PHILOSOPHY 4360/5360 – METAPHYSICS

Topic IV: The Nature of the Mind

Arguments for (Persisting) Substance Dualism

Argument 1: The Modal Argument from Personal Identity

This first type of argument is advanced by Richard Swinburne in his book *The Evolution of the Soul – Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) pages 148ff.). In one version of his argument, Swinburne considers the case where the left and right hemispheres of a person's brain are transplanted into different bodies. Swinburne advances the following crucial claims about this sort of case:

"The operation would therefore create at least one new person–we may have our views about which (if either) resultant person *p* is, but we could be wrong. And that is my basic point–however much we knew in such a situation about what happens to the parts of a person's body, we would not know for certain what happens to the person." (148-9)

"Although it *may* be the case that if my two brain hemispheres are transplanted into different bodies, I survive partly as the person whose body is controlled by one and partly as the person whose body is controlled by the other, it may not be like that at all. Maybe I go just where the left hemisphere goes." (150)

Given these claims, it seems to me that Swinburne's argument can be put as follows:

Personal Identity and the Hemisphere's Argument

(1) In the case where one hemisphere of one's brain is transplanted into one body, and the other hemisphere into another body, it is possible that the result is that one then has two new people, but it is also possible that one is identical with, say, the person associated with the left hemisphere.

(2) If one's mind is an immaterial substance, this is a possibility, since one's immaterial mind could accompany the left hemisphere into the new body.

(3) On the other hand, if one does not have an immaterial mind, then no facts about one's two hemispheres could make it the case that one was identical with the person associated with the body containing the left hemisphere.

(4) Accordingly, one must have an immaterial mind, since otherwise what is clearly a possibility would be not be a possibility.

A bit later, Swinburne focuses instead on the idea of surviving bodily death. Here the heart of Swinburne's argument is found in the following passage:

"This liberalized Aristotelian assumption I will call the quasi-Aristotelian assumption: that a substance S_2 at t_2 is the same substance as an earlier substance S_1 at t_1 only if S_2 is made of some of the same stuff as S_1 (or stuff obtained by gradual replacement).

Given the quasi-Aristotelian assumption, and 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 continues 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 that matter is destroyed, that I should nevertheless continue to exist. From the mere logical possibility of my continued existence there follows the actual fact that there is now more to me than my body; and that more is the essential part of myself. A person's being conscious is thus to be analyzed as an immaterial core of himself, his soul being conscious." (*The Evolution of the Soul – Revised Edition, p. 154)*

Here it seems that Swinburne's argument is as follows:

Personal Identity and the Survival of Death Argument

(1) It is logically possible for a person to continue to exist without his body.

(2) If one's mind is an immaterial substance, continuing to exist without one's body is a possibility, since one continues to exist if one's mind continues to exist.

(3) On the other hand, if one does not have an immaterial mind, then continuing to exist without one's body is not a possibility

(4) Accordingly, one must have an immaterial mind, since otherwise what is clearly a possibility would be not be a possibility.

Discussion of Argument 1: The Personal Identity Arguments

One can talk about what things are logically possible *simpliciter* and about what things are logically possible given certain other things. To say that *p* is logically possible *simpliciter* is to say that the proposition that *p* is true does not generate any contradiction.

The following things are logically possible *simpliciter*:

(1) It is logically possible that person A's experiences and other mental states belong to an immaterial mind.

(2) It is logically possible that if person A's hemispheres were transplanted into two different bodies, person A would be identical with the person associated with the body containing A's left hemisphere, and not with the person associated with the body containing A's right hemisphere.

To say that *p* is logically possible relative to *q* is to say that the conjunction *p* & *q* does not generate any contradiction.

What is one to say, now, about the following claim?

(3) Given everything that is true about person A, it is logically possible that if person A's hemispheres were transplanted into two different bodies, person A would be identical with the person associated with the body containing A's left hemisphere, and not with the person associated with the body containing A's right hemisphere.

The answer is that whether this last proposition is true depends upon what is true about person A. If it is true that person A has an immaterial mind, then (3) is true. But if it is false that person A has an immaterial mind, then (3) is false.

One can now see what is wrong with Swinburne's argument involving personal identities and transplantation of hemispheres into different bodies. The problem with the argument is that Swinburne is failing to distinguish between proposition (2) and proposition (3). Once one does so, it is clear that proposition (2) may be true while proposition (3) is false, and because of this it is clear that the truth of (2) does not entail that human persons have immaterial minds.

How could Swinburne make this mistake? Here is a possible explanation. Consider the following statement:

(1) *p* entails *q*.

Statement (1) can also be expressed as

(2) Necessarily, if *p* then *q*.

But sometimes, in ordinary speech, statement (2) is expressed by

(3) If *p*, then necessarily *q*.

Statement (3), however, is not a happy way of expressing either (1) or (2). This is most easily seen if we introduce the following symbols:

'$\rightarrow$' for "if … then---"

'$\Box$' for "necessarily".

Sentences (2) and (3) are then most naturally symbolized as follows:

(2*) $\Box(p \rightarrow q)$

(3*) $p \rightarrow \Box q$

But (2*) and (3*) are not, of course, logically equivalent. Not does (2*) entail (3*).

