Vol. 2. 1975.

⁵ [Streetlight effect](#)