In passing, it is worth noting that a fallacious inference of this type is sometimes involved in arguments for logical fatalism. Consider, for example, the following argument:

(1) It is necessarily the case that if *p* then *p*.

Therefore:

(2) If *p*, then necessarily *p*.

(3) It is necessarily the case that if ~*p* then ~*p*.

Therefore:

(4) If ~*p*, then necessarily ~*p*.

(5) Either *p* or ~*p*.

Therefore:

(6) Necessarily *p* or necessarily ~*p*.

In symbols:

(1) $\Box(p \rightarrow p)$

Therefore:

(2) $p \rightarrow \Box p$

(3) $\Box(\sim p \rightarrow \sim p)$

Therefore:

(4) $\sim p \rightarrow \Box \sim p$

(5) p v $\sim p$

Therefore:

(6) $\Box p$ v $\Box \sim p$

My suggestion, then, is that Swinburne may be making the fallacious inference involved in the following line of thought:

(1) The proposition that humans have no immaterial minds entails that it is not the case in the splitting scenario that the person before the splitting is identical with the person associated later with the body containing the left hemisphere.

(2) Necessarily, if humans have no immaterial minds, then it is not the case in the splitting scenario that the person before the splitting is identical with the person associated later with the body containing the left hemisphere.

(3) If humans have no immaterial minds, then necessarily it is not the case in the splitting scenario that the person before the splitting is identical with the person associated later with the body containing the left hemisphere.

(4) If humans have no immaterial minds, then it is impossible in the splitting scenario that the person before the splitting is identical with the person associated later with the body containing the left hemisphere.

Similarly, in the case of the version of Swinburne's "personal identity and survival of death" argument, the following two things are true:

(1) It is logically possible for a person to continue to exist in the absence of his body.

(2) The proposition that humans do not have immaterial minds entails that a human person does not continue to exist in the absence of his body.

These two things do **not** entail:

(3) Accordingly, human persons have immaterial minds.

But if one expresses (2) by means of the following misleading statement:

(2*) If humans do not have immaterial minds, then necessarily it is not the case that a person continues to exist in the absence of his body.

it will then be tempting to move to

(2**) If humans do not have immaterial minds, then it is **impossible** for a person to continue to exist in the absence of his body.

But given (1) and (2**), one can move to (3) via *modus tollens*.

The problem, in short, is that (2) does not entail (2**), but if one uses (2*) to express what is being said by (2), it is easy to think that one can move from (2) to (2**).

I am not sure that Swinburne is committing this modal fallacy. But it is one that is easy to commit if one formulates things in terms of ordinary language, rather than in a more formal way.

Another possibility is that Swinburne is formulating things in terms of a sentence that is ambiguous, and that, when interpreted in one way, makes one premise true, but another false, and when interpreted in the other way, again makes only one of the two premises true, but this time the premise that is true under the first interpretation comes out false, while the premise that is false under the first interpretation now comes out true.

Here's an illustration of how that can happen.

First of all, let us use the following abbreviations:

p = [*A*'s mind = *A*'s brain].

q = [*A*'s mind survives the destruction of *A*'s brain].

Now in my earlier account of where Swinburne might be going wrong, I supposed that he was, to put it in terms of the present propositions, moving fallaciously from $\Box(p \rightarrow \sim q)$ to
$(p \rightarrow \Box\sim q)$, and then on to $(p \rightarrow \sim\Diamond q)$. But let us suppose that he simply views the last of these as an obvious premise. His argument is then simply this:

(1) $(p \rightarrow \sim\Diamond q)$

(2) $\Diamond q$

Therefore:

(3) $\sim p$

My suggestion now is that q can be interpreted in the following two ways:

q_1 = [The thing that is, **as a matter of fact**, *A*'s mind survives the destruction of *A*'s brain].

q_2 = [*A*'s experiences and other mental states (but not powers) belong to something – namely, an immaterial mind – that survives the destruction of *A*'s brain].

My claims are now as follows:

(1) It is true that $(p \rightarrow \sim q_1)$.

(2) It is also true that $(p \rightarrow \sim\Diamond q_1)$.

But

(3) It is **not** true that one can establish that $\Diamond q_1$ is the case by an appeal to what one can imagine or coherently conceive. Whether it is possible that the thing that is, **as a matter of fact**, *A*'s mind survives the destruction of *A*'s brain depend on what sort of thing *A*'s mind is. If it is *A*'s brain, then q_1 is **not** possible.

(4) It is true, on the other hand, that one can establish that $\Diamond q_2$ is the case by an appeal to what one can imagine or coherently conceive.

(5) It is also true that $(p \rightarrow \sim q_2)$.

(6) But it is **not** true that $(p \rightarrow \sim\Diamond q_1)$. The proposition that p is perfectly compatible with the proposition that it is possible that *A*'s mind,, rather than being identical with *A*'s brain, is instead an immaterial substance.

The upshot is that q is capable of being interpreted in two ways, either as q_1 or as q_2. On either interpretation, only one of the following two premises is true:

(1) $(p \rightarrow \sim\Diamond q)$

(2) $\Diamond q$.

To sum up, then, it seems to me that Swinburne is probably going astray for either of two reasons. One is that he is using a formulation of a premise that is ambiguous, and either interpretation of which makes only one of this two premises true. The other is that he is starting from premises, all of which are true, but then is committing a modal fallacy on route to his conclusion